

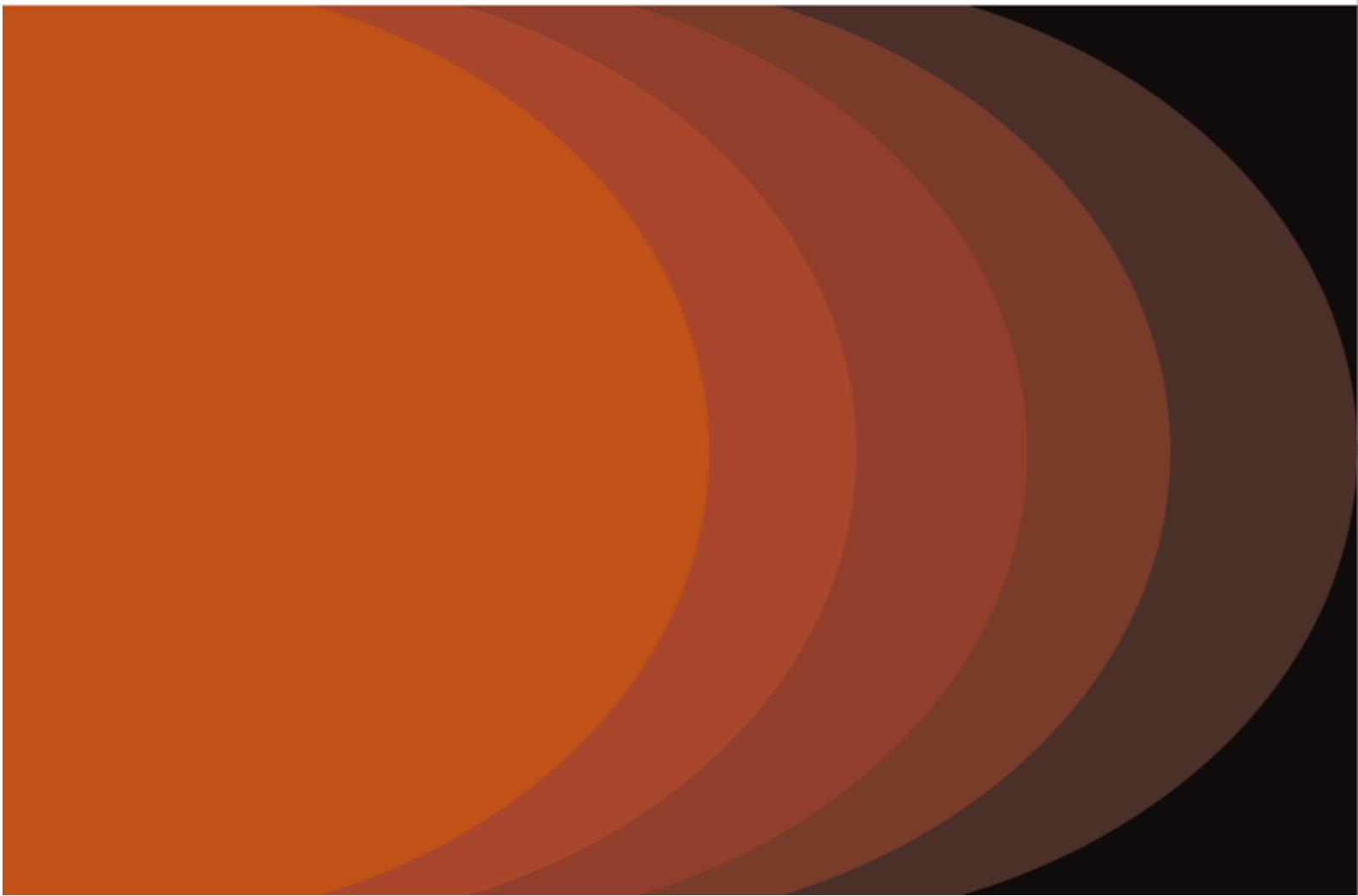


Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Oxfordshire

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2020



Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Yvonne McGuckian, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the Inspectorate. 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.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our four-year programme of youth offending service (YOS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service; the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts; and the quality of out-of-court disposal work. Overall, Oxfordshire YJS was rated as 'Good'.

Over the past year, changes to the composition of the YJS board and management team have led to a shift in strategic focus to tackling issues that make children vulnerable to criminal exploitation. We found good innovation in this area and there is potential for other services to learn from the approaches being developed.

This work has been underpinned by some solid core youth justice work, including sound assessment of desistance, an excellent focus on victims, and partnership-wide use of restorative approaches. As a result, the factors underlying children's offending- are well understood and addressed.

We did find some significant delays between the time when children are arrested and the time they are convicted, and these delays are having an adverse effect on some areas of work, including the experience of victims. The police are trying to reduce the delays, but the board does not yet fully understand the implications of them. We are finding increasing delays in a growing number of the YOTs we are inspecting, which is of concern and something that should receive national attention from the Ministry of Justice and Home Office.

Joint work between agencies and parents/carers was particularly effective; however, social care services need to do more to consistently promote the safety and wellbeing of children.

Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service has many aspects of work and innovation it can be proud of, and we will watch the development of these with interest.



Justin Russell

Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service		Score	28/36
Overall rating		Good	
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Good	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Outstanding	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Good	
2.2	Planning	Good	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
2.4	Reviewing	Good	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Good	
3.2	Planning	Outstanding	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
3.4	Joint working	Outstanding	

Executive summary

Overall, Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) is rated as: 'Good'. This rating has been determined by inspecting the YOS in three areas of its work, referred to as 'domains'. We inspect against 12 'standards', shared between the domains. The standards are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. They are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with children who have offended.¹ Published scoring rules generate the overall rating.² The findings and subsequent ratings in those domains are described below.

1. Organisational delivery



Recent changes to the YJS board and management team have led to a shift in strategic focus to tackling issues that make children vulnerable to criminal exploitation. We found that this work has been underpinned by some solid core youth justice work, including sound assessment of desistance, an excellent focus on victims, and partnership-wide use of restorative approaches. As a result, children have their offending-related needs understood and addressed. Joint work with social care services needs to be improved, and the board needs to better understand the impact of delays in the wider criminal justice system on service delivery.

We interviewed the YJS manager and the chair of the management board. We held meetings with other members of the board and key stakeholders. Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows:

- There is a shared vision, strategy and commitment that focuses on tackling criminal exploitation. This is leading to some effective disruption activities.
- Most partnership arrangements are established and well developed, particularly those with health providers. These lead to effective services for children. Other partnership work requires development, including joint work with children's social care. Work is planned by the board to align services while protecting the specialism found in the YJS.
- Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about the children they supervise. Management responsibilities are clearly defined, but some staff have received inconsistent management supervision and oversight of their practice, due to changes in the management team in the past year.
- We have rated partnerships and services as 'Outstanding'. This is to reflect some of the innovative and proactive work with the police to protect children from criminal exploitation and disrupt the adverse effects on them from being drawn into drug dealing. We were impressed by the breadth and range of tactics being used. The support received from health services was also of note. Although some services were stretched, they had given priority to the YJS and were key partners in managing risk and vulnerability.

¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards can be found here:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

² Each of the 12 standards is scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; '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'.

- Information-sharing arrangements were good across the partnership, with clear learning from local and national serious case reviews. YJS staff are well regarded by partners at operational level. We found examples of good joint working to best meet the needs of children. Case managers in the YJS work flexibly and develop trusting relationships with children.

