



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

# **Buckinghamshire**

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HM Inspectorate of Probation, January 2023



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## The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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## Foreword

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This inspection is part of our programme of youth offending service (YOS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Buckinghamshire 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, Buckinghamshire YOS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Outstanding'.

The governance and leadership of this service is strong. Their youth justice plan has been developed with input from board members and is based on detailed understanding of the profiles of children and their needs. Board arrangements are effective, and mechanisms are in place to oversee the delivery of the strategy. Comprehensive data reports about the profile of children, as well as YOS performance enable the board and management team to oversee service delivery. We were pleased to see the focus on addressing ethnic disproportionality being driven at board level.

Children have access to a range of services and interventions that meet a spectrum of needs and they are supported to access these. The positive feedback we received from children confirms that they are getting the support and help they need.

A skilled, stable, highly motivated, staff team are supported by a competent management team that promotes a culture of learning and development. There are excellent training and development opportunities and a strong connection between operational delivery and strategic priorities.

All aspects of post-court work are excellent. Case managers take a holistic approach to their work. They balance children's desistance, and safety and wellbeing needs, with an equal focus on protecting the public where a risk of harm has been identified. The consistent quality of statutory work was impressive.

However, the services delivered to children who receive out-of-court disposals is not of the same quality as that received by children on court orders. Assessment of children's own safety and wellbeing and planning to manage and reduce the risk of harm they may present to others require improvement.

Information sharing and joint work with social care is strong; however, further work is needed to ensure information within out of court disposal assessments consistently reflects social care input. Leaders also need to better understand the reintegration rates for children who are not in mainstream education to make sure every child has the best possible education placement.

In this report, we make seven recommendations which we trust will assist the service in delivering a high-quality service for all children it is in contact with.



**Justin Russell**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Ratings

**Buckinghamshire Youth Justice Service**  
Fieldwork started October 2022

**Score 27/36**

### Overall rating

**Good**



### 1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

**Good**



1.2 Staff

**Outstanding**



1.3 Partnerships and services

**Good**



1.4 Information and facilities

**Outstanding**



### 2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

**Outstanding**



2.2 Planning

**Outstanding**



2.3 Implementation and delivery

**Outstanding**



2.4 Reviewing

**Outstanding**



### 3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

**Requires improvement**



3.2 Planning

**Requires improvement**



3.3 Implementation and delivery

**Good**



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

**Requires improvement**



### 4. Resettlement<sup>1</sup>

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

**Outstanding**



<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 Buckinghamshire. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth offending services, and better protect the public.

### **The Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service management board should:**

1. monitor the reintegration rates of YOS children into mainstream education to make sure that children return to full-time mainstream education in every case where this is appropriate
2. ensure information within out of court disposal assessments consistently reflects social care input and that the roles and responsibilities for each service area are clearly identified within a children's plans.

### **The Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service should:**

3. improve the quality of assessment and planning for out-of-court disposal work to focus on the safety and wellbeing of children and the management of risk of harm to others
4. review the out-of-court disposal guidance so that it sets out explicitly how the service intends to meet all diversity, safety and wellbeing needs, and risk of harm to others
5. strengthen out-of-court disposal assessment processes so that children and families are engaged at the earliest opportunity and ensure their views routinely contribute to disposal decisions
6. consistently ensure that suitable supervision arrangements for children completing reparation and expand the number of projects available
7. seek to proactively diversify the pool of volunteers so that it reflects the children and families the service works with.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Buckinghamshire YOS over a period of a week, beginning on 03 October 2022. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 04 October 2021 and 29 July 2022; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 04 October 2021 and 29 July 2022; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 04 October and 29 July 2022. We also conducted 23 interviews with case managers.

Buckinghamshire Council is a unitary local authority. It was created in April 2020 from the areas that were previously administered by Buckinghamshire County Council, including the districts of South Bucks, Chiltern, Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale.

The YOS is part of the council's wider children's services. It is aligned with the child missing and exploitation hub which also sits under the YOS Head of Service. Thirty-nine per cent of YOS children are subject to child in need or child protection plans, and just under two per cent are children in care.

The YOS has consistently performed well against national key performance indicators. Children in Buckinghamshire enter the justice system at a significantly lower rate than they do on average across the rest of England and Wales. The rate of reoffending is also lower than the national median. This is against a backdrop of increasing recorded crime in the county.

The county has around 58,000 children aged 10 to 17, 19% of the children are from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. This group of children represent 32 per cent of the YOS cohort, which is a significant over-representation. Understanding and addressing this disproportionality is a priority for the YOS and the partnership.

