



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

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HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2022



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## Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector Mike Ryan, 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 (delete for single inspections). 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.

## The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. We report on the effectiveness of probation and youth offending service work with adults and children.

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.

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

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This publication is available for download at: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation)

Published by:  
HM Inspectorate of Probation  
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M3 3FX

Follow us on Twitter  
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ISBN: 978-1-915468-08-6

## Foreword

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This inspection is part of our programme of youth offending service inspections. We have inspected and rated Stoke-on-Trent Youth Offending Service (YOS) 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, Stoke-on-Trent YOS was rated as 'Requires improvement'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Inadequate'.

As an organisation, the Stoke-on-Trent YOS has considerable strengths. There is an active and committed management board, and this is supported by experienced and knowledgeable managers. The contribution of health service partners to the work of the YOS is noteworthy. In addition to a speech and language therapist, it has implemented an innovative approach to meeting the neurodivergent needs of the children through the work of an occupational therapist. There are strong arrangements to support children in education, training, and employment both while they are at school and after they have left.

The mixed results of our inspection of individual cases are disappointing. For post-court disposals we found that the commitment to relationship-based working was, too frequently, not supported by consistent analysis of information at the assessment stage. We also found limitations in practice related to planning. There were examples where key contributors to planning, such as the child or family members, had not been sufficiently included and factors such as a child's diversity needs had not been effectively considered. The responses we gathered from children and their parents or carers indicate that case managers form positive working relationships, but it is of concern that documented case records do not reflect the good work being done.

The YOS has recently participated in a review, with Staffordshire Police colleagues, of out-of-court disposal work. The results of our inspection for this area of work are far more encouraging. Again, assessment work was not as consistent as we would expect, but plans were more effectively developed and detailed, and the delivery of services had strong elements of purpose.

YOS staff had maintained strong working relationships with the small number of children who had experienced custody. However, the supporting resettlement policy requires significant revision and development before it can guide practitioners in this area of work.

It is important that all aspects of a child's background are understood and planned for, and that their identified needs are met. We would urge the management board to develop a clear approach to addressing the support needs of children from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We have made seven recommendations to the YOS management board that we think will support the YOS to make significant improvements and develop high-quality services.

















**Justin Russell**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Ratings

**Stoke-on-Trent Youth Justice Service**  
Fieldwork started June 2022

**Score 18/36**

Overall rating	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>		
1.1 Governance and leadership	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
1.2 Staff	<b>Good</b>	
1.3 Partnerships and services	<b>Good</b>	
1.4 Information and facilities	<b>Good</b>	
<b>2. Court disposals</b>		
2.1 Assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
2.2 Planning	<b>Inadequate</b>	
2.3 Implementation and delivery	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
2.4 Reviewing	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
<b>3. Out-of-court disposals</b>		
3.1 Assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
3.2 Planning	<b>Outstanding</b>	
3.3 Implementation and delivery	<b>Good</b>	
3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	<b>Good</b>	
<b>4. Resettlement<sup>1</sup></b>		
4.1 Resettlement policy and provision	<b>Rating</b>	

<sup>1</sup> The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YOS rating.

## Recommendations

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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 Stoke-on-Trent. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth offending services, and better protect the public.

### **The Stoke-on-Trent Youth Justice Service management board should:**

1. develop methods of quality assurance that will drive improvement in the standard of post-court work
2. improve staff training and development in assessment and planning of case management, management oversight, reflective practice and professional curiosity
3. increase the numbers of people at operational, management, and board level who can represent the diverse communities of Stoke-on-Trent
4. improve engagement with the voluntary and community sector
5. develop a clear approach to working with children from diverse cultural backgrounds
6. develop ways to ensure that the voices of the child and their parents or carers are heard more clearly at board level
7. develop a 'fit for purpose' resettlement policy, which clearly details local resettlement pathways and practice guidance, and ensure this is translated into effective resettlement practice.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Stoke-on-Trent YOS over a period of a week, beginning on 27 June 2022. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 28 June 2021 and 22 April 2022; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 28 June 2021 and 22 April 2022; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 28 June 2021 and 22 April 2022. We also conducted 33 interviews with case managers.