But:

- The board understands most risks to the service, including the need for more accurate data and the implications of a change in the management team. However, board members were not aware of the effect of some significant delays between the point of arrest and conviction for some children. We found examples of how this had caused difficulties for victims and in working with children to recall and think about what they had done.

2. Court disposals



We took a detailed look at 20 community sentences and 1 custodial sentence managed by the YJS. We also conducted 21 interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work to address desistance, and the safety and wellbeing of the child. For the 19 cases where there were factors related to harm,³ we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the 17 cases where there were factors related to the child's own safety and wellbeing, we looked at work done to keep them safe. The quality of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory.

In this inspection we found the work of the YJS to understand and respond to desistance from offending was 'Outstanding', with between 80 per cent and 95 per cent of cases having a sufficient quality of assessment, planning, delivery of interventions and reviews.

Similarly, planning and delivery of interventions to manage and reduce risk of harm met our standards in between 89 per cent and 95 per cent of cases.

However, work around the child's safety and wellbeing was not as strong, with the proportion of cases where the quality of assessment, planning and delivery of interventions was satisfactory, only just achieving the threshold for 'Good', at 65 per cent.

These lower scores for safety and wellbeing are the reason the YJS achieved a rating of 'Good' in these domains, when much of the other work was outstanding.

The staff team had a good understanding of desistance and risk of harm, and how these needed to be assessed and responded to. This knowledge had been built over time and reinforced by effective ongoing training and development. Case managers were well supported by most partners, especially health services. It was clear, however, that the quality of support from, and joint work with, children's social care was too variable, and this affected the scores in this area. Work is being undertaken

³ The number of cases quoted here that relate to harm, or safety and wellbeing, is based on the judgement of inspectors rather than that of the YOS.

at a strategic level to align and integrate services, but this has not yet had the intended effect for all children.

Our key findings about court disposals are as follows:

- There is a thorough and sustained focus on desistance and risk of harm to others, leading to high-quality assessment, planning and the delivery of suitable interventions.
- There is meaningful involvement with children and parents/carers in case work to support and strengthen relationships with them.
- The strong advocacy for, and focus on, the needs and wishes of victims was some of the best we have identified during this inspection programme to date.
- Partnership work with forensic child and adolescent mental health services (FCAMHS) and other health services is effective and assists with shared decision-making and risk management.
- Restorative approaches are consistently used to resolve conflict and reduce offending.
- Reparation is used effectively to help children learn new skills and to demonstrate to victims that they are sorry for the harm they have caused.
- Close work with residential settings helps to keep children in suitable placements.
- Multidisciplinary risk management processes, including Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), are used appropriately.

But:

- Work to manage the safety and wellbeing of children themselves needs to be more consistent, especially in cases where children's social care services were or should have been involved.
- Management oversight of safety and wellbeing should be strengthened, so that it is as rigorous as the oversight of work to manage risk of harm to others.

3. Out-of-court disposals



We inspected 13 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of 12 youth conditional cautions and 1 youth caution. We did not inspect any community resolutions. We interviewed the case manager in 11 cases we inspected.

We examined the quality of assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. All 13 cases involved factors related to harm,⁴ and we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the nine cases where there were relevant factors, we looked at work done to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child. We also looked at the quality of joint working with the local police. The quality

⁴ See footnote 3.

of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory.

Oxfordshire achieved a rating of 'Good' for assessment of out-of-court disposal cases, similar to the score for court cases, as they were assessed by the same case manager team. Work on desistance was strongest, with the assessment of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm being completed to a sufficient standard in over two-thirds of cases.

Planning and delivery of interventions and joint work all scored 'Outstanding', with work being completed to a sufficient standard in between 85 per cent and 100 per cent of cases.

The partnership has invested resources in diverting children from the criminal justice system, particularly where they are victims of serious organised crime, including county lines activity. This includes a specific out-of-court disposal for possession of cannabis, the Cannabis Warning Clinic, which is run by the YJS substance misuse workers, and provides an opportunity to identify those being used for, or vulnerable to, county lines drug dealing. Interventions are provided for children, including referrals to the Aquarius substance misuse service or to Early Help.

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

- The YJS makes an effective contribution to decision-making for out-of-court disposals, delivering interventions as requested by partners.
- High-quality work focuses on desistance, planning and delivering interventions.
- A wide range of services and interventions are delivered to meet children's needs.
- There is a clear focus on reducing and managing risk of harm and protecting victims.
- Reparation and restorative approaches are used effectively.

But:

- Assessments of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm are not as strong as assessments of desistance.
- The delay between arrests and decisions is excessive and has an impact on service delivery. In one example the delay was for 18 months.

Recommendations

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

The Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service should:

1. review and mitigate the potential impact on service delivery of delays between arrest and sentence
2. improve the use of data to understand trends and performance at strategic and operational levels.

The Director of Children's Services should:

3. make sure that joint work between the YJS and children's social care services is consistently effective.

Background

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, they were dealt with out of court. HMI Probation inspects both these aspects of youth offending services.

YOSs are statutory partnerships, and they are multidisciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to have staff from local authority social care and education services, the police, the National Probation Service and local health services.⁵ 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 MAPPA 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.

Oxfordshire Youth Justice Services (YJS) sits under Children's Social Care (CSC) in Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) Children, Education and Families Directorate. Its work aligns with the key priorities in OCC's Corporate Plan, *Thriving People and Thriving Communities*. Reducing youth offending and reoffending remain key priorities of the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership in 2019/2020.

Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service covers a large area, comprising the City of Oxford, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse. The YJS is coterminous with Oxfordshire County Council.

The youth population of Oxfordshire stands at 62,607 (2018 mid-year estimate), with 0.4 per cent of the youth population offending in 2018/2019. As at 31 December 2019, the overall YJS caseload consists of 66 children, which continues a slight upward trajectory since 2018.⁶

The rate (per population aged 10–17) of first-time entrants to the youth justice system has declined in Oxfordshire and is better than the average for English county local authorities, although the increase in criminal exploitation of children has meant that those who are in the youth justice system have more complex needs than before. The number of children who offend and the reoffending rate continues to drop. The number of substantive offences by children in Oxfordshire reduced in 2018/2019, with a 6 per cent decrease on the previous year.⁶ There had been four more disposals in the same period in 2017/2018 and seven more children had offended.⁶

Violence against the person (33 per cent of all offences) and criminal damage (14 per cent) continue to be the most prevalent offences committed by children in the caseload. However, there was a rise in the proportion of those with drug-related offences, to 14 per cent.⁷ Data for 2018/2019 showed a growing number of arrests of children who live outside the Oxfordshire area. This has been identified as an issue for increased monitoring to inform cross-boundary work with neighbouring authorities.

⁵ The *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* sets out the arrangements for local YOSs and partnership working.

⁶ Data supplied by YOT.

⁷ Youth Justice Board. (2019). Youth justice annual statistics 2017 to 2018.

The numbers of girls that the service works with has slightly increased since the previous year. In 2018/2019, 13 per cent of all offences were by girls, and girls carried out 27 per cent of criminal damage offences and 30 per cent of domestic burglary offences.

Eighteen per cent of all substantive offences were by children aged 14 and under, which is a reduction from 24 per cent in the previous 2 years.

The youth offending cohort features children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are at risk of criminal exploitation, and those who are likely to have offences related to possession of a knife or bladed article.

