

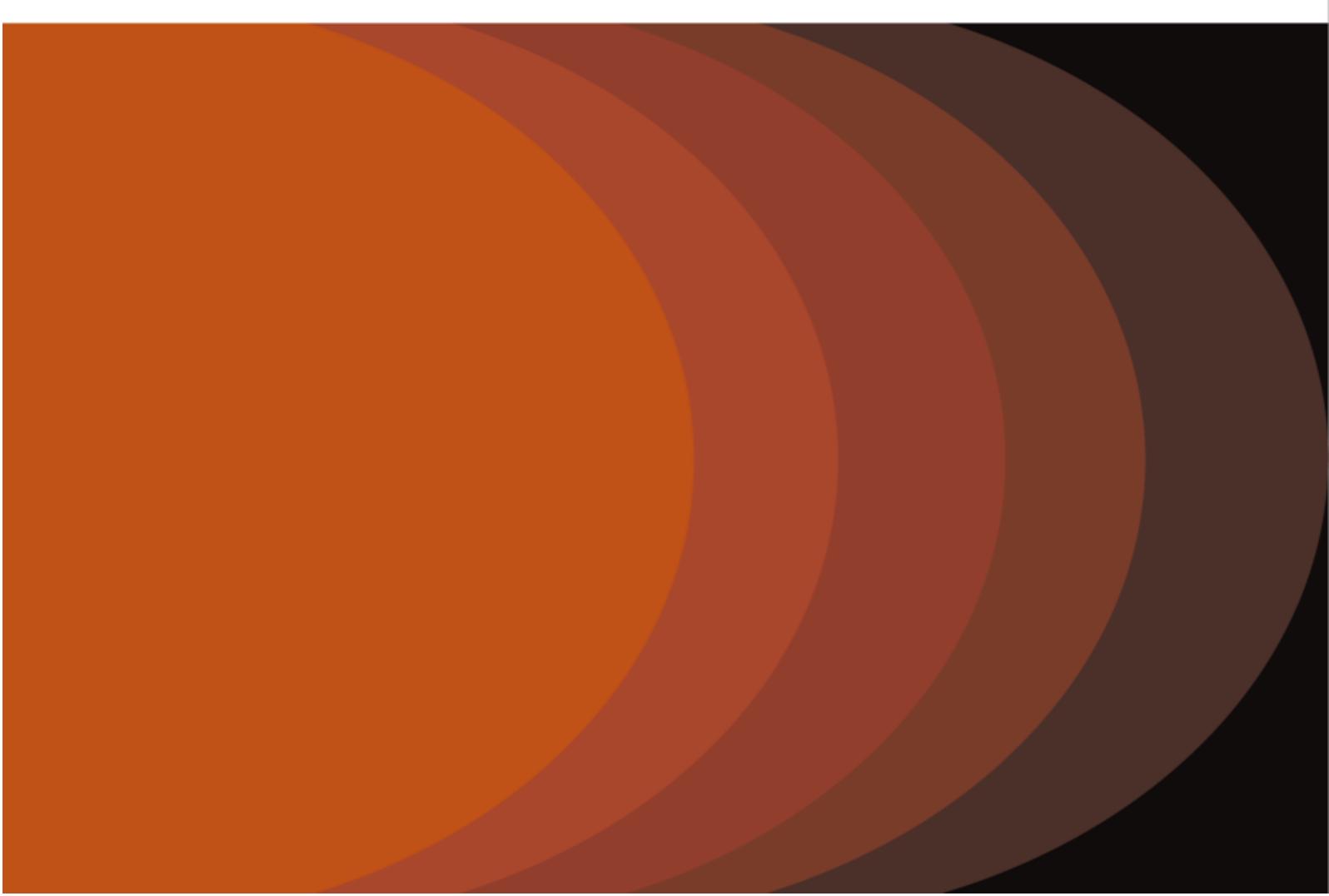


Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Blackpool

HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2021



Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Mike Ryan, supported by a team of inspectors, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the Inspectorate. HM Inspectorate of Probation was joined by colleague inspectors from police, health, social care and education. 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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We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice, and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government, and speak independently.

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Foreword

This inspection follows on from our inspection of the Blackpool Youth Justice Service (YJS) in 2018 as part of our four-year programme of YOS inspections. In 2018 we rated Blackpool as 'Inadequate' overall and identified several areas of poor practice. This current inspection was undertaken jointly with our partner inspectors from the police, health, social care and education.

We have inspected and rated Blackpool 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, Blackpool YJS was rated as 'Good'.

In many ways, the work in Blackpool has improved significantly since our 2018 inspection. Following substantial reorganisation, the YJS now has effective governance arrangements, which both set the direction for the YJS and provide rigorous scrutiny of the work being delivered. Leaders are keen to develop the service, and this is being translated into the greatly improved quality of work that our inspectors have identified. At the heart of this improvement is an engaged and highly motivated staff group. The YJS works well with other agencies within 'Blackpool Families Rock', a unified strategic approach to delivering children's services.

The supervision of court disposals is now, in the main, done to a good standard. There has been substantial improvement.

There has been a comprehensive overhaul of the arrangements for out-of-court disposal work, led by police colleagues. The quality of services has changed from 'Inadequate' across the board, to at least 'Good' and in some respects 'Outstanding'.

It is greatly encouraging that the service for children in Blackpool has shown such substantial improvement. We are confident that the foundations have been laid to maintain the quality of services, and we have provided a number of recommendations that should help to improve the service even further.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Blackpool Youth Justice Service		Score	25/36
Overall rating		Good	
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Good	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Requires improvement	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Good	
2.2	Planning	Requires improvement	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
2.4	Reviewing	Outstanding	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Outstanding	
3.2	Planning	Good	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
3.4	Joint working	Outstanding	

Executive summary

Overall, Blackpool YJS is rated as: **'Good'**. This rating has been determined by inspecting the YJS in three areas of its work, referred to as 'domains'. We inspect against 12 'standards', shared between the domains. Our fieldwork was conducted between 17 May and 11 June 2021. 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 YJS rating.² The findings and subsequent ratings in those domains are described below.

1. Organisational delivery



There has been extensive improvement in the delivery of services, and this is reflected in the ratings for domains two and three, which have changed from a score of 1 in 2018 to a score of 18 now. The board has been strengthened and has adopted a strong scrutiny role. There is a commitment to a 'child first' strategy and this aligns well with the broader intentions of the Blackpool Families Rock strategy.

The key features of the strategy are:

- creating trusting and honest relationships (relationship-based practice)
- improving and repairing relationships within families and communities (restorative practice)
- supporting families, providing a 'jigsaw of support' through partnership staff (systemic solution-focused practice)
- viewing adults and children as resourceful and resilient in the face of their worries (strengths-based practice).

The board acknowledges that, while the YJS has improved, more work is needed in order to fulfil its ambitions to achieve excellence in the delivery of services.

The current staff arrangements are a stark contrast to the picture we saw when we inspected the YJS in 2018. Staff feel valued and included, and work well with the children who come to the YJS. Relationships are the key to effective work with children and the organisation supports the continuity of key people in the children's lives.

In 2018³ we found that there was 'no up to date analysis of the needs of children subject to YJS supervision'. There is now detailed information, and this is supported

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

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.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'.

³ HM Inspectorate of Probation (2018). *An inspection of youth offending services in Blackpool*.

by analysis, with all relevant aspects of the children's circumstances being identified and monitored.