Stoke-on-Trent is an urban conurbation in the West Midlands of England. It has some significant demographic challenges and was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the 2015 indices of multiple deprivation. In 2015, around 26 per cent (13,300) of children lived in low-income families and the area had a significant proportion of adults in employment deprivation (18 per cent). In addition, the latest health profile (2016) asserts that health-related outcomes for children are below the national average.

The number of children achieving GCSEs is also lower than the national average. Stoke-on-Trent has recently received priority area funding from the Department for Education to address these issues.

Stoke-on-Trent YOS is based in the centre of Hanley. Children attend the building for some appointments, but others are held in children's centres, the child's home or other appropriate meeting places, depending on the needs of the child and their family.

Stoke YOS has a very clear ethos of a child-first approach. This is championed by members of the Management Board, supported by the leadership team, and delivered by frontline practitioners. The YOS is also committed to protecting the victims of offending and ensuring that they have a voice within the criminal justice system. It has a strong commitment to restorative justice and has two dedicated restorative justice workers.

Stoke-on-Trent has a high number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system. This fell in 2020 but has started to increase once more. This has been identified as a key area for action in the youth justice plan. Despite the high levels of deprivation seen in the city, the current reoffending rate is very low, and the YOS is within the 10 best-performing youth offending services in the country for this measure. Rates of custodial sentences are slightly higher than the YOS family average with which the YOS is compared, but numbers are very low.

The numbers of children in the city who have an education, health and care plan or special educational needs are high. The percentage of children who complete their intervention who have appropriate education, training or employment is also high. This is achieved through the work of the dedicated education officer and seconded careers workers, along with initiatives such as the preventing NEET (not in education, employment or training) project.

While its work in Stoke-on-Trent can be challenging, the YOS does have the benefit of understanding its cohort of children through data and close working relationships with partners. The work of the YOS clearly makes a difference to children, as evidenced by the low rates of reoffending, and the YOS is able to advocate for children both strategically and operationally.

## Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YOS and conducted 10 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

### 1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Requires improvement

#### Strengths

- There is a clear strategy and vision for the YOS's work.
- All statutory partners are engaged in the membership of the board, which is well attended, although no non-statutory services are represented.
- There was good evidence that YOS board members act as advocates of the work of the YOS partnership in their own roles.
- The recently appointed board chair has a good understanding of the YOS and is ambitious to deliver a high-performing service.
- The YOS management team is experienced and knowledgeable and there is active engagement between the management team and the board.
- Seconded and specialist staff had a good understanding of their roles and worked within a child-first, trauma-informed set of principles, shared with all participants in the partnership.
- YOS staff were well integrated into the local multi-agency arrangements to identify and work on child criminal exploitation.

#### Areas for improvement

- The quality of service delivery is not being driven well enough by the board. Less than half of the ratings for domains two and three were 'Good' or 'Outstanding', and under HM Inspectorate of Probation guidance, this limits the rating for leadership and governance to 'Requires improvement'.
- There is no active representation from the voluntary sector at the board, and there may be an opportunity to recruit board members who are more representative of the demographic make-up of the community.
- Over a quarter of the children in the YOS caseload are from black, Asian or other minority ethnic backgrounds. The actions set out by the YOS in action plans do not adequately address the need to work positively with children from non-white backgrounds in order to understand key aspects of their lives, including their culture and experiences of discrimination.

- The youth justice action plan for 2022 sets out a series of activities, but this is often imprecise (for example, 'co-design service with children and families', or 'complete audit of female children'), and it is unclear how the activities relate to what is going to be delivered by the YOS staff.