Contextual facts

201	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in Oxfordshire ⁸
157	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in South East region ⁸
222	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in England and Wales ⁸
29.9%	Reoffending rate in Oxfordshire ⁹
38.4%	Reoffending rate in England and Wales ⁹

Population information¹⁰

687,524	Total population in Oxfordshire
62,607 (9.1%)	Total youth population (10-17 years) in Oxfordshire
7,103 (11.3%)	Total black and minority ethnic youth population in Oxfordshire ¹¹

Caseload information¹²

Age	10–14	15–17
Oxfordshire YJS	16%	84%
National average	23%	77%

Race/ethnicity	White	Black and minority ethnic	Not known
Oxfordshire YJS	75%	25%	0%
National average	70%	26%	4%

Gender	Male	Female
Oxfordshire YJS	84%	16%
National average	85%	15%

⁸ Youth Justice Board. (2020). First time entrants, April to March 2019.

⁹ Ministry of Justice. (2020). Proven reoffending statistics, April 2017 to March 2018.

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics. (2019). UK population estimates, mid-2018.

¹¹ Figure derived from Office for National Statistics' Census 2011 (10 to 17-year-olds Black and Minority Ethnic population) divided by Office for National Statistics' mid-2018 UK population estimates (10 to 17-year-olds).

¹² Youth Justice Board. (2019). Annual statistics, 2017 to 2018.

For children subject to court disposals:

Offence types ¹³	%
Violence against the person	57%
Burglary	5%
Robbery	10%
Theft and handling stolen goods	5%
Arson	5%
Drug offences	10%
Summary motoring offences	10%

¹³ Data from the cases assessed during this inspection.



1. Organisational delivery

The youth justice partnership demonstrated strong collaborative working at strategic and operational level, and a focus on protecting children from criminal exploitation and the adverse effects of offending. The service is going through a redesign, and there have been three managers in the past year. We found examples of innovative practice and a board that understood the risks to organisational delivery reasonably well.

Strengths:

- There is a shared vision, strategy and commitment that focuses on tackling criminal exploitation.
- Most partnership arrangements are established and well developed, particularly those with health providers. These lead to effective services for children.
- There is a strengthened management board with clear priorities and objectives.
- Strong partnership work leads to promising innovation for disrupting criminal exploitation of children involved in county lines drug dealing.
- Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about the children they supervise.
- Learning from serious incidents and examples of good practice from this is embedded across the service.

Areas for improvement:

- Use of data to analyse and monitor performance and service delivery is limited but being improved.
- Significant delays between arrest and conviction are having a detrimental impact on service delivery. The full scale and extent of this are not known.
- Partnership work with social care services is of varied quality and needs to be provided to all children who need it.
- Management responsibilities are clearly defined, but some staff have received inconsistent management oversight and supervision due to changes in the management team in the past year.

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



The governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Key data¹⁴

Total spend 2019/2020

£1,255,953

In making a judgement about governance and leadership, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a clear local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The governance and leadership of the YJS is focused on service development. The board and management team are building on existing strengths and good practice, for example adopting restorative approaches across the partnership. The chair of the board has considered the findings from inspections of youth offending services and, as a result, has decided to retain the youth justice specialisms in the planned service redesign, which is bringing together the YJS and the child sexual exploitation team to form a youth justice and exploitation team.

The membership, role and function of the board were reviewed a year ago. As a result, all statutory agencies are represented and there is a wider range of partners on the board. This has strengthened the governance of the YJS. It was positive to find that services for victims are represented at board level. This reflects the strong focus on victims we have found in casework.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services, as chair of the board, has provided clear leadership and direction. Priorities are shared and partners are clear about the contribution the YJS and their own organisations should make. Improvements have been made, including better relationships with the education, training and employment (ETE) sector.

The board's understanding of the operation and practice of the YJS is developing. Board members are using performance data in a better way now but have recognised the need to have more reliable data and analysis of YJS-specific information. This will assist the board in identifying strengths and areas for development.

In the last year, the board chair and head of service have updated the induction process for board members, who said they found induction helpful and informative. Attendance at the board has been variable but is improving. There are effective links to relevant strategic bodies, including the Community Safety Partnership.

Overall, board members knew how their service contributed to the work of the YJS and if their service's contribution was effective.

¹⁴ Data supplied by YOT.

Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?

The YJS has been instrumental in promoting the use of restorative approaches, which have been adopted by other partners, including schools, and children's social care. These approaches have been applied in work both for children and staff, for example in managing changes.

Partnership work at operational level is effective, especially between the YJS, health services and the police. Information-sharing at all levels is good, supported by learning from serious case reviews and clear protocols. This has enabled the board to understand some key aspects of children's offending, especially in relation to county lines and drug dealing within the area.

Data on crime trends and police analysis have driven work to understand and respond to child exploitation. We found some innovative work to protect children and to disrupt criminal and sexual exploitation.

Partnerships with the ETE sectors are developing. There are over 350 educational establishments across Oxfordshire, so this is a sizeable task. The board is working to obtain key data about 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) rates. Most children in the YJS attend school, but 80 per cent of those known to the YJS have faced fixed-term exclusions. The education representative and board members understand that this makes children vulnerable to exploitation. They are helping schools and colleges understand this and reduce exclusions.

In 2018/2019, Oxfordshire YJS partnered with the Oxford Trust's Ideas and Science Festival, collaborating with an acclaimed recording artist to work with children at risk of drugs exploitation. The children wrote and recorded their personal stories of grooming, produced professional-standard music videos, and performed live at the Oxford Playhouse. The project ran again in summer 2019/2020 with a second cohort of children. The music video produced was shared with stakeholders across the local authority. We spoke to a child and his parent about the project. They told us that they were now able to speak to each other about his experiences, and this was helping mum to properly understand how he was exploited. They and professionals working with them were much better placed to identify warning signs of further danger and keep him and others safe. This is one example of where the voice and experiences of children had been used to improve services.

Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery?

The head of service was due to leave at the end of our inspection. She was respected by the staff team and had been instrumental in helping the chair of the board to develop an understanding of the service's performance, setting direction and integrating the YJS into children's services.

In the last year, the board chair and YJS manager have taken actions to improve the link between the board and the operational team, including board members' attendance at service away-days. Board members recognise that this link needs further development. In our survey of staff, 59 per cent said they understood the role and function of the board.

The YJS leadership team has developed a culture of openness where ideas can be shared. The results of a survey of Oxfordshire children's services staff, including the YJS staff, have led to training in staff resilience.

Challenge is constructive and issues can be resolved quickly. This includes times when there is disagreement between partners on which actions should be prioritised.

The board understands some of the risks to service delivery due to changes in management and has a plan in place to mitigate these.

Service delivery is currently being affected by significant delays between arrest and conviction at court. While the police are trying to reduce these, the board does not know the full impact of them. There has been no analysis of the scale of this issue or its impact on YJS work. We found examples of adverse effects on several areas of practice, including out-of-court disposals, sentencing, offence-related work and work with victims. The delays seem to be caused by a combination of factors, including delays when children or children are released under investigation, which is used by the police instead of bail. Unlike bail, it has no time limits or conditions, which can lead to delays in investigation. Alongside this, the police face delays in having data from mobile phones analysed.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Key staffing data¹⁵

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent, FTE)	25.7
Average caseload, case managers (FTE) ¹⁶	6

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following four questions:

Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The partnership benefits from a knowledgeable, motivated and committed staff team. Staff support each other well and have a strong focus on children and on achieving the best outcomes for them. Results from our inspections of individual cases, both court ordered and out of court, show that they undertake core work consistently well.