In many respects, partnership working has substantially improved since the last inspection. Information exchange between the YJS and police has greatly improved. Police officers attending the multi-agency risk management meetings (MARMM) take an active role in the effective management of children who are either at risk of serious harm or have the potential to cause harm to the public. Previously reported delays in access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) have been removed by the introduction of a 24/7 service. One inspector noted: "There were clear pathways into health services and case managers were aware of these and how to access services."

We were not able to visit the premises used by the YJS due to Covid-19 restrictions, so our commentary on facilities is limited. However, staff feedback suggests that there has been a substantial improvement since the previous inspection. Leaders have paid considerable attention to improving working arrangements at the YJS, and this has resulted in tangible progress.

We interviewed the YJS manager and the chair of the executive management board and held meetings with other board members and key stakeholders. Inspectors from the police and from health, social care and education and learning services were part of our inspection team. They followed up individual children's records and interviewed key members of staff.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows:

- the executive management board sets a clear vision for Blackpool YJS. It is well led by an experienced chair and members are of sufficient seniority to influence the provision of resources to support the YJS, in their host organisations
- the staff delivering services are skilled practitioners and they are supported by equally committed seconded and partnership staff. Morale is high, staff have been given improved access to training and view their managers as making a positive contribution to the quality of work. In the previous inspection, 42 per cent of staff rated their supervision as poor or very poor. When surveyed for this inspection, all staff reported supervision to be quite good or very good
- in 2018, only 41 per cent of staff felt they fully had the skills and knowledge to deliver high-quality services to children. In our most recent survey, all staff perceived themselves to at least mostly have the relevant skills and knowledge
- there is a good range of partnership services and developments are increasingly based on good information and analysis
- the new IT system (Core+) has markedly improved the availability and usefulness of data.

But:

- the YJS needs to develop an agreed protocol and shared understanding across the partnership on managing contextual safeguarding at the operational level

- the effectiveness of interventions should be evaluated to ensure they are meeting children's needs and reducing re-offending
- the YJS and partner agencies need to develop the way they manage information so that they communicate more effectively
- children should receive a thorough and effective initial assessment of their health and educational needs
- children need better access to services where they can gain the personal, life, and social skills they need to work towards employment.

2. Court disposals



We took a detailed look at 13 community sentences managed by the YJS. We conducted 13 interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. We inspected each of these elements in respect of work done to address desistance. For services to keep the child safe, we only assessed the quality of planning, implementation and reviewing in the 11 children's records where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning, implementation and reviewing in the 12 children's records where meaningful work was required. We did not look at any custodial sentences.

In our 2018 inspection, we rated assessment as 'Requires improvement'. For each of the other standards associated with court disposals, the rating was 'Inadequate'.

In the current inspection, we rated the standards as follows:

- for assessment, over three-quarters of the children's records inspected met all our standards, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- for planning, just over half of the children's records met the standard for keeping other people safe, resulting in a rating of 'Requires improvement'
- for implementation and delivery of court disposals, over two-thirds of the children's records met all our standards, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- where a review was necessary, the YJS met our standards in all children's records, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'.

Our key findings about court disposals are:

- assessment is based on sound analysis and used the contributions of partner agencies well
- plans are effective in supporting desistance and attending to the child's safety and wellbeing
- the court order was delivered well, with the balance between engagement, motivation and enforcement maintained to high professional standards
- the reviews of children's records were well done.

But:

- the needs of victims and access to restorative work were not considered in all appropriate children's records

- the language used in some documents was not always accessible to children
- in some children's records, there were no effective contingency arrangements to manage identified risks to the child's safety and wellbeing
- in some children's records, there was either no plan to keep other people safe or no contingency planning in the event that issues in the child's life increased the likelihood of harmful behaviour.

3. Out-of-court disposals



We inspected 10 children's records managed by the YOT that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of three youth conditional cautions, five youth cautions, and two community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 10 children's records.

We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. We inspected each of these elements in respect of work done to address desistance. For services to keep the child safe, we only assessed the quality of planning and implementation in the seven children's records where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning and implementation in the six children's records where meaningful work was required. We inspected the quality of the YJS's recommendations and joint decision-making in all children's records, and the effectiveness of joint working with the police in the three youth conditional caution children's records only. The quality of the work undertaken needs to be above a specified threshold for each aspect of supervision to be rated as satisfactory.

When we inspected Blackpool YJS in 2018, the quality of out-of-court disposal work was rated as 'Inadequate' for each of the standards.

Since that inspection, Blackpool YJS has carried out an extensive review of its out-of-court disposal processes, so we would expect to see considerable improvement to the way the work is done.

In this inspection, we rated the work as follows:

- for assessment, at least eight out of 10 children's records met all our requirements, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'
- for planning work, four out of six children's records where risk of harm to other people was identified met our expectations, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- for implementation and delivery, four out of six children's records met our requirements where risk of harm to other people had been identified, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- joint working met our expectations in all children's records, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'.

Our key findings for out-of-court disposal work were:

- the use of AssetPlus ensures high-quality assessment work in almost all children's records; all assessments of risk to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others were accurate and appropriately recorded

- the work was appropriately planned
- an extensive range of interventions is available to children within the out-of-court disposals arrangement
- the joint working that underpins the delivery of out-of-court disposals was exemplary.

But:

- victim work was not delivered as required in a small number of children's records
- risk to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others were given insufficient attention in a small number of children's records.

Recommendations

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

The Blackpool Youth Justice Service should:

1. evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to ensure they are meeting children's needs and reducing re-offending
2. provide thorough and effective initial assessment of children's health and educational needs, including communication skills and dyslexia
3. reduce the unacceptably high NEET (not in education, training or employment) rates for the over-16 caseload by getting more children into further education provision and vocational training, including access to services where children can gain the personal, life, and social skills they need to work towards employment
4. ensure that, in all children's records, there is a plan to keep other people safe and contingency planning if issues in the child's life increase the likelihood of harmful behaviour
5. where risk to the child's safety or wellbeing is identified, put in place clear contingency planning for circumstances where the risk may increase
6. where risk to other people is identified, put in place clear contingency planning for circumstances where the risk may increase.

The Youth Justice Board should:

7. review the level of oversight of the Blackpool YJS.

Background

Youth offending teams (YOTs) work with children aged 10 to 18 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. HM Inspectorate of Probation inspects both these aspects of youth offending services. We use the terms child or children to denote their special legal status and to highlight the obligations of relevant agencies such as social care, education and health to meet their safety and wellbeing needs.

YOTs are statutory partnerships, and they are multi-disciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to have staff from local authority social care and education services, the police, the National Probation Service and local health services.⁴ Most YOTs are based within local authorities; however, this can vary.

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

Blackpool is a town of 140,000 people, with slightly fewer than 12,500 children and young adults aged between 10 and 18 years old. The population split is 51:49 male to female, and they are overwhelmingly white British (87 per cent)⁵. Blackpool is the most deprived local authority in England. Eight of the 10 most deprived small areas in England are in the centre of Blackpool (up from three a decade ago) and a quarter of the whole of Blackpool is in the most deprived one per cent of areas in England. Nowhere else in the country has an equivalent concentration or extent of poverty and deprivation. Deprivation is chiefly driven by a low-skill, low-wage economy and poor employment opportunities. These in turn lead to particularly poor population-level health outcomes. Much of the work in the town is seasonal and tourism-based. Blackpool had the highest level of adult benefit claimants in the country before Covid-19. The rate has since doubled and remains the highest in the UK.