## 1.2. Staff



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

Good

### Strengths

- Staffing levels are sufficient to deliver high-quality services and the workload is manageable. 89 per cent of staff think that their workload is manageable and that managers will actively support them in dealing with fluctuations in demand.
- The YOS has a long-established, experienced group of operational staff and managers. There has been very little change in the staff group for many years. The newest member of staff started working in the YOS eight years ago.
- There is a strong team-working ethos, which supports the provision of cover at times of staff absence. The reported sickness rates are relatively low.
- All staff are appropriately qualified to undertake the work required, either as social workers or as holders of the Youth Justice Board's Professional Certificate in Effective Practice.
- Staff can access training and the YOS supports their development.
- The YOS is developing a database to identify and monitor staff's learning needs, although this has only been partially deployed as yet.
- Staff believe that there is a culture wherein their work is recognised and rewarded, and that some efforts are made to foster a learning culture, for example through the use of breakfast briefing presentations or through deep-dive case reviews.
- We found clear evidence that the YOS responds well to individual staff circumstances and provides appropriate and reasonable adjustments where these can support a member of staff.
- The YOS staff group broadly reflects the diversity of the local population: 25 per cent of the staff are reported to be black, Asian or of other minority ethnic origin. The diversity of the management does not reflect the local population as closely.

### Areas for improvement

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff are not represented on the management team or management board, or in the volunteer group.



- Not all staff are confident about engaging with issues concerning the children’s cultural heritage and experiences of discrimination.
- Management oversight of cases is not good enough in too many cases. Neither the managers nor the case managers are demonstrating a consistent capacity to identify and manage key issues in the children’s lives. Our inspectors considered management oversight to be inadequate in 42 per cent of the cases they assessed.
- There is no clear strategy to develop succession planning in the staff group.

### 1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

#### Strengths

- There is access to a wide range of services that can support the children in key aspects of their lives.
- There is good, and developing, needs analysis in relation to the children. The 2022 Needs Assessment for Liaison and Diversion Services in Staffordshire (which includes Stoke-on-Trent) provides comprehensive data and analysis of children’s needs.
- Following a review of health provision in the YOS, and drawing on a comprehensive needs analysis, the YOS has an outstanding health offer, consisting of a community health manager, a part-time speech and language therapist, a children’s nurse, a liaison and diversion support worker and a part-time occupational therapist. These staff members are located in the YOS premises and work to address the complex health needs of children who work with the YOS.
- Access to substance misuse interventions is provided by an in-house specialist. Where more intensive intervention is required, this is dealt with by referral to a third-sector substance misuse intervention agency.
- The YOS’s focus on education, training and employment is led by an in-house education worker and a seconded part-time careers worker, and the impact of this work is monitored. At the time of the inspection, all children of school age were engaged in education and 11 per cent of post-school-age children were designated as NEET.
- There is a well-established approach to victim work, and the victim’s perspective is maintained throughout the work with children. This includes the attendance of the restorative justice practitioner at out-of-court joint decision-making panels. Restorative justice work includes a wide variety of reparation projects and possibilities, including victim/child conferencing where this is suitable.
- There is a clear understanding of the necessity to invest in children’s lives at an early stage. Consequently, YOS services have an increased and developing focus on preventative work. This includes supporting schools at critical points

in children's lives; for example, where exclusion is being considered, YOS staff will work to support the child and their family.

### Areas for improvement

- There is limited incorporation of the views of children and families in the development of services.
- There is a wide range of active and productive partnerships that seek to address the complexity of the children's lives. However, the needs of children from minority ethnic families are not well provided for.
- We found little engagement with the voluntary sector, and where volunteers are working with the YOS in referral panels, all participants are white.