Staffing levels have reduced over recent years, but caseloads are manageable and monitored. The challenges of managing cases across a large geographical area are known and accounted for in case allocation.

Staff were not always aware of the work of the board, or other services, although this is improving. The board would benefit from seeing directly some of the good work undertaken by operational staff.

Do the skills of YOT staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

Staff know their children well, are persistent in engaging them, and understand the impact of diversity and discrimination. There are examples where staff are working effectively and proactively and leading performance improvement, including work to

¹⁵ Data supplied by YOS and reflecting staffing at the time of the inspection announcement.

¹⁶ Data supplied by YOS, based on staffing and workload at the time of the inspection announcement.

support victims, the use of reparation and restorative approaches, and the use of volunteers.

There is a common understanding of the distinct skills base of both YJS workers and partnership staff. This knowledge is shared and there is a strong culture within the team to put the needs of children at the centre of work, and to improve and learn.

The board monitors the over-representation of black, Asian and minority ethnic children within the service and has developed an action plan to try and reduce this.

The workforce is representative of the local area and caseload. The team has a balance of experienced and new staff; consequently, practice can evolve and develop.

Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?

There are formal and informal methods of support and supervision, including various meetings to discuss individual children. Staff valued having a duty manager system so that they could seek advice when needed.

Performance management is developing. Some staff have had several managers over the past year and have found that the management approach has been inconsistent.

Management audits of practice have highlighted some performance issues and staff are clear about these. Work is focusing on establishing clear processes. We found that staff are not confident with using the AssetPlus assessment system, and some had not received the relevant training. This led to some inconsistencies in the quality of assessments and recording of work.

Good and exceptional work is recognised within the team, but not always by managers and the board. This is a missed opportunity to reinforce good practice.

Induction processes are in place for new staff alongside shadowing and smaller caseloads, which gradually increase over the induction period in a managed way.

Poor performance is identified and action plans are in place for staff where appropriate. Staff were clear about how practice needed to improve, but less clear on the timescales for improvement plans.

Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?

Staff and managers can access a wide range of training and development opportunities.

Staff can and do access training organised by the safeguarding board and can request additional training as needed.

Staff told us that they were able to request training and particularly welcomed the monthly learning opportunities facilitated by the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) worker.

The Building Resilience and Knife Intervention toolboxes aim to help professionals work with children to develop strategies for dealing with risky situations, raising awareness of exploitation and promoting personal resilience. These resources received good reviews from staff and are now available nationally on the YJB resource hub.

1.3 Partnerships and services



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

Outstanding

Caseload open to the YJS at 31 December 2019	66
Number of children who were looked after by the local authority	8
Number of children on a child protection plan	2
Number of other children open to social care e.g. child in need	10
Percentage of current caseload with an education, health and care plan	20%
Percentage of children over statutory school age in education, training or employment (quarter 4 2018/2019)	85%
Percentage of children of statutory school age in education provision (quarter 4 2018/2019)	90%

In making a judgement about partnerships and services, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children, to ensure that the YOT can deliver well-targeted services?

The partnership has developed a shared culture and ethos of work with this group of children. It understands that offending, risk of harm, and safety and wellbeing are usually closely linked.

Partnership services are provided based on various audits and analysis, including the joint strategic needs analysis and crime data from the Community Safety Partnership. The crime data includes new and emerging issues.

The YJS has carefully considered the inherent safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm issues for children involved in county lines.

One of the board's priorities is to understand and mitigate disproportionality. Work has been done to map this, and an action plan has been produced. The action plan includes visiting YOTs that perform better in this area and undertaking 'blind' out-of-court disposal panels to try and mitigate unconscious bias. The board is also undertaking a thematic review of custody to better understand why so many children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are in custody.

Does the YOT partnership have access to the volume, range and quality of services and interventions to meet the needs of all children?

A wide range of universal and specialist interventions and services are available to meet the desistance needs of children. There is a strong emphasis on the use of restorative justice, and reparation is often used in a meaningful way. Other services were available through a range of multi-agency panels. We found little delay for children in accessing services.

The YJS and partnership staff demonstrated flexibility in working with children, who were often chaotic and resistant to engage.

There is no specific strategy for working with girls, but work is being undertaken at board level to understand their needs, especially those convicted of violent offences.

Around 20 per cent of children known to the service have an education, health and care plan, and many more have emotional and mental health needs. Referrals to partnership agencies are routinely made for children, although due to a lack of capacity these have to be prioritised for those with the greatest level of need. We found that case managers provided good support to prepare children for interventions and to support them while they waited for a service.

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

Support from the forensic CAMHS team is excellent. This is used to manage those children who pose the greatest risk to others. Case formulation provides a detailed understanding of behaviour and the most effective methods of working with individuals. This information is shared with key partners, including children's social care, the National Probation Service (NPS) and residential services.

Partnership work between the YJS and NPS is strong. This extends to children who transition to adult probation services.

Partnership work with the ETE team, a specialist team within the local authority who try and reduce exclusions, and schools is developing and leading to work to understand and respond to the high incidence of fixed-term exclusions for children known to the YJS.

Within casework, we found good attention to diversity and issues of self-identity; staff capitalised on strengths and protective factors.

Links with MAPPA are effective. Focus and support to victims are particularly good; their needs and experiences are kept at the forefront of risk management.

Links with the community are developing, in part due to the recruitment of over 40 volunteers. Support and training for them are good. Panel members were very clear that the service "*was instrumental in the progress made by children*", which they observed through referral order panels.

Involvement of children and their parents and carers

Consultation at operational and strategic level is meaningful and sustained. Staff are skilled at engaging children and parents/carers in an open and honest way. The name of the service is one example of how the board listens to children: this was changed from 'youth offending' to 'youth justice' at their request, to reflect the range of provision and to avoid labelling.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Good

In making a judgement about information and facilities, we take into account the answers to the following four questions:

Are the necessary policies and guidance in place to enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

There are a full range of policies and procedures in place. These are routinely updated and changes shared with staff. Where practice and procedures are aligned across the partnership, this gives a common understanding of pathways and methods of working.

Information-sharing arrangements are effective at all levels, underpinned by protocols.

Staff generally understood how to access services from partner agencies; however, the roles of some agencies were not always fully understood by YJS staff. The alignment of the services should assist the YJS staff in having a better understanding of roles and responsibilities. This redesign is using learning from a previous police operation to identify and protect children from sexual exploitation.

Does the YOT's delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children and enable staff to deliver a quality service?

Oxfordshire is made up of city, town and rural areas. Staff use a wide range of premises to see children, including schools, libraries, county council buildings and the individual's home. They carefully consider the safety of children and staff, with some visits involving more than one staff member when there are identified risk issues. We heard mixed views from staff about the use of the community-based locality hubs. Some staff said that it was difficult to find private spaces in the hubs to have conversations with children.

Do the information and communication technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

All staff have laptops and mobile phones, which are reliable and enable remote working. Some staff use Skype to have three-way meetings.

The police are developing the use of mobile technology to help disrupt county lines and drug dealing.