During the past year, Blackpool has been free from Covid-19 restrictions for just six weeks (mid-July to early September 2020). The council and its partner agencies have been trying to deliver services to vulnerable children, young people and adults, while ensuring the safety of workers.

There are currently 38 children open to Blackpool YJS. They are disproportionately male (87 per cent) and 88 per cent are white British (in line with the broader local population). A small number of children are of mixed ethnic heritage, of eastern European heritage or from Vietnam. Just over a third of the children have experienced public care or were in care at the time they were involved with the YJS. Two-thirds have had involvement with social care services, either currently or previously, although a third have never had any such involvement.

⁴ The *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* set out the arrangements for local YOTs and partnership working.

⁵ Data provided by Blackpool YJS.

Key characteristics of the group include:

- mental health concerns (70 per cent of the cohort), with 10 per cent having a risk of suicide
- substance misuse issues are very common (70 per cent), with concern about two-fifths of all the children regarding addictive behaviours
- three-quarters of the children have special educational needs and disabilities or communication concerns, with a fifth having difficulty with reading and writing, half having difficulty with empathy and 40 per cent having difficulty relating to others. Yet only five per cent have a diagnosed speech, language and communication need.

A large majority of the children live at home (70 per cent), although a significant proportion live in residential units (18 per cent). The proportion of children where there are accommodation concerns mirrors this pattern (30 per cent where there are concerns); and over half of the children have education, training or employment needs. Nearly half have been assessed as vulnerable to criminal exploitation (22 per cent previously or currently involved in county lines), with a fifth vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

In terms of offending, depending on the aspect assessed, up to a quarter of the children present high-level concerns (16 per cent high or very high risk of significant harm; 22 per cent high or very high safety concerns; 23 per cent risk of self-harm). Between a third and half have been assessed as of low concern. Half of the children have a previous conviction. The average age at first conviction is 15.2, and the average age at first sanction 14.3. Half of those children have one previous conviction and a fifth have four or more.

Contextual facts

Youth justice information

227	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in Blackpool ⁶
201	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in North West
207	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in England and Wales
45%	Reoffending rate in Blackpool ⁷
39%	Reoffending rate in England and Wales

Population information⁸

139,446	Total population of Blackpool
12,494	Total youth population (10–17 years) in Blackpool

Caseload information⁹

Age	10–14	15–17
Blackpool YJS	22%	78%
National average	22%	78%

Race/ethnicity	White	Black and minority ethnic	Unknown
Blackpool YJS	91%	6%	3%
National average	69%	28%	0%

Gender	Male	Female
Blackpool YJS	86%	14%
National average	85%	15%

Additional caseload data¹⁰

35	Total current caseload, of which:
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⁶ First-time entrants, January to December 2019. Youth Justice Board.

⁷ Proven reoffending statistics, January to December 2018. Ministry of Justice.

⁸ UK population estimates, mid-2019. Office for National Statistics. June 2020.

⁹ Youth justice annual statistics, 2019-2020. Youth Justice Board. January 2021.

¹⁰ Data supplied by the YJS, reflecting the caseload at the time of the inspection announcement.

29 (83%)	court disposals
6 (17%)	out-of-court disposals

Of the 29 court disposals

27 (93%)	Total current caseload on community sentences
2 (7%)	Total current caseload in custody
0 (0%)	Total current caseload on licence

Of the six out-of-court disposals

3 (50%)	Total current caseload with youth caution
3 (50%)	Total current caseload with youth conditional caution
0 (0%)	Total current caseload: community resolution or other out-of-court disposal

Education and child protection status of caseload

13%	Current caseload 'Looked After Children' resident in the YOS area
34%	Current caseload 'Looked After Children' placed outside the YOS area
3%	Current caseload with Child Protection Plan
6%	Current caseload with Child in Need Plan
20%	Current caseload aged 16 and under not in school/pupil referral unit/alternative education
53%	Current caseload aged 16 and under in a pupil referral unit or alternative education
41%	Current caseload aged 17+ not in education, training or employment

For children subject to court disposals:

Offence types ¹¹	%
Violence against the person	38%
Sexual offence (contact)	15%
Burglary	8%
Robbery	23%
Arson	8%
Summary motoring offences	8%

¹¹ Data from the children's records assessed during this inspection.

1. Organisational delivery



The ratings in our last inspection (2018) were:

- Governance and leadership – ‘Inadequate’
- Staff – ‘Inadequate’
- Partnerships and services – ‘Requires improvement’
- Information and facilities – ‘Requires improvement’.

In this inspection, the ratings are as follows:

- Governance and leadership – ‘Good’
- Staff – ‘Good’
- Partnerships and services – ‘Requires improvement’
- Information and facilities – ‘Good’.

There has been substantial improvement in the standards of organisational delivery in and around the Blackpool YJS. In the last inspection, we encountered a deflated, dispirited staff group; in this inspection, we found staff to be well motivated, energetic and working within much clearer parameters.

Strengths:

- The executive management board sets a clear vision for the YJS.
- The board is well led by an experienced chair and members are of sufficient seniority to influence resources in their host organisations.
- The issues that influence the children towards offending – the risks and vulnerabilities – are well understood by the YJS.
- The board is supported by a committed and capable management team.
- Staff morale is high.
- There is active and skilled management support through staff supervision and oversight of work in multi-agency settings.
- The staff delivering services are skilled practitioners and they are supported by equally committed seconded and partnership staff.
- There are improved partnership arrangements in most areas of the service.
- The new IT system (Core+) has increased the effectiveness of information management.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS needs to develop an agreed protocol and shared understanding across the partnership for managing contextual safeguarding at the operational level.

- The effectiveness of interventions needs to be evaluated to ensure they are meeting children’s needs and reducing re-offending.
- The YJS and partner agencies need to develop the way they manage information so that they communicate more effectively.
- Children need to receive a thorough and effective initial assessment of their personal, social, health and educational needs.
- Children need better access to services where they can gain the personal, life, and social skills they need to work towards employment.

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

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 executive management board sets the YJS’s vision within the wider ‘Blackpool Families Rock’ strategic framework. This framework informs the approach to work with all children in the local authority. It was developed jointly with parents, children, carers and partner organisations. It involved a research review and careful attention to how families want partnerships to work with them.

The key features of the approach are:

- creating trusting and honest relationships (relationship-based practice)
- improving and repairing relationships within families and communities (restorative practice)
- supporting families, providing a ‘jigsaw of support’ through partnership staff (systemic solution-focused practice)
- viewing adults and children as resourceful and resilient in the face of their worries (strengths-based practice).

There is an up-to-date and relevant business plan for the work of the YJS. Key aspects of nationally set performance measures are monitored alongside local improvement plans.

All relevant statutory partners are represented consistently at the YJS executive management board, and members have an appropriate level of seniority. We found that the board uses performance management information to inform its scrutiny of

front-line practice across the partnership. The board's work is supported by appropriate workstreams, including neglect, domestic abuse and contextual safeguarding.

Our case inspections provided evidence of the YJS's vision being translated into practice.

The independent chair has a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which the YJS functions and is a strong advocate for the work of the team.

The role of the voluntary sector in contributing to the YJS's work is underdeveloped and the sector is not represented in the management at board level.

Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?