## 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

### Strengths

- There is good evidence that key policies are in place and up to date, including safe working, home visits and office working practices and procedures. Staff are aware of the policies that they are expected to follow, and all report that they understand their roles and responsibilities in the YOS partnership arrangements at least quite well.
- This is a close-knit team with considerable experience, and there is a good understanding of how services are accessed to support the children.
- IT systems support the delivery of services and provide useable management information.
- Information exchange between agencies is effective and problems with limited access to children's social care systems for some staff have recently been resolved.
- The YOS promotes and supports a personalised approach to work with the children and their parents or carers. Services are delivered in line with the children's needs through responsive contact arrangements, including school and home visits. Facilities for work in office locations are of a high standard and enable staff to focus on the quality of the work they do.
- The YOS is striving to develop services in line with well-evidenced approaches to the work, and this has led to its focus on preventative work.

## Areas for improvement

- The YOS has ample technical capacity to identify the children’s protected characteristics, but has not, as yet, developed a distinct approach to working with children from diverse backgrounds.
- On the basis of our mixed case inspection results for domains 2 and 3, it is evident that the current range of audit and quality assurance activity is not driving improvement.
- The railings surrounding the front of the building and colour scheme of the main building may be seen as intimidating or off-putting by some children.

## Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YOS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to obtain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 14 children, or their parents or carers, who consented, and three children and one parent replied. We also interviewed seven children and four parents or carers while working on site.

The YOS has adopted, and promotes, a child-first approach to its work. It focuses on building positive working relationships with children and families. The information we gathered demonstrates that YOS case managers do this very well. One parent commented that:

*“My child finds it hard to engage with people and the two ladies [sic] that worked with us were very good, taking their time getting know the kids, building that bond and trust with them. They were both very professional.”*

The child-first approach extends to partnership working, and this was appraised by a parent, as follows:

*“My son got into a bit of trouble and the worker has helped him to understand what was wrong about that. My son has had problems at school, the YOS worker got a speech and language worker and the school head together at my house. They all talked to my son and me and worked out how he can be helped better at school.”*

When asked, “Does the YOS worker have the right skills to work with you?”, a child responded:

*“Yes 100 per cent. She's always there for me. I've been low in my life; at times I couldn't afford to get to college, but my worker was there. She picked me up and got me to college. It mattered to me and I mattered to her. When I get issues, my worker is there. She speaks up for me and when I had problems at college, she was there next to me.”*

There were very clear illustrations of the important role of YOS staff in supporting the children. For example:

*“When things went bad for me, my worker got the right people involved. She helped me sort my accommodation and benefits. When things didn't happen in the right way, she stood up for me and made people do what they should be doing. My worker hears me and helps me.”*

The purpose of relationship-building with children is, ultimately, to get the child to be an independent and involved member of their community. It is about getting children to succeed and lead healthy, productive lives. One child directly attributed his progress to the relationship with his YOS worker:

*“The YOS have helped me to think about a lot of things. I’m now getting into work with my brother, and they are helping me get qualifications because it will help me be an electrician. If it was not for the YOS worker I’d be doomed.”*

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## Diversity

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- There is comprehensive monitoring of many of the protected characteristics of the YOS caseload.
- This monitoring highlights the increase in the proportion of girls in the caseload.
- It also highlights the disproportionate number of children who are looked after by the local authority who are on the YOS caseload.
- Both these areas of work are highlighted as needing further analysis and understanding by the YOS – there is little in the way of concerted action to address the underlying issues.
- 27 per cent of the children are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities, which reflects the local population.
- Some disproportionalities have been identified in the representation of children from a black, Asian or other minority ethnic group in the YOS cohort, particularly in the group of children receiving referral orders at court. Again, this has been highlighted for further exploration.
- We are concerned that, for a quarter of the YOS caseload, there is no developed approach to working with these children in a culturally informed and culturally sensitive way.
- The level of attention paid to the diversity of children in the inspected cases was variable. It was concerningly low in the assessment of post-court cases, with only 38 per cent of cases judged to be sufficient in relation to assessment and planning for diversity needs.
- While the YOS staff group broadly reflects the diversity of the local population, black, Asian or minority ethnic staff are not represented in the management team, management board or volunteer group.

## Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 13 community sentences managed by the YOS; there were no post-custody licences being supervised by the YOS. We interviewed the case managers in 13 cases.

### 2.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>2</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	69%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	69%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>54%</b>

Case managers worked effectively to analyse offending behaviour, drawing from previous assessments, where these had been done, and understanding of the child's life experiences. The children's circumstances were often complex and traumatic.

When assessment was done well, we saw positive engagement with the child and their parents or carers. We found, however, that in the majority of cases, the child's protected characteristics had not been considered in relation to their ability to engage and comply. In a small number of cases, we were concerned that case managers had not used information from other agencies in the assessment process. Key issues of mental health, family relationships, substance misuse or bereavement had been omitted when considering the child's potential to desist from offending.

When assessment focused on child safety, we found that most case managers had considered critical issues such as domestic abuse, the involvement of other agencies and other family circumstances that were relevant to the child's safety and wellbeing.

The focus on child safety was not consistently maintained, however. In one case, we found that analysis of safety was limited to identifying emotional harm that could be experienced should the child receive a custodial sentence. This was in the context of a child who had experienced neglect and witnessed domestic abuse. Too few of the cases we inspected contained sufficient analysis of how to keep other people safe. Too frequently, issues concerning the victims of offences had not been considered, nor were the risks associated with possible future victims planned for.

Management oversight was not directing the case manager to careful inquiry and analysis of available information.

<sup>2</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

## 2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating<sup>3</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	54%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	<b>46%</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	54%

Planning work was insufficient in too many of the cases we inspected. Plans too frequently lacked detail about who would do what and when. Key contributions to planning were too frequently missing, with limited input from the child or their family members. In some cases, we found that the speech and language therapist's assessments were not used to develop methods of working in line with identified learning needs. Even where plans were reasonably developed, a low level of attention was paid to the child's cultural background.

Although case managers knew the children well and could articulate their plans of action, the evidence in the case records indicated that these thoughts had frequently not been formalised. There were examples of weak contingency planning for events that would render the child vulnerable; for example, in one case, a parent had been known to supply the child with illegal substances, but there was no plan about how to manage subsequent contact with that parent.

In just over half of the cases, we found reasonable work being undertaken in planning to keep other people safe. In interviews, case managers were able to explain what they planned to do, but this was not reflected in written documentation. In one case, contingency arrangements were left blank for several months, despite the child receiving a conviction for serious violence.

The focus on planning requires significant improvement.

<sup>3</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

## 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>4</sup> for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	77%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	62%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	<b>54%</b>

When delivering services, case managers were able to demonstrate higher quality work. In most cases the delivery of services supported desistance. This was through good partnership working, building relationships with the children and their parents or carers and the use of a range of resources to support the child. There were good examples of case managers engaging the children in sporting activities and work related to education and employment. They used a range of methods to develop the child's understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. Reparation work was arranged in a way that fitted the child's individual circumstances. It built their confidence through activities and developed their awareness of the impact of offending on the wider community.

Safeguarding the child featured clearly in more cases when services were being delivered. Other agencies participated in face-to-face work with the case manager; for example, police staff supported and reinforced interventions to address attitudes to offending behaviour, to support their safety, and mental health professionals worked to support the child's needs. There was also evidence of advocacy on the child's behalf when social care judgements around living arrangements were thought to compromise safety.

In most cases, there was evidence that the case manager had addressed the safety of other people through the delivery of services, with a clear focus on challenging offending behaviour, developing thinking skills and promoting victim awareness. However, in some cases, we were concerned that information had not been verified, safety controls and monitoring were underdeveloped and there were insufficient contingency arrangements should the child's circumstances deteriorate.

The inconsistency of approach towards the safety of other people is a clear area for improvement.