Managers in the service have been working to improve the reliability of the information available from the case management system. Some information does not give an accurate picture of need. A recent example was the NEET figures supplied to the YJB by Childview, the YJS case management system. Further analysis at the request of the board showed that performance was much better than the figures suggested. Records on Childview did not always give an accurate picture of the strong understanding staff had of the children they supervised.

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

Funding has been agreed to recruit a data analyst for the YJS. At present, data available to drive improvement is limited. This is a recognised need.

Learning from critical incidents and inspection is well embedded, for example, there was a recent review of children in custody following the findings of an inspection report on separation in custody by HMI Prisons.

2. Court disposals



We took a detailed look at 20 community sentences and 1 custodial sentence managed by the YJS. We also conducted 21 interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance, and the safety and wellbeing of the child. For the 19 cases where there were factors related to harm, we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the 17 cases where there were relevant factors, we looked at work done to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child. The quality of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory.

In this inspection we found that work to understand and respond to help children with their desistance from offending was 'Outstanding'. Between 80 per cent and 95 per cent of cases had sufficient quality of assessment, planning, delivery of interventions and reviews.

Similarly, planning and delivery of interventions to manage and reduce risk of harm met our standards in between 89 per cent and 95 per cent of cases.

However, work around the child's safety and wellbeing was not as strong; the proportion of cases we inspected where the quality of assessment, planning and delivery of interventions was satisfactory, only just achieving the threshold for 'Good', was 65 per cent.

These lower scores in safety and wellbeing are the reason the YJS achieved a rating of 'Good' in these domains, when much of the other work was outstanding.

The staff team had a good understanding of desistance and risk of harm, and how these needed to be assessed and responded to. This knowledge had been built over time and supported by effective ongoing training and development. Case managers were well supported by most partners, especially health providers. It was clear, however, that quality of support and joint work with children's social care services were too variable, and this affected the scores in this domain. Work is being undertaken at strategic level to align and integrate services, but this has not yet had the intended effect for all children.

Strengths:

- There is a thorough and sustained focus on desistance and risk of harm to others, leading to high-quality assessment, planning and the delivery of suitable interventions.
- There is meaningful involvement with children and parents/carers in casework to support and strengthen relationships.
- The strong advocacy for, and focus on, the needs and wishes of victims was some of the best we have identified during this inspection programme to date.
- Partnership work with FCAMHS and other health services is effective and assists with shared decision-making and risk management.
- Restorative approaches are used consistently to resolve conflict and reduce offending.

- Reparation is used effectively to help children learn new skills and to demonstrate to victims that they are sorry for harm they have caused.
- Close work with residential settings helps to keep children in suitable placements.
- Multidisciplinary risk management processes, including MAPPA, are used appropriately.

Areas for improvement:

- Work to manage the safety and wellbeing of children needs to be consistent, especially in cases where children’s social care services were or should have been involved.
- Management oversight of safety and wellbeing should be strengthened so that it is as rigorous as the oversight of work to manage risk of harm.

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

2.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

Good

Our rating¹⁷ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child’s desistance?	90%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	67%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	76%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child’s desistance?

This was an area of strength for the service. Overall, we assessed work in this area to be ‘Outstanding’. Staff considered carefully and in detail the child’s attitudes to offending, motivation to change and existing strengths that could be built on to support desistance from offending.

Assessments drew on a range of sources, including the use of specialists’ assessments when needed. In one case, the inspector noted:

¹⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

“Very detailed analytical assessment, clearly outlining the factors for and against desistance. Good attention given to the boy’s ethnicity and experience of discrimination. His care history and relationship with mum was critical to his sense of belonging and this is identified. The impact of his autistic spectrum disorder, case formulation from FCAMHS was used to advise the pre-sentence report and assessment”.

Information provided by the child on self-assessment questionnaires was routinely included in assessments, which gave a clear sense of their thinking. This was often used to understand whether or not the child was likely to comply with the requirements of an order.

In a few cases, we noted significant delays between the child’s arrest and their appearance at court. In one case, there had been a delay of 18 months. Staff made careful assessments of the child’s ability to reflect on the initial incident and what may have contributed to desistance in the intervening period. It was clear that assessments drew out which factors were still relevant to offending and where the child’s life had moved on.

We found particularly good attention to the needs and wishes of victims and identification of opportunities for restorative justice, which was embedded across the service. The victim worker was adept at keeping case managers aware of the needs of victims.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

This was the weakest area of assessment. We judged that the assessment sufficiently analysed how to keep the child safe in two-thirds of cases (14 out of 21).

In the majority of cases, the classification of the level of safety and wellbeing was correct; however, in the three cases where we disagreed, we thought risk factors had been underestimated.

There were some marked variations in when assessments were completed. A third of assessments were undertaken too far into the order. When this occurred, some critical factors, including previous self-harm and the child’s exposure to domestic violence, were identified late. This caused unnecessary delays in planning and joint work to deliver the services to best protect children.

Where assessments were undertaken quickly and well, we found that case managers incorporated the assessments of other agencies and their knowledge of the child to understand their life and things that made them unsafe or at risk of harm. This included consideration of those who were vulnerable to or being exploited.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

There were 18 cases in our sample where the child posed a risk of harm to others, including serious harm. Almost three-quarters of assessments identified these risks clearly, including who was at risk, in what situation this might happen, the imminence and the likely impact of harmful behaviour.

Again, we found good attention to assessing how to keep actual and potential victims safe. This happened in all but one case, equating to 95 per cent. This is much higher than the percentage of cases we usually find; the national average from YOSs inspected so far is 55 per cent.

We noted that classifications of risk of serious harm were accurate in 81 per cent of cases. In those we disagreed with the risk was underestimated, usually because of a

too-narrow focus on the current offence, and some risky behaviours were not included in the assessments.

2.2. Planning



Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

Good

Our rating¹⁸ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	95%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	65%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	95%

Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

Planning to support desistance from offending was undertaken to a consistently high standard, being based on the good-quality assessments. The views of the child and their parents/carers were respected, and we could see objectives that were important to them added to planning. Existing strengths were supported, including relationships with care home staff and attendance at school. Planning was well sequenced and included relevant interventions.

The service used the planning and pathway section of AssetPlus, but these plans were supplemented by time spent with the child to ensure they understood the planning and what was expected of them. Sometimes a child-friendly plan was made. In most cases, staff had carefully considered the contents of the plan to make them meaningful, and tailored to the individual and the circumstances of the offence.

The needs and wishes of victims were incorporated into planning and opportunities for restorative justice were actively pursued. We came across a few cases where the victim did not want contact with the child directly but requested that they undertook some work in the community to show they were sorry. These requests were honoured. In one case, a child made a bench for a local community garden, where the victim would be able to see and use it.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

This was the weakest area of work: the score of 65 per cent of cases being sufficient only just met our threshold for a 'Good' rating. The main reason that this area was not as strong as the others was a lack of contingency planning which outlined actions to be taken for anticipated changes; 81 per cent of the children in this sample had safety and wellbeing needs, and this was a particularly important part of their plans.

In one case, we noted:

¹⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

“This was a case where there were concerns that in the future the child could be criminally exploited, although there was no evidence it was happening at the time the case was assessed. There was no planning to monitor this, including no plans for working in conjunction with the practitioner supervising his older brother, or those case managers working with other more sophisticated associates of his. There was no planning around ways in which he could keep himself safe”.

It was positive to see that planning to keep children safe was usually coordinated with other agencies, including custody, schools, social care and other partner agencies.