We found clear examples of board members promoting the work of the YJS within their own organisations. Importantly, in the context of concerns that we expressed in our 2018 inspection, there has been a police-led review of out-of-court disposal processes and systems. The marked improvement in this area of work is directly attributable to the improvements that followed the review.

The work of the seconded probation officer has supported the development of an under-25s team in the adult probation service. This aims to improve the management of issues relating to transition and increase staff's understanding of maturity and development.

There are appropriate formal agreements between partners, including secondment agreements and escalation processes. Multi-agency working is at the heart of the broader strategy for children. Seconded staff have a clear understanding and sense of ownership of their responsibilities for the delivery of services.

There is a strong focus on accessing specialist interventions and securing appropriate ways into mainstream services.

Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery?

The membership of the board provides strong alignment with other strategic boards and partnerships across children's social care. This includes the Local Authority Scrutiny Committee, the Children and Families Partnership Board and the Children Safeguarding and Assurance Partnership.

There was strong police representation on the YJS board, with a superintendent who has policing responsibility for Blackpool, and the Head of Criminal Justice Lancashire. The Head of Criminal Justice also sits on the other two YJS strategic boards that make up the YJS across the Lancashire Constabulary area. This ensures that police across the force area take a consistent approach and that good practice is shared.

Health services were represented at the YJS board and by people of the appropriate level of seniority to be able to make decisions. Board members we spoke with all felt that partnership working had significantly improved since the last inspection and that they were actively involved in decision-making.

In our 2018 report, we noted that, '...the Management Board was not sufficiently challenging during this time and accepted an overly optimistic assurance of the impact of the changes'. Our current inspection has shown marked improvement in the functioning of the board. A healthy level of scrutiny has led to better

understanding of the service and clearer appreciation of what needs to be made better.

The development of a 'shadow board' provides an active, formal link between staff and the board and is an example of promising practice. The shadow board aims to provide a forum for the executive board and YJS practitioners to share information. It also seeks to provide a practitioner's perspective on the YJS Improvement Plan, performance reports and other issues, as requested by executive board. A member of the shadow board also sits on the executive board to support two-way communication. As a consequence, staff engage directly in the board's workstreams (as practitioner theme leads), review the progress of work and actively contribute to decision-making.

There are clear business risk management processes documented, including developing a 'happy, engaged staff group'.

Sustainable change has been supported by an increase in management capacity.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Key staffing data¹²

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent, FTE)	13.28
Total headcount qualified case managers (FTE)	6.51
Total headcount other case managers (FTE)	2
Vacancy rate: case managers only (total unfilled case manager posts as percentage of total case manager headcount)	0%
Average caseload per case manager (FTE)	5
Average annual sickness days (all staff)	12.36
Staff attrition (percentage of all staff leaving in 12-month period)	0%

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?

This is a stable group of staff who display active and sensitive ways of working. Delivery of the appropriate adult role in-house is one example of the way the service has been restructured to meet demand effectively.

¹² Information supplied by YJS and reflecting the caseload at the time of the inspection announcement.

The workload of caseworkers is at a level where it is reasonable to expect the delivery of high-quality services. Staff have opportunities to share work where necessary, and there is a strong commitment to continuity of relationships in managing work with children.

Morale was high, and case managers and social workers impressed as hard-working and committed to improving children's lives. Workers' passion and commitment to making a difference were prominent when they discussed their work, and they demonstrated that they knew the children well. The Blackpool Families Rock model was routinely reflected in practice across the partnership and supported the delivery of effective plans and interventions.

Police officers seconded to the YJS are experienced and well-valued members of the team. They work within the guidelines set out in the Youth Justice Board's *Role of the YOT Police Officer 2015*. The officers provide invaluable assistance to case managers in relation to intelligence-sharing. They also actively participate in high-risk panel meetings and play a key role in the out-of-court disposal panel.

The YJS police officers provide support to other police departments across Blackpool. There was evidence of good engagement with the neighbourhood teams, including attendance at weekly anti-social behaviour meetings. Support and advice provided to response officers have included a bespoke presentation on the work the YJS can provide in relation to dealing with criminal offences committed by children, and a significant investment in the Early Help hub. The YJS sergeant supervises the missing from home officer and has good links with the child sexual and criminal exploitation teams. This enriches the sharing of information.

The YJS police officers had a good knowledge of safeguarding. They understood when and how to make referrals to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) for children who exhibit behaviour that presents a risk of harm to other people. Officers also attended the Multi-Agency Risk Management Meetings (MARMM), taking an active role in effectively managing children who are either at risk of serious harm or have the potential to cause harm to the public.

All the health staff working with the YJS were passionate and dedicated. They delivered a child-focused service. This included reviewing which health practitioner was the most suitable person to lead on the work with the child, which helped to build trusting relationships. Staff were flexible in their approach. For example, they carried out home visits, and were persistent in building relationships with the children to support them to access health services. They, alongside all other YJS colleagues, continued to work with children throughout most of the period of pandemic restrictions.

A specialist education, training and employment officer is seconded to the YJS. Consequently, work with alternative education providers has been effective, ensuring that most children aged 10 to 16 years are appropriately placed. Blackpool Council's advice and guidance team is highly responsive when a child is ready to access a programme such as 'Positive Steps'.

Some of the partnership staff do not have the benefit of effective cover arrangements.

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

This is a skilled group of staff who advocate strongly on behalf of the child in order to access appropriate services. There is a clear and professional commitment to the consistency and quality of the working relationship.

Most staff are appropriately qualified and there are active processes to support those with different qualification levels when working with issues relating to risk to safety or risk of harm to others.

Staff are strongly encouraged to develop their skills and portfolio of experience. For example, they can lead on strategic workstreams, pursue external qualifications, access in-house training and attend the executive board.

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

All staff in the YJS receive appropriate supervision and there is clear evidence of management oversight in almost all of the children's records. Overall, case managers and social workers report receiving effective supervision, including reflective supervision, in line with Blackpool's supervision policy. In some instances, in children's social care, the level of formal supervision for social workers was not in line with policy and there was an over-reliance on informal supervision. Caseworkers and social workers value the open-door policy and feel managers are visible and accessible.

There is a clear and effective induction programme for new members of staff, which has been sustained during the period of pandemic restrictions.

Almost half of staff had not had an appraisal and of those who had, almost half did not consider it to be valuable.

Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?

A combination of line management identification of training needs and the delivery of improvement actions has meant that all staff have accessed training in AssetPlus, safeguarding, restorative justice and trauma-informed practice. Take-up of training is monitored, and the information used to identify future training needs across the partnership.

The small number of active volunteers working on referral panels report that they are well trained and supported by the YJS.

We found good evidence of staff development. One individual is undertaking formal social work training and others are supporting the board's work themes. One member of staff sits on the executive board as a staff representative. Caseworkers are supervising an intake of local apprentices into the YJS.

There is a clear focus on 'child first' ways of working. Through training, supervision and high levels of staff motivation, the approach is being translated into the delivery of services. In 2018 we formed the view that, '... morale among some staff was low. Practitioners did not feel enabled to effect changes. Staff struggled to identify anything about their work or their workplace that they were proud of. When pushed, one member of staff said 'surviving'.'