<sup>4</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

## 2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>5</sup> for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	85%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	77%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>62%</b>

Reviewing addressed the issues of desistance consistently well. The work was regularly reviewed in most cases, and relevant information such as increased school engagement or changed employment patterns formed part of the review. Reviews were carried out either on an individual basis or as part of multi-agency arrangements (child-in-need meetings, management of risk forums, multi-agency child exploitation meetings). In some cases, the perspective of the child or their parents or carers was incorporated well into the process of review.

The child's safety was actively considered in most cases during the process of review. There was good information exchange between agencies, which resulted in better safety arrangements for the child and more responsive interventions (for example, the use of audio-visual equipment to adapt to learning needs identified by a speech and language assessment). In a small number of cases, we found that the case manager had overlooked issues concerning the child's safety and these had not been picked up by management oversight of the case.

Reviews of the risk of harm the child may present to others were generally carried out to an acceptable standard. In relevant cases the risk category associated with the child was adjusted in accordance with information gathered in review meetings. However, in some cases, information that had a bearing on the risks the child may present to others had not been shared with the professional network involved in the child's life.

Weaknesses in the case management approach to assessment, planning and implementation (discussed above) were not entirely offset by the process of review. Where there were gaps in understanding and analysis, these were not always remedied.

<sup>5</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).



## Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 20 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of three youth conditional cautions, two youth cautions, 12 community resolutions and three other disposals. We interviewed the case managers in 20 cases.

### 3.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>6</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	75%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	65%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>60%</b>

Following review of the out-of-court policies and procedures, the YOS adopted a standard screening tool for use before the joint decision-making panel in all cases referred. Where the child is considered for a youth conditional caution, the AssetPlus assessment tool is used.

Case managers analysed desistance in assessments well enough in most cases. Critically, they analysed diversity issues in most cases, and considered the child's personal circumstances in almost all of them. They made clear links between factors in the child's life such as the school environment, health issues, family relationships and peer relationships and the prospects of further offending. Assessments drew on a range of information provided by other agencies, such as the police, health and education.

Case managers identified and analysed the vulnerabilities of most of the children effectively. This included some joint assessment work where this was appropriate to the child's health needs. Where there was a risk of the child being exploited by others, there were strong and effective links to multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) arrangements.

In a minority of cases, we found that there were deficits. In one case, for example, the child's history of mental illness was not included in the written assessment and had not triggered actions to understand it further through the professional network.

Case managers maintained a focus on keeping other people safe in more cases than not. Where this was sufficiently assessed, we found that the case manager had understood the child's behaviour well. In cases where the assessment of risk of harm was insufficient, we found that behaviours that indicated higher levels of potential

<sup>6</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

harm to others had been overlooked or that the victim’s concerns were simply not addressed.

### 3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating<sup>7</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child’s desistance?	80%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	85%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>80%</b>

Following the Staffordshire-wide review of out-of-court disposal work, the Stoke-on-Trent YOS had adopted a revised planning document entitled ‘My Plan’. Planning of work with children receiving out-of-court disposals, when it was required, was markedly better than the other aspects of case management inspected. In almost all cases we found that plans were individualised and linked the child to the most appropriate service, intervention, or support in line with assessed need. This was the case even when, following assessment, no further action was taken.

Case managers paid appropriate attention to keeping the child safe in almost every case inspected. Where necessary, the plan linked to the work of other partners or agencies. In one case, we found that interventions related to learning needs and mental health concerns were reviewed to align with the work of other agencies, in order to focus on specialist delivery that was appropriate to the child’s needs.

The focus on keeping other people safe was a strong feature of plans for individual children. This was achieved through the use of restorative justice, the robustness of professional networks supporting the child, victim awareness work, individualised reparation work and strong links to police intelligence.

### 3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

<sup>7</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

Our rating<sup>8</sup> for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	<b>75%</b>
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	80%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	85%

The work with most of the children and their parents or carers was based on effective professional relationships. Planned work was delivered individually by the case manager, or jointly with other agencies or by other agencies. All services available to the YOS were being used and delivered in a manner that reflected the child's preferred learning style or individual circumstances.