We saw some good planning for children with the most complex needs, supported by forensic CAMHS. The insights provided by the specialist teams were shared with all workers, including probation, in preparation for transition to adult services. As a result, planning for safety and for risk of harm posed by the child was realistic, timely and appropriate. It allowed the child to take some managed risks with a support network in place.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Planning to manage and reduce risk of harm, including serious harm, was done consistently well. Where other agencies were involved, they were given appropriate actions and interventions to deliver. Risk of harm factors, including poor emotional regulation, learned behaviours and purposeful use of violence, were addressed, either by one-to-one work with case managers or via referrals to other agencies.

Where other agencies could contribute to risk management, planning often included consideration of how the child would be introduced to new workers. Although this was rarely recorded in written plans, interviews with case managers demonstrated that this aspect was fully discussed between workers.

Victims’ expressed views and their wishes were included in planning, and we saw good use of restrictive interventions, including exclusion zones and no-contact conditions. Case managers sought and received advice from the YJS victim worker to help plan to keep actual and potential victims safe. Where needed, referrals were made to the NPS for victims to access the statutory victim contact scheme.¹⁹

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Good

Our rating²⁰ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

¹⁹ The purpose of the victim contact scheme is to keep victims of the most serious offences, where the offender has been given a long prison sentence or an indefinite hospital order, informed at key stages of the offender’s sentence, and to give them the opportunity to request licence or discharge conditions on release.

²⁰ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

	% yes
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	95%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	65%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	89%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?

The delivery of services and interventions had been adapted to meet the needs of children, giving them the best chance to engage and get the maximum benefits from their supervision by the YJS. Priority was given to supporting trusting relationships, either with the case manager or with another worker when there was already an established relationship.

Home visits were used to mitigate travel difficulties for some children who lived in rural areas and to involve parents/carers.

Children had access to a range of interventions and support services. These tended to be delivered quickly, with case managers keeping progress under review.

Reparation was meaningful and often linked to the child's strengths and aspirations. As a consequence, they complied, and often completed more time on these activities than they were required to.

The work of the substance misuse service was valued, although demand was higher than capacity. Interventions included work to address substance misuse and the impact of drug dealing. Work with the substance misuse worker could lead to referrals to the newly formed Kingfisher team, which supported children who were at risk of or being exploited. Case managers in the YJS did not fully understand the work of the Kingfisher team, so did not always know how the two services could complement each other.

Appropriate enforcement action was taken in the five cases where this was needed. The processes and rationale for this were explained to children. Staff then worked hard to re-engage the child.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?

There were 15 cases where other agencies should have been involved with the delivery of interventions to keep children safe. This work was effective in nine cases.

Children's social care services did not always respond appropriately to the additional needs of children working with the YJS. In one case, we noted:

"Social care said that because the child was now known to the YOT, they were closing the child in need case, even though the family had not engaged and they had no recent assessment".

In our view, escalation processes should have been used to raise the suitability of decision-making with social care managers; however, this was not done.

Service delivery promoted safety and wellbeing in 11 of the 17 cases where this was needed. We noted that there were some missed opportunities to intervene earlier with children.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?

The coordination of work with other agencies to manage risk of serious harm was better than that for safety and wellbeing. Liaison with MAPPA, the probation service and the police was good, with timely referrals made to enable agencies to share information.

We found that information was shared between the YJS, schools and the police to identify any problematic behaviour.

Risk management panels provided a level of management oversight of how risk was managed. Staff found this multidisciplinary forum helpful.

In most cases, interventions were used to reduce risks posed by the child. There was consistent use of victim awareness, restorative approaches and conflict resolution.

Where needed, specialist services were used, including programmes and work on emotional management, thinking and consequences of actions and impact of particular offences, such as car crime. Staff could also access sexual harmful behaviour interventions.

In one case, we noted that:

“Work has been completed on emotional management and in development of coping strategies. Triggers and consequences are also considered so that the child may have more of an understanding as to why he has a tendency to react physically in difficult situations”.

For those who posed the highest risk of harm to others, transitional work to adult probation services was started in good time, including joint work and handovers to probation staff. If CAMHS had been involved, they continued to support risk management, providing clinical and advisory support.

2.4. Reviewing



Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

Good

Our rating²¹ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	80%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	73%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	75%

²¹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

Reviewing of cases was good and used proactively to identify any deterioration in engagement and behaviour. As a result, we found that significant changes were identified in 17 of the 20 cases where these occurred. This led to adaptations in the work carried out in three-quarters of cases.

Case managers also focused on positive changes demonstrated by the child, and then took these opportunities to reinforce positive behaviour and strengths. When we spoke to case managers, it was clear that they focused on helping children to improve their self-image and see that they were capable of making better decisions.

Children and parents/carers were routinely involved in reviewing and able to give their perspectives on what they thought was working and what might need to change.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

We identified 15 cases where there had been a change in the child's level of safety and wellbeing. This change had been identified by case managers in 12 cases. The quality of reviewing safety and wellbeing and subsequent recording was variable. We found some examples of thorough reviewing involving other agencies, including care home providers, parents and social workers. This occurred in nine relevant cases. When these reviews were done well, they resulted in referrals to other appropriate agencies or safety mechanisms, including the Kingfisher exploitation team, a multi-agency risk management panel, and close liaison with the Edge of Care team and with the police.

In one case we assessed, we found that the close cooperation between the case manager and restorative justice worker had promoted a flexible approach to undertaking work. This included adjusting the plan to fit the needs of the child and his family. When the family showed that they were motivated to engage with him, the restorative justice worker arranged a family conference to address and explore some of the issues relating to mistrust within the family that had affected the child over a long period of time. Following the conference, his parents still had overly high expectations of him. However, there was evidence that the relationship had improved slightly, and the child had a better understanding of his parents' views and the need for the restrictions they placed on him.

In four cases, new information did not lead to the necessary adjustments, even when this information was concerning. These cases included a child who disclosed that his father was intimidating and aggressive towards him, and a child who was assaulted by a rival gang.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Reviewing focused sufficiently well on keeping other people safe in three-quarters of relevant cases (nine out of twelve cases). In the same proportion of cases, reviews had identified and responded to risk of harm factors and had been informed by other agencies.

Staff said that they could approach managers to discuss changes in risk when they needed to, and liked the fact they always had a duty manager to go to for advice and support. Reviewing led to an appropriate reduction in risk levels and gave all workers a current and accurate understanding of risk factors.

3. Out of court disposals



We inspected 13 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of 12 youth conditional cautions and 1 youth caution. We did not inspect any cases that had received a community resolution. We had to exclude some cases that we had intended to inspect as no assessment had been undertaken. We interviewed the case manager in 11 cases we inspected.

We examined the quality of assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. For the 13 cases where there were factors related to harm, we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the nine cases where there were relevant factors, we looked at work done to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child. We also looked at the quality of joint working with local police. The quality of work undertaken in relation to each element of case supervision needs to be above a specific threshold for it to be rated as satisfactory.

Oxfordshire achieved a rating of 'Good' for assessment. Work on desistance was strongest, with the assessment of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm completed to a sufficient standard in 69 per cent of cases.

Planning and delivery of interventions and joint work all scored 'Outstanding', with work completed to a sufficient standard in between 85 per cent and 100 per cent of cases.