During the current inspection one of our inspectors observed that: *"Workers' passion and commitment to making a difference were prominent when discussing their work and demonstrated they knew young people well. The Blackpool Families Rock model of practice was routinely reflected in practice across the partnership and supported the delivery of effective plans and intervention."*

Staff and managers actively look outside their own organisation for models of best practice.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Requires improvement

Caseload characteristics¹³

Percentage of current caseload with mental health issues	50%
Percentage of current caseload with substance misuse issues	72%
Percentage of current caseload with an education, health and care plan	19%

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?

There is a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children. All relevant factors and issues are understood, including safety and wellbeing, risk of harm, disproportionality and sentencing patterns. The clearest issue that emerges from the data is the over-representation of white boys from identifiable districts of the town, characteristically those with the highest known levels of deprivation.

There is good evidence that services are developing in line with an understanding of the children's needs. As a result of the pandemic, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment had not been updated recently. However, due to the small cohort of children open to the YJS, the level of joint working that was in place, and practitioners' knowledge, the YJS had reliable information on what the children's current health needs were.

Police contribute to delivering interventions, including knife crime, consequences of crime and driving awareness. The range of interventions delivered by the YJS as a whole needs to be evaluated to ensure that the interventions are meeting the children's needs and contributing to reducing re-offending.

¹³ Data supplied by YJS.

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

Our previous inspection described out-of-court disposal arrangements as 'Poor'. Since then, the YJS has carried out a comprehensive review, and in this inspection, we found a carefully mapped out set of processes that are well understood by all participants. The panel's decision-making is underpinned by an AssetPlus assessment in all children's records and the case inspection results show a remarkable improvement in performance.

In our 2018 inspection, we found that 'access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) can be particularly difficult for children, with a third of children's records having to wait three months for the start of treatment'. In this inspection we found that children were supported to attend mainstream health services and there is an excellent health offer in Blackpool. This includes the Child and Adolescent Support and Help Enhanced Response service, which allows 24/7 access for children with mental health needs, and Connect, a sexual health service. Both of these see children on the day of referral. There are clear pathways into health services, and caseworkers are aware of these and how to access services.

There is a good range of services available, including the Awaken Team (which provides a bespoke service to children at risk of exploitation), Early Help Hub and Edge of Care provision. Information is shared across services to determine the best approach and maximise impact.

Communication at strategic and operational level across the YJS and children's social care is normally effective. The ability of caseworkers to input information on to children's electronic case records provides for timely and effective information-sharing.

YJS managers regularly attend multi-agency meetings, including daily meetings. This provides support for the identification of children at risk and acts as an early alert in identifying changes in children's circumstances.

The effectiveness of joint working resulted in children's needs, including placement and support, being met effectively. Joint working across services where children were at risk of exploitation, including child criminal exploitation, was strong.

Individual assessment of need and risk, including immediate risk of serious harm, is embedded. Some YJS workers are trained in assessing harmful sexual behaviours by children and carry out joint assessments with children's social care.

Victim and restorative work is appropriately resourced, with an active partnership between the YJS and Lancashire Constabulary Police Restorative Justice Team.

Substance misuse interventions are delivered by the Blackpool Young People's Service as part of the Addiction, Diversion, Disruption, Enforcement, Recovery scheme for complex children. Access to services is quick and is helpfully integrated with the delivery of YJS support.

Blackpool YJS has a full-time, seconded education and employment officer. Education provision for school-age children means that most children are appropriately placed in school. The proportion of children in the YJS caseload who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is too high (41 per cent) and well above that of other Blackpool children (five per cent). Reduction of the NEET figure is a priority within the Blackpool Education Improvement Board's 2020-2030 vision.

Children do not get thorough enough initial assessment of their personal, life and educational needs. Speech and language assessments have just begun, following staff training; however, there is no screening for dyslexia or assessment of children's communication, social and life skills, such as telling and using time.

Staff have not developed any programmes where these skills can be gained and improved in safe environments and where children are encouraged to identify and celebrate the personal, life, and social skills they gain.

There has been significant recent improvement in the use of electronic systems by and between partners, such as the police, social care, case workers and the education, training and employment officer. However, timely communication of 'events', such as an arrest, while well documented by a partner, do not create sufficient 'alerts' within the systems to ensure that all workers involved with that child can respond rapidly. For example, the development of an education, health and care plan, which would support a child entering custody, may be delayed if information is not received in a way that alerts the service receiving the child.

Leaders and managers have not yet sufficiently evaluated the impact of the learning and employment programmes they provide for children. Managers had not until very recently identified the gaps in provision to support children to gain the necessary skills for sustained employment.

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

All staff work within a service level agreement. They are clear about their responsibilities and speak with great enthusiasm about the 'child first' way of thinking about and delivering services.

There is a well-developed partnership with the NSPCC (as part of children's social care) and some evidence of a promising development in relation to the Blackpool Football Club Community Trust. Increased attention to the role of the voluntary sector in supporting the work of the YJS would be a valuable future development.

In our 2018 inspection, we observed that, 'Feedback from the court was not positive'. We expressed concerns about poor communication between the YJS and courts. In this inspection, we found Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service represented on the executive board and closely involved in the organisation's improvement programme.

Involvement of children and their parents and carers

The wider strategy, 'Blackpool Families Rock', was constructed using a carefully developed approach to co-production, involving children, their parents or carers and partner organisations. The YJS has planned for a participation group to restart after the pandemic to obtain feedback from the children about health services. Further development of this work is necessary.

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 staffing, 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?

We found that staff had good awareness of policies and guidelines and were able to access these as necessary. There was good evidence of policies and guidance being reviewed and refined at appropriate intervals.

The local authority has appropriate policies and procedures in place. This includes the Targeted Intervention Service (TiS) Safeguarding Guidance, which explains how to apply policies in relation to safeguarding children. The TiS guidance is aligned to the policies set out by Blackpool Council, including the Children Safeguarding and Assurance Partnership.

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

The YJS seeks to maintain contact arrangements close to where the child is living. The main office is at a children's hub but there are more local facilities available for the use of YJS staff.

The police officers are located at the YJS, with the flexibility to attend the satellite offices to deliver interventions and youth cautions when required. They have full access to the YOT and police IT systems, including Core+ and the Police National Computer (PNC), and have a good working knowledge of them. Intelligence held on local police systems and the PNC is researched and provided to case managers when they ask for it.

Learning from the pandemic has resulted in the YJS becoming more flexible in managing face-to-face contact.

Health and safety concerns for staff are carefully managed. This has particularly been the case during the operating conditions caused by the pandemic.

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

IT equipment is sufficient to support the delivery of the service, with all members of staff supported to work at home when necessary. The move to Core+ has increased the YJS's ability to generate useful management information.

All partners have access to and can directly input into the Core+ system. The YJS introduced a new IT system in mid-2020, which has enabled it to produce better information on performance. The new system also provides for the YJS to input into the children's social care electronic case records. This supports timely information-sharing and communication, but could be further strengthened by social workers

having access to the YJS electronic case record. Most recording seen was up to date, succinct and relevant.

Although information is shared between partners, the system does not alert the receiver that new information has been provided (there is no alert or flag system to make the receiver aware of new information coming in).

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

There are clear arrangements for the YJS to provide and analyse information on its performance and the quality of its work for use at board and operational levels.

The YJS undertakes routine quality assurance work and has supplemented this with peer reviews. Service development has been guided by close attention to the observation of the most effective developments in working with children.

Since our last inspection the YJS has delivered an extensive response to the recommendations we made.

More focus on evaluating the work delivered would support continuous improvement.



2. Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 13 community sentences managed by the YJS. We also conducted 13 interviews with the relevant case managers. 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 services to keep the child safe, we only assessed the quality of planning, implementation and reviewing in the 11 children's records where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning, implementation and reviewing in the 12 children's records where meaningful work was required.

In our last inspection (2018) we rated assessment work as 'Requires improvement'. For each of the other standards associated with court disposals the rating was 'Inadequate'.

In the current inspection we rated the standards as follows:

- for assessment, over three-quarters of the children's records inspected met all our standards, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- for planning, just over half of the children's records met the standard for keeping other people safe, resulting in a rating of 'Requires improvement'
- for implementation and delivery of the court disposal, over two-thirds of the children's records met all our standards, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- where a review was necessary, the YJS met our standards in all children's records, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'.

There has been a clear and substantial improvement in the quality of work being delivered by the Blackpool YJS. The balance between engagement, analysis and a focus on issues of desistance, risk to safety and wellbeing and risk of causing harm to others is well maintained in most children's records.

Strengths:

- Assessment work was based on sound analysis and used the contributions of partner agencies well.
- Good working relationships were established with the children and their families.
- Plans were effective in supporting desistance and attending to the child's safety and wellbeing.
- The court order was delivered well, with the balance between engagement, motivation and enforcement maintained to high professional standards.
- Multi-agency work was strong in both the delivery of services and the oversight of individual children's records.
- Reviews were good enough in all children's records inspected.

Areas for improvement:

- The needs of victims and access to restorative work were not considered in all appropriate children's records.
- The language used in some documents was not always accessible to children.
- In some children's records, there were no effective contingency arrangements to manage identified risks to the child's safety and wellbeing.
- In some children's records, there was either no plan to keep other people safe or no contingency planning in the event that issues in the child's life increased the likelihood of harmful behaviour.

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 rating¹⁴ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% yes	2018 results
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	85%	58%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	92%	58%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	77%	58%

Since our last inspection, assessment work has improved as a consequence of staff training, improved management oversight of children's records and a 'child first' approach, meaning that there is a strong focus on issues which have an impact on desistance and the safety of the child. With most of the children, the focus on risk of harm is appropriate and carefully considered.

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

In almost all children's records (11 out of 13) the focus on factors that would help the child to avoid further offending was good. The work was characteristically thorough, and caseworkers were sufficiently analytical, with relevant contributions to assessments from other agencies or seconded partnership staff.

¹⁴ 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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

In 10 out of the 13 children’s records, the views of parents or carers were deemed to be meaningfully considered in formulating an assessment. The child’s motivation to engage and change was carefully gauged in 12 of the 13 children’s records.

Opportunities to attend to the needs and wishes of victims were not always pursued. This was the case in a third (four) of the children’s records where there was an identifiable victim.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

The work sufficiently considered the safety of the child in 12 out of the 13 children’s records we inspected. There was a strong sense of partnership in the caseworker’s consideration of the child’s safety. Other agencies were consulted and the information they shared was incorporated into the resultant work.

There was good evidence of the involvement of other agencies, when this was appropriate, in 12 of the 13 children’s records. We found that caseworkers had a good understanding of the child’s personal circumstances. Factors relevant to vulnerability were well documented, analysed and accurately classified in terms of the degree of risk to the child.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

In over three-quarters of the children’s records inspected (10 out of 13), the caseworker had sufficiently analysed how to keep other people safe. We found good levels of inter-agency working in the formulation of assessment of risk of harm to others, and that classification was accurate in most (10 out of 13) children’s records.

With some of the children (three), the risk of harm to others was underestimated. This was either because the caseworker relied too much on the child’s self-reporting or because they did not consider the child’s potential to cause harm by repeating some reckless behaviours.

2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

Our rating¹⁵ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes	2018 results
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s desistance?	75%	54%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	82%	30%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	55%	39%

¹⁵ 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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Planning of work has improved since the last inspection. Improvements in assessment should lead to improved plans, but this was not always the case.

We found that in too many of the children's records, where risk of causing harm had been identified, there were insufficient plans for circumstances in which the risk of repeating harmful behaviour could increase. There is a need for increased rigour, both by the practitioner and manager, to make sure that appropriate planning takes place in all children's records where anticipatable behaviour will require additional work, for example to protect known victims or to change the nature and frequency of supervision.

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

In nine out of 12 children's records, the plans focused well on desistance. Plans contained activities most likely to support the child in ceasing to offend in 10 out of 12 children's records.

We were concerned about the technical language used in some of the planning documents. For some programmes of activity, such as intensive supervision or referral orders, we considered that more work needed to be done to create a plan that was written in a style that matched the child's learning needs. This would then support the caseworker in making a plan that the child could work with and understand.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

Generally, plans focused on keeping the child safe (nine out of 11 children's records).

We noted, however, that in too many children's records (six out of 11) there were no effective contingency arrangements to manage identified risks to the child's safety and wellbeing. This meant that, should anticipated events occur, such as the child becoming homeless, the plan did not set out what action should be taken.

When the issues in the child's life had reached the threshold where they could be classified as at least a medium risk to the child's safety and wellbeing, the planning developed by a multi-agency risk management meeting (MARMM) was found to be sufficient to address identified needs.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Too frequently (five out of 11 children's records), planning for the risk that the child presented in terms of potential to harm others was insufficient. In particular, there was either no plan to keep other people safe or no contingency planning in the event that issues in the child's life increased the likelihood of harmful behaviour.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating¹⁶ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% yes	2018 results
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	83%	33%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child safe?	91%	30%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	70%	22%

There has been a marked improvement in the quality of work delivered since our last inspection. Staff developed strong working relationships with the children and their families and used a range of contact methods to maintain the quality of engagement, despite the limiting circumstances of the pandemic.

In most respects, the work being delivered was to a good standard. Where work was being delivered with partner agencies, it was effective.

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

The work of the YJS strongly supported the child's desistance in 10 out of 12 children's records, and built on strengths and positive factors in all children's records. In the main, the YJS caseworkers demonstrated a calm, patient approach. They knew the children well and fostered good working relationships with them and with partnership staff. Despite the restrictions in place because of the pandemic, we found strong evidence of effective and supporting working.

The balance between effective engagement and maintaining compliance was well maintained. Where necessary, appropriate enforcement action was taken in all circumstances.

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

In 10 out of 11 children's records, the identified risks to the child's safety and wellbeing were appropriately managed. We found that concerns were being well monitored, families were engaged in providing support to the child, and multi-agency approaches worked well in securing additional resources. Caseworkers played a clear role in coordinating the work.

¹⁶ 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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

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

In over two-thirds of the children's records (seven out of 10) the YJS effectively supported the safety of other people.

Even where the child refused to engage with the YJS we found that MARRM arrangements monitored the case and identified the appropriate actions to take in anticipation of deteriorating circumstances. Caseworkers often acted as advocates for the child with other agencies and this led to successful additional help being secured to address issues of risk of harm to others.

In a small number of children's records (three), issues of risk of harm to others had been overlooked or insufficiently considered.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Outstanding

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

	% yes	2018 results
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%	38%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	100%	40%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%	38%

In 2018 we found the quality of reviews to be 'Inadequate' across the requirements of the standard. Due to a mixture of increased practitioner attention, management oversight and supportive multi-agency working, we found a substantial improvement in reviewing practice.