Decisions about disposals by the joint panel were made in a timely way in almost every case we inspected. Likewise, work was delivered in a timely way.

The work done with children strongly promoted the child's safety and wellbeing. We found good work being carried out by case managers, health professionals, education professionals and children's services, as understanding of the child's needs developed.

In almost all cases we found that the work delivered was sufficient to support other people's safety. There was good communication between partner agencies around the child's circumstances, and the needs of victims were appropriately incorporated into the work.

### 3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based out-of-court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance.

Good

We also inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for out-of-court disposals, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. Our key findings were as follows:

#### Strengths

- There is a clear joint protocol between Staffordshire Police and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent YOSs. This contains both the policy position and practice guidelines for staff operating within the protocol. Guidance on joint decision-making is well documented.
- In accordance with national policy, the protocol states that that point-of-arrest diversion should be a distinct and substantially different response to formal out-of-court disposals. It indicates that all action should be taken to promote

<sup>8</sup> 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. A more detailed explanation is available in the [data annex](#).

diversion into more suitable child-focused systems, and to promote positive, constructive behaviour.

- Once the evidential requirement is met, all children are referred to the YOS for assessment, which includes, at a minimum, a standard assessment tool and health checks. All assessments are then reviewed by a joint decision-making panel, where the most appropriate disposal for the child is determined.
- The joint decision-making panel includes the chair, YOS team manager, YOS assessor, YOS police officer, health representative, victim liaison officer, and restorative justice worker. A representative from children's social care is invited to the panel if ongoing involvement is identified.
- There is a consistent plan format, 'My Plan', which should be used with all children.
- There is a clear escalation process should the panel fail to agree on the most appropriate outcome for the child.
- Referral, assessment, decision-making, and delivery are carried out within clear time constraints.
- The safety of the child and any potential risks to the safety of other people are intended to be considered for each child throughout the process. This had happened in over 75 per cent of the cases inspected in relation to planning and implementation, although in a smaller proportion for assessment.
- The entire range of YOS services is available to each child working with the YOS under the auspices of the protocol.

### **Areas for improvement**

- There is limited guidance on how the children's diverse needs are to be addressed within the scheme.
- The child or family view is not incorporated into ongoing review or evaluation of the scheme.

## 4.1. Resettlement

### 4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

Inadequate

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected three cases managed by the YOS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows:

#### Strengths

- There is a written resettlement policy that sets out the broad principles of constructive resettlement.
- The policy acknowledges the importance of health, education, accommodation, safety and wellbeing, risk of causing harm to others, successful transition to community or adult services, and the need to maintain services to victims.
- In all three cases the case manager had maintained good levels of contact during the custodial part of the sentence. In one case we identified that there was a detailed plan for licence conditions to restrict the child's movements and contacts following release. In the same case, the individual was reviewed by the local multi-agency risk forum to plan for release.
- In two of the three cases, the case manager and educational institution shared appropriate information about the educational support required by the child.
- The majority of case managers have received training in constructive resettlement.

#### Areas for improvement

- The written policy is strong on what should happen, but weak on what will happen in practice.
- The resettlement pathways to key services are ill-defined, although, in practice, many of the necessary services are co-located in the YOS, which means they are likely to be readily accessible.
- The policy requires considerable revision before it is implemented.
- Detailed policies and procedures to support resettlement are yet to be developed.
- In the three cases inspected we found that only one had a plan at any time during the sentence for accommodation on release.
- In two of the cases, there was significant engagement in education during the custodial stage of the sentence, but no continuing work had been planned

following release (in all three cases, the young person transferred to the probation service on their 18th birthday).

- Victim work was mentioned in only one of the cases.
- The policy was established very recently and takes a 'wait and see' approach to the pending evaluation of national pilot work in resettlement.

## Further information

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The following can be found on our website:

- [inspection data, including methodology and contextual facts about the YJS](#)
- [a glossary of terms used in this report.](#)