The partnership has invested resources in diverting children from the criminal justice system, particularly where they are victims of serious organised crime, including county lines activity. This includes a specific out-of-court disposal for possession of cannabis - the Cannabis Warning Clinic. Run by the police, this provides an opportunity to identify those children being used for, or vulnerable to, county lines. Interventions are provided for them, including referrals to the Aquarius substance misuse service or to Early Help.

The YJS makes effective contributions to decision-making for out-of-court disposals, based on a range of detailed screening information gathered before the panel meets. It assesses cases where a youth caution or youth conditional caution has been agreed. The YJS provides some interventions for children who have received an out-of-court disposal, including those who have received a community resolution.

Strengths:

- The YJS makes an effective contribution to decision-making for out-of-court disposals, delivering interventions as requested by partners.
- High-quality work focuses on desistance, planning and the delivery of interventions.
- A wide range of services and interventions are delivered to meet children's needs.
- There is a clear focus on reducing and managing risk of harm and protecting victims.
- Reparation and restorative approaches are used effectively.

Areas for improvement:

- Assessments of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm are not as strong as assessments of desistance.
- The length of delay between arrests and decisions is excessive and has an impact on service delivery.

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

3.1. Assessment



Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

Good

Our rating²² for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	69%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	69%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Assessment of desistance was sufficient in all cases. Case managers used AssetPlus for more complex cases, or a locally developed tool. We saw both being used to good effect.

There had been some lengthy delays between the time of arrest and the time when the decision on an out-of-court disposal was made. Some of these delays were excessive; in one case we saw, the child had been on bail for 12 months before receiving a youth conditional caution. This caused some frustration for children and parents/carers. Case managers showed considerable skill in engaging individuals when there were delays so that potential offending could be addressed. This was a particularly important part of assessing the child's motivation to change.

Assessments were strengths-based and considered relevant diversity factors, the individual's social context and the support available from their family.

There was a victim in 10 of the 13 cases. In each case, the victim's needs and the impact of the offence on them were assessed and considered.

²² The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

One inspector noted:

“The assessment tool used by the YJS enabled an efficient but effective analysis of the key issues. The practitioner was skilled at pulling together the views of the child, their parent and the victim into a thorough offence analysis, demonstrating the ability to engage with a sceptical child quickly in order to produce a robust assessment early on”.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

Assessments of safety and wellbeing were sufficient in over two-thirds (nine of the thirteen) cases, leading to our judgement of ‘Good’ on this area of work. The assessments were clearly recorded, and discussions with case managers showed that they had given careful thought to assessments.

Where we judged assessments to be insufficient, the common reasons were that the assessment had not been completed in a timely manner, risks to the child had been underestimated, or the case manager had not drawn on all relevant sources of information.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

In 10 of the 13 cases where there was actual or potential risk of harm to others, classifications were accurate, and case managers had considered the effect of the offence on the victims and assessed the nature of risks.

In the four cases in which we judged the assessments to be insufficient, this was for the same reasons we found in relation to safety and wellbeing, i.e. delays in completion and case managers not using all sources of information to inform assessments.

3.2. Planning



Planning is well informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

Outstanding

Our rating²³ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does planning focus on supporting the child or young person's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child or young person safe?	89%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	85%

²³ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?

In all cases, we found that planning set out the services and interventions most likely to support desistance. Planning was proportionate and tailored to the needs of the child.

Parents/carers and children were involved in drawing up the plans, which considered and sought to support the positive aspects in the child's life.

For example, in one case, the case manager identified the importance of the education system supporting the young man to pursue his interest in carpentry. This was correctly seen as a protective factor and a personal strength that had the potential to deter him from further offending.

There was a focus at the planning stage on supporting individuals to lead a crime-free life and to develop an awareness of how decisions and behaviours impact on others. Interventions were delivered quickly and within the limited time available following the assessment.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

In nine cases, case managers needed to develop a plan to promote safety and wellbeing. They completed these well enough in all but two cases. The plans were consistently aligned with those of other agencies, including education, health and children's social care.

Discussions with case managers showed that they had considered exit planning and knew the actions they would take if a child was at risk from other people or their own behaviour. Referrals to other agencies had been made when needed.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Planning promoted the safety of other people and matched the assessment in the vast majority of cases.

Planning involved other agencies, including schools and residential placements, and where necessary risks were shared with others to protect actual and potential victims. In one instance, the case manager shared her concerns with a social worker undertaking a family assessment. This provided a fuller picture of the family dynamic and the risks to others in the family home.

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

Outstanding

Our rating²⁴ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does service delivery effectively support the child or young person's desistance?	100%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child or young person?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	92%

Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?

In every case, children were provided with planned and suitable services that were personalised to their style of learning and engagement. In every case we saw, efforts were made to make interventions meaningful for the child, regardless of who delivered them.

Interventions and support were delivered by a range of workers. These included the police delivering sessions on consequences of crime and what the substance misuse and exploitation team could offer them, and restorative approaches being taken when appropriate.

Reparation was used to good effect. Projects linked to either the victim's wishes or the child's strengths and interests. Case managers were able to give us examples of how reparation had helped children to understand that they had repaired some of the harm they had caused.

One inspector noted:

"Work is completed on emotional management, using visual exercises and easy-to-understand pieces of work, such as 'comfortable stories' (justifications for behaviours) and making better decisions. The child fully engages with the work and even completes work as 'homework', which he is eager to show his case manager at subsequent appointments".

Work with children started at the right time to meet their desistance needs, rather than when the out-of-court disposal was given. For some, this was before the decision to give an out-of-court disposal was made. This approach was in the best interests of children.

²⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annex 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?

We saw determined efforts to provide or facilitate services to help keep children safe, including referral to specialist services that could support them longer term. When needed, cases were discussed by a multi-agency management panel, particularly to escalate issues if another agency was not providing a service that was needed. Management oversight through these meetings was effective and resulted in children accessing the services they needed.

In one case, a girl was able to access support for abuse she had suffered in her early years. This was the first time she had felt able to engage with this service. This was a good example of a case manager being able to recognise when a child had reached a critical point in their life, and of a child being helped to understand the underlying reasons for their behaviours.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?

In every case where there was an actual or potential victim, sufficient attention was given to protecting them. In almost all cases, action was taken to manage and reduce risk of harm.

Again, we found some very effective examples of restorative approaches, including the following case example:

Good practice example

The victims of the offence continue to work within the children's home and the interventions aim to reduce the risk to them and to reduce the risk of similar further offending. With support, staff members were willing to engage and acknowledge the benefits of the restorative justice process. In this case, work is undertaken with the child so that they can recognise their reactions and conflict.

There were several restorative justice sessions, followed by a restorative session at the end of the out-of-court disposal when the child meets with the restorative worker and staff who had been assaulted. It is noted that the head of the children's home becomes involved in the session, as the child is reported to have also assaulted a child who has recently been placed within the home. The restorative justice worker then offers a follow-up appointment with the head and the child to look at ways to move on and to reinforce the importance of appropriate behaviours, focusing on victim impact.

This approach reduced the risk to staff and other children and maintained the child's place in the residential home.

3.4. Joint working



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

Outstanding

Our rating²⁵ for joint working is based on the following key questions, which are only asked in youth conditional caution cases:

	% yes
Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child or young person, supporting joint decision making?	100%
Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out of court disposal?	100%

Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision-making?

In all cases, the YJS made well-informed recommendations to the police and decision-making panel.