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

Caseworkers paid good attention to the child's desistance in the context of changed personal circumstances or escalating concerns. In all children's records, we found that the review of work was done well enough.

Caseworkers demonstrated a good understanding of risk factors and need, particularly when working with children with volatile lives. They translated this into meaningful case reviewing.

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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

As a consequence of robust reviewing, particularly in the MARMM process where there is extensive monitoring and coordination, we found that the work focused sufficiently on keeping the child safe in all children's records.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

In a smaller number of children's records (three) where there were clear factors associated with risk of harm to others, we saw good evidence of multi-agency working. Plans and actions were appropriately revised on the basis of well-managed information-sharing, particularly with police colleagues. In each case the reviews focused sufficiently on keeping other people safe.

3. Out of court disposals



We inspected 10 children's records managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of three youth conditional cautions, five youth cautions, and two community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 10 children's records.

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 services to keep the child safe, we only assessed the quality of planning and implementation in the seven children's records where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning and implementation in the six children's records where meaningful work was required. We inspected the quality of YOT recommendations and joint decision-making in all children's records, and the effectiveness of joint working with the police in the three youth conditional caution children's records only. The quality of the work undertaken for each factor needs to be above a specified threshold for each aspect of supervision to be rated as satisfactory to achieve a particular score.

When we inspected Blackpool YJS in 2018, the quality of work was rated as 'Inadequate' for each of the standards.

Since that inspection, Blackpool YJS has carried out an extensive review of its out-of-court disposal processes, so we would expect to see considerable improvement to the way the work is done.

In this inspection, we rated the work as follows:

- for assessment, at least eight out of 10 children's records met all our requirements, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'
- for planning, four out of six children's records where risk of harm to other people was identified met our expectations, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- for implementation and delivery, four out of six children's records met our requirements where risk of harm to other people had been identified, resulting in a rating of 'Good'
- joint working met our expectations in all children's records, resulting in a rating of 'Outstanding'.

The YJS's work has substantially improved since the last inspection and is being delivered within a well-documented and clear process. Panel arrangements now function well, and participants are clear about their role and the purpose of the work.

Partner agencies participate well in the panel process, the quality of which is underpinned by the consistent provision of comprehensive assessments. This leads to well-informed, appropriate and proportionate use of out-of-court disposals, which are delivered well.

Strengths:

- There is a comprehensive and well-documented set of processes to support the delivery of out-of-court disposal work.
- People understand their roles well and there is strong multi-agency working to deliver the services.
- The use of AssetPlus ensures high-quality assessment work in almost all children's records.
- All assessments of risk to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others were accurate and appropriately recorded.
- An extensive range of interventions is available to children within the out-of-court disposals arrangement.
- Caseworkers demonstrate commitment to the children and form appropriately supportive and challenging relationships in an honest and open way.
- The joint working that underpins the delivery of out-of-court disposals was exemplary.

Areas for improvement:

- Victim work was not delivered as required in a small number of children's records.
- Risk to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others was given insufficient attention in a small number of children's records.

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.

Outstanding

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

	% yes	2018 results
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	80%	36%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	80%	21%

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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	90%	21%
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In 2018 we found that assessment practice for out-of-court disposals was inconsistent. Assessment work was not undertaken for some children’s records and, for others, was done by staff not trained to do this work. The resultant rating was that assessment work was ‘Inadequate’.

Within the revised process, all assessment work was done by suitably trained and experienced staff. This investment of time has yielded a dramatic improvement in the quality of work.

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

The YJS uses AssetPlus to assess all children referred for consideration of an out-of-court disposal. This means that a comprehensive assessment should be undertaken before the out-of-court disposal decision-making panel considers the case.

The work was done well enough to support the child in keeping away from further offending in eight out of the 10 children’s records we inspected. We found that assessments were detailed, analytical and drew on an appropriate range of sources of information. Where caseworkers identified concerns about victims, they considered their needs and wishes appropriately at all times.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

In almost all of the children’s records (eight out of 10), the caseworker assessed well enough how to keep the child safe. We found that the classification of safety and wellbeing was reasonable in nine of the 10 children’s records, and that the assessment was clear and in written form in all.

The involvement of other agencies and services was a strong characteristic of the work. Many of the children had complex needs. Caseworkers had a good appreciation of the role of children’s services, and this led to effective liaison work when appropriate.

Staff providing protective services, including Family in Need provision and the Awaken team, contributed to the assessment of the child where criminal or sexual exploitation were identified as risks to the child.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

In nine out of 10 children’s records there was enough analysis of how to keep other people safe.

The caseworkers demonstrated a good understanding of factors that had a bearing on the assessment of risk. They took into account the child’s current and previous behaviour and the context in which the child was living. In all children’s records we considered the classification of risk of causing harm to others to be reasonable.

3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating¹⁹ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes	2018 results
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	80%	29%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	71%	0%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%	29%

The adoption of a coherent and consistent approach to out-of-court disposal work means that plans were mostly of a good quality.

Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?

We found that in eight out of 10 children's records the plans for work with the child were done well enough. There was a good appreciation of the child's learning needs and plans were adapted according to the individual child. The child and their parent or carer were meaningfully involved in planning in eight out of the nine children's records where this was possible.

In all children's records, the caseworker had considered the needs and wishes of the victim.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

There were concerns about the safety and wellbeing of the child in seven children's records. In most, the plans were sufficient to promote safety. Other agencies were involved if this was appropriate to the child's needs.

In two children's records, some risks to the child had been missed. In three children's records, necessary plans to manage changes in factors that caused the child to be at risk were not developed.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Planning was good enough to keep other people safe in four of the six children's records in which concerns had been identified. We found active steps to address the needs of victims, through either delivering victim awareness work or engaging the child in restorative work. This included providing direct reparation to the victim of the offence.

Plans included the work of other agencies in four out of five children's records where this was appropriate to concerns about the child's behaviour.

¹⁹ 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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

3.3. 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:

	% yes	2018 results
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	90%	7%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	71%	0%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	67%	29%

Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?

In nine of the 10 children's records, we found that the delivery of work supported the child's desistance.

There was a good standard of work across all our requirements and a clear sense that caseworkers were holding together the work being done by other services. Staff were tenacious in maintaining contact with the children and their families and, where necessary, used compliance meetings to secure the engagement of the child in the relevant activities.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?

In most children's records, the safety of the child was effectively supported (five out of seven). Where this was done well, the caseworker acted as an assertive advocate for the child and made sure the YJS was represented at key events, such as children in need meetings.

In two children's records, not enough attention was paid to the safety and wellbeing of the child. In these children's records, there was either familial hostility towards services or lack of engagement of the child.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?

The services effectively supported the safety of other people in four out of six children's records. This mostly reflected the good liaison arrangements between the YJS staff and police colleagues.

In two children's records, planned work to address the victim's concerns was not delivered. In one case, this was due to lack of engagement by the child.

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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

3.4. Joint working



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

Outstanding

Our rating²¹ for joint working is based on the following key questions:

	% yes	2018 results
Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision making?	100%	50%
Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal? ²²	100%	21%

The joint-working arrangements adopted to support out-of-court disposals are reliable, support good decision-making and are based on good working relationships between the key agencies.

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

In all of the children's records, we found that the YJS caseworker had made proportionate and timely contributions to the out-of-court process. These contributed positively to the decision-making of the out-of-court disposal panel.

There was enough evidence to be clear that all of the children and their parents or carers understood the process well enough to make informed decisions about their involvement.

The panel's decisions were clearly and accurately recorded in all children's records.

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

For youth conditional cautions, we require the YJS to inform the police of progress and outcomes in a sufficient and timely manner and to give proper attention to compliance with, and enforcement of, the conditions. These requirements were met in all children's records.

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 1 for a more detailed explanation.

²² This question is only relevant in youth conditional caution cases.

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.²³

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 YJS submitted evidence in advance and the Chief Executive delivered a presentation covering the following areas:

- How do organisational delivery arrangements in this area make sure that the work of your YJS 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 23 interviews with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. The second fieldwork week is the joint element of the inspection. HM Inspectorate of Probation was joined by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care and education services. We followed up issues which had emerged from the case inspections. We held various meetings, which allowed us to triangulate evidence and information. In total, we conducted 13 meetings, which included meetings with managers, partner organisations, and staff. The evidence collected under this domain was judged against our published ratings characteristics.²⁴

Domain two: court disposals

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. 60 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. In some individual children's records, further enquiries were made during the second fieldwork week by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care or education services.

We examined 13 court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

²³ 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. 40 per cent of children's records selected were those of children who had received out-of-court disposals two 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. In some individual children's records, further enquiries were made during the second fieldwork week by colleague inspectors from the police, and health, social care or education services.

We examined 10 out-of-court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

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.

Ratings explained

Domain one ratings are proposed by the lead inspector for each standard. They will be a single judgement, using all the relevant sources of evidence. More detailed information can be found in the probation inspection domain one rules and guidance on the website.

In this inspection, we conducted a detailed examination of a sample of 13 court disposals and 10 out-of-court disposals. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards: assessment, planning, and implementation/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 and manage the safety and well-being of the child, and any risk of harm posed to others.

For each standard, the rating is aligned to the lowest banding at the key question level, recognising that each key question is an integral part of the standard.

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 ☆

We use case sub-samples for some of the key questions in domains two and three. For example, when judging whether planning focused sufficiently on keeping other people safe, we exclude those cases where the inspector deemed the risk of serious harm to be low. This approach is justified on the basis that we focus on those cases where we expect meaningful work to take place.

An element of professional discretion may be applied to the standards ratings in domains two and three. Exceptionally, the ratings panel considers whether

professional discretion should be exercised where the lowest percentage at the key question level is close to the rating boundary, for example between 'Requires improvement' and 'Good' (specifically, within five percentage points of the boundary; or where a differing judgement in one case would result in a change in rating; or where the rating is based upon a sample or sub-sample of five cases or fewer). The panel considers the sizes of any sub-samples used and the percentages for the other key questions within that standard, such as whether they fall within different bandings and the level of divergence, to make this decision.

Overall provider rating

Straightforward scoring rules are used to generate the overall provider rating. Each of the ten standards will be scored on a 0-3 scale as listed in the following table.

Score	Rating (standard)
0	Inadequate
1	Requires improvement
2	Good
3	Outstanding ☆

Adding the scores for each standard together produces the overall rating on a 0-30 scale as listed in the following table.

Score	Rating (overall)
0-6	Inadequate
7-18	Requires improvement
19-30	Good
31-36	Outstanding ☆

We do not include any weightings in the scoring rules. The rationale for this is that all parts of the standards framework are strongly linked to effective service delivery and positive outcomes, and we have restricted ourselves to those that are most essential. Our view is that providers need to focus across all the standards, and we do not want to distort behaviours in any undesirable ways. Furthermore, the underpinning evidence supports including all standards/key questions in the rating, rather than weighting individual elements.

Annexe 2: Inspection data

The answers to the key questions that determine the ratings for each standard are underpinned by answers to more detailed 'prompts'. These tables illustrate the proportions of the case sample with a satisfactory 'yes' response to the prompt questions. It should be noted that there is no mechanistic connection between the proportion of prompt questions answered positively, and the overall score at the key question level. The 'total' does not necessarily equal the 'sum of the parts'. The summary judgement is the overall finding made by the inspector, having taken consideration of the answers to all the prompts, weighing up the relative impact of the strengths and weaknesses.

Domain 2 – Court disposals

2.1. Assessment	
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	% Yes
Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	85%
Does assessment consider the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, utilising information held by other agencies?	85%
Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	85%
Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	83%
Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and their likelihood of engaging with the court disposal?	92%
Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice?	67%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	77%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	77%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	92%

Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	92%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	73%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	91%
Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to manage and minimise the risk of harm presented by the child?	82%

2.2. Planning	
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	% Yes
Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	83%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child?	75%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	82%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	75%
Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s?	67%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	92%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	
Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	82%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (e.g. child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	90%

Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	91%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	45%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	73%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	100%
Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	70%
Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people?	64%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	36%

2.3. Implementation and delivery	
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	% Yes
Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	83%
Does service delivery reflect the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents/carers or significant others?	92%
Does service delivery build upon the child's strengths and enhance protective factors?	100%
Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers?	83%
Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration including access to services post-supervision?	92%
Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	92%
Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate?	100%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	
Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	91%
Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well coordinated?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	
Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	73%
Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	63%
Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well coordinated?	100%

2.4. Reviewing	
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	% Yes
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors linked to desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building upon the child's strengths and enhancing protective factors?	100%
Does reviewing consider motivation and engagement levels and any relevant barriers?	100%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement, and are their views taken into account?	100%
Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to support desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to safety and wellbeing?	100%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in promoting the safety and wellbeing of the child?	100%

Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to risk of harm?	100%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm?	100%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their risk of harm, and are their views taken into account?	67%
Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	100%

Domain 3 – Out-of-court disposals

3.1. Assessment	
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	% Yes
Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's acknowledgement of responsibility, attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	100%
Does assessment consider the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, utilising information held by other agencies?	80%
Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	80%
Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	78%
Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change?	80%
Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice?	100%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	

Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	80%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	80%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	71%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including any other assessments that have been completed, and other evidence of behaviour by the child?	100%

3.2. Planning	
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	% Yes
Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	90%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child?	80%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	90%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	80%
Does planning take sufficient account of opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services following completion of out of court disposal work?	90%
Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s?	100%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	89%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	

Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	71%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (e.g. child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	71%
Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	57%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	100%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	80%
Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	80%
Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	83%

3.3. Implementation and delivery	
Does service delivery support the child's desistance?	% Yes
Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	90%
Does service delivery reflect the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents/carers or significant others?	80%
Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers?	90%
Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	90%
Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services?	90%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	
Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	71%

Is the involvement of other agencies in keeping the child safe sufficiently well utilised and coordinated?	67%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	
Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	67%
Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	67%

3.4. Joint working	
Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision making?	% Yes
Are the recommendations by the YOT for out of court disposal outcomes, conditions and interventions appropriate and proportionate?	100%
Do the recommendations consider the degree of the child's understanding of the offence and their acknowledgement of responsibility?	90%
Is a positive contribution made by the YOT to determining the disposal?	100%
Is sufficient attention given to the child's understanding, and their parents/carers' understanding, of the implications of receiving an out of court disposal?	100%
Is the information provided to inform decision making timely to meet the needs of the case, legislation and guidance?	80%
Is the rationale for joint disposal decisions appropriate and clearly recorded?	100%
3.2.1 Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out of court disposal?²⁵	
Does the YOT inform the police of progress and outcomes in a sufficient and timely manner?	100%
Is sufficient attention given to compliance with and enforcement of the conditions?	100%

²⁵ This question is only asked in youth conditional caution cases.