These recommendations were based on relevant information and assessments, which included the child's understanding and acknowledgement of responsibility. Work was undertaken to reduce the criminalisation of looked-after children, and there has been a reduction in the number of cases of assaults on care home staff and criminal damage coming to the panel.

Rationales for decision-making are recorded clearly in panel minutes, and four of Oxfordshire's cases have been considered by the Thames Valley scrutiny panel in the past year; this gives limited oversight of decision-making.

When disagreements on outcomes occur, these are discussed and, if necessary, referred to managers for resolution. Most cases are agreed following discussions.

Consideration is given during meetings to children's safety and wellbeing. When necessary, they are recognised as victims and National Referral Mechanism or child protection referrals are made for them or their siblings and peers.

Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?

The out-of-court disposal scheme is well understood and was implemented effectively. The police are notified of progress and outcomes as required. In all of the cases we assessed, children complied, often as a result of the persistence of case managers and the personalisation of service delivery.

²⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Annexe 1: Methodology

HM Inspectorate of Probation standards

The standards against which we inspect youth offending services 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 children who have offended.²⁶

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

Domain one: organisational delivery

The youth offending service submitted evidence in advance and the chair of the youth justice services management board delivered a presentation covering the following areas:

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

During the main fieldwork phase, we conducted 32 interviews with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. We held various meetings, which allowed us to triangulate evidence and information. In total, we conducted 11 meetings, which included meetings with managers, partner organisations and staff. The evidence collected under this domain was judged against our published ratings characteristics.²⁷

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 who had received court disposals six to nine months earlier, enabling us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined 21 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.

²⁶ HM Inspectorate's standards are available here:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

²⁷ HM Inspectorate's standards are available here:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

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 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 significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined 13 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.

In some areas of this report, data may have been split into smaller sub-samples – for example, male/female cases. Where this is the case, the margin of error for the sub-sample findings may be higher than five.

Annexe 2: Inspection results

In this inspection, we conducted a detailed examination of a sample of 21 court disposals and 13 out-of-court disposals. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards: assessment, planning, implementation and delivery - for court disposals, we look at reviewing, and in out-of-court disposals, we look at joint working with the police. For each standard, inspectors answer 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 children 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>1.1. Governance and leadership</p> <p>The governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.</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?</p> <p>1.1.2. Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?</p> <p>1.1.3. Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery?</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>1.2. Staff</p> <p>Staff within the YOT are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.</p> <p>1.2.1. Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?</p> <p>1.2.2. Do the skills of YOT staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?</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>	<p>Good</p>
<p>1.3. Partnerships and services</p> <p>A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.</p> <p>1.3.1. Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children, to ensure that the YOT can deliver well-targeted services?</p> <p>1.3.2. Does the YOT partnership have access to the volume, range and quality of services and interventions to meet the needs of all children?</p> <p>1.3.3. Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?</p>	<p>Outstanding</p>

1.4. Information and facilities **Good**

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

- 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?
- 1.4.2. Does the YOT's delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children 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?
- 1.4.4. Is analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

2. Court disposals

Standards and key questions	Rating and % yes
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2.1. Assessment	Good ²⁸
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Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 2.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance? | 90% |
| 2.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe? | 67% |
| 2.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe? | 76% |

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

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 2.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance? | 95% |
| 2.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe? | 65% |
| 2.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe? | 95% |

²⁸ The score relating to keeping people safe was within five per cent of the rating boundary, providing the opportunity to exercise professional discretion. The YOS scored well for its work to assess desistance, and safety and well-being factors. For this reason, we raised the overall rating for assessment to 'Good' in order to provide a more accurate reflection of its performance.

2.3. Implementation and delivery	Good
High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	
2.3.1. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	95%
2.3.2. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	65%
2.3.3. Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	89%
2.4. Reviewing	Good
Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.	
2.4.1. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	80%
2.4.2. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	73%
2.4.3. Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	75%

3. Out-of-court disposals

Standards and key questions	Rating and % yes
3.1. Assessment	Good
Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.	
3.1.1. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	100%
3.1.2. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	69%
3.1.3. Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	69%

3.2. Planning	Outstanding
Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents/carers.	
3.2.1. Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
3.2.2. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	89%
3.2.3. Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	85%
3.3. Implementation and delivery	Outstanding
High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	
3.3.1. Does service delivery support the child's desistance?	100%
3.3.2. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	89%
3.3.3. Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	92%
3.4. Joint working	Outstanding
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, supporting joint decision-making?	100%
3.4.2. Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?	100%

Annexe 3: Glossary

AssetPlus	Assessment and planning framework tool developed by the Youth Justice Board for work with children who have offended, or are at risk of offending, that reflects current research and understanding of what works with children
Community resolution	Used in low-level, often first-time, offences where there is informal agreement, often also involving the victim, about how the offence should be resolved. Community resolution is a generic term; in practice, many different local terms are used to mean the same thing
Court disposals	The sentence imposed by the court. Examples of youth court disposals are referral orders, youth rehabilitation orders and detention and training orders.
Child protection	Work to make sure that all reasonable action has been taken to keep to a minimum the risk of a child experiencing significant harm.
Child exploitation	<p>Child sexual exploitation is a type of child abuse, occurring when a child is encouraged, forced or manipulated to take part in sexual activity for something in return, for example presents, drugs, alcohol or emotional attention.</p> <p>Criminal exploitation occurs when children or children are exploited, forced or coerced into committing crimes.</p>
Enforcement	Action taken by a case manager in response to a child's failure to comply with the actions specified as part of a community sentence or licence. Enforcement can be punitive or motivational
Detention and training order	Prison sentence for a child. The length is specified by the court, and the child 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 will be released on licence
Enforcement	Action taken by a case manager in response to a child's failure to comply with the actions specified as part of a community sentence or licence. Enforcement can be punitive or motivational
ETE	Education, training and employment: work to improve learning, and to increase future employment prospects.
FTE	First-time entrants: a child who receives a statutory criminal justice outcome (youth caution, youth conditional caution or conviction) for the first time.
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.
Local authority	YOTs are often a team within a specific local authority.
NEET	Children not in any form of full or part-time education, training or employment
NRM	National Referral Mechanism – the national framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery in order to gain help to support them.

Out-of-court disposal	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
Personalised	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
Protected characteristics	Defined by the Equality Act 2010 as age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.
Referral order	A restorative court order which can be imposed when the child appearing before the court pleads guilty, and whereby the threshold does not meet a youth rehabilitation order
Risk of serious harm	A term used in AssetPlus. All cases are classified as presenting a low/medium/high/very high risk of serious harm to others. HM Inspectorate of 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 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
Safeguarding	A wider term than 'child protection', it involves promoting a child's health and development, and ensuring that their overall welfare needs are met
Safety and wellbeing	AssetPlus replaced the assessment of vulnerability with a holistic outlook of a child'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)
Youth caution	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
Youth conditional caution	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
YOT/YOS	Youth offending team is the term used in the <i>Crime and Disorder Act 1998</i> to describe a multi-agency team that aims to reduce youth offending. YOTs are known locally by many titles, such as youth justice service (YJS), youth offending service (YOS), and other generic titles that may illustrate their wider role in the local area in delivering services for children.
YOT management board	The YOT management board holds the YOT to account to ensure it achieves the primary aim of preventing offending by children.
Youth rehabilitation order	Overarching community sentence to which the court applies requirements (e.g. supervision requirement or unpaid work).
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



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