Fifty-nine per cent of YOS children are identified as having a learning disability and a similar proportion attend a pupil referral unit or an alternative education placement, or they are on a school roll but with a reduced timetable. Eight-seven per cent of the YOS cohort who are 17 years old and over are in education, training or employment.

The YOS has seen a significant shift in the profile of its caseload in the past 12 months. Statutory cases have reduced by 40 per cent as out-of-court work has increased substantially. This coincides with an increase of the use of police 'street community resolutions' to divert children from the youth justice system. The use of youth cautions in Buckinghamshire has significantly reduced since 2016, and the use of youth conditional cautions has remained largely the same.

The service responded swiftly to the Covid-19 pandemic by moving to remote working quickly and maintaining contact with children throughout. All work, including referral order panel meetings, are now being delivered in person.

## Domain one: Organisational delivery

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To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YOS and conducted 12 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

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### 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

#### Strengths:

- The youth justice plan has been developed with input from board members and is based on an understanding of the profiles of the YOS children and their needs.
- The YOS strategy focuses on meeting the diverse needs of children at the earliest opportunity and driving this approach across the partnership.
- There is consistent attendance from board members, who are of the right level of seniority and advocate for the YOS in their own agencies.
- The ethnic diversity of the board reflects the community, which is a particular strength, given that addressing disproportionality is a service priority.
- The membership of the board supports strong strategic links to other strategic forums and networks, such as the Safer Communities Partnership.
- High-quality reports to the board provide data on the profiles of children, their needs and the YOS's performance. Quality assurance reports are submitted on a six-monthly basis to provide information on practice.
- Partnership arrangements are collaborative and progressive. Partners share knowledge and expertise to improve the quality of services for children.
- The management team promotes a culture of learning, development and ongoing improvement.

#### Areas for improvement:

- Sixty per cent of YOS children attend a pupil referral unit or alternative education provision or attend school with a reduced timetable. Reintegration rates are not sufficiently monitored to make sure that every child who can return to mainstream education does so.
- The management oversight of out-of-court disposals is not as effective as that of statutory work, and this is evident in the quality of the out-of-court disposal casework inspected.

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## 1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

### Strengths:

- Inspectors were impressed by the capability and knowledge of the practitioners they met with. They were skilled at engaging children with an excellent understanding of child-centred practice and a thorough technical knowledge of the youth justice system.
- The service is supported by committed, knowledgeable and motivated volunteers who are well integrated into the service. They have received the training and support they need to carry out their roles effectively.
- There are high levels of staff satisfaction. Staff are committed and highly motivated to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people.
- Staff are satisfied with the frequency and quality of their supervision. They can also access clinical support when they need it.
- The workforce development plan is developed in response to quality assurance findings and provides excellent learning opportunities for staff. Training effectively equips them to work with a diverse range of children and meet their distinct and specific needs.
- Staff hold lead roles within the service, which provides opportunities for learning and development and promotes leadership from within the team. The service also has a 'wellbeing champion', who liaises with staff and managers to identify and raise any areas of need.
- Managers set clear practice standards and identify and address under-performance with appropriate support plans and targets for improvement.
- New staff benefit from highly effective induction, which includes the importance of adapting work to meet the needs of children and young people and respecting and valuing diversity.
- Staff are supported to develop, and opportunities to 'act up' are used to help staff progress and retain them within the service.
- Specific human resources recruitment activity has taken place to promote diversity within the workforce, so that it is more reflective of the community of YOS children.

### Areas for improvement:

- Not all staff have found the formal appraisal process to be valuable.
- Managers and the board could do more to consistently recognise and reward good work.

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## 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:

- The YOS has an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the children and young people, based on a wide range of recent and reliable information. It has collated and analysed data from partner agencies to understand and plan to address disproportionality.
- Children can swiftly access a range of services and support, and there are specific pathways for universal, targeted and specialist provision. Inspectors found trusted and high-quality relationships between staff across the partnership.
- Mental health provision is tiered and meets a spectrum of needs. The liaison and diversion team work with out-of-court cases, and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offers interventions to those on statutory orders. Forensic CAMHS intervenes in the higher-risk, complex cases. There is no waiting list for access to services.
- The YOS offers advice to help other providers consider their own practice. Partners recognise the role the YOS has played in highlighting disproportionality and promoting trauma-informed and restorative practice.
- In recognition of the higher exclusion rates for children of ethnic minority backgrounds, Spark2life has been commissioned to work with this group of children when they are transitioning from primary to secondary school.
- YOS youth workers are working with 16 schools across Buckinghamshire offering support to staff and children.
- An education officer post funded by the council is occupied by a qualified teacher who has good working relationships with schools and colleagues in the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) team.
- The YOS speech and language worker has devised a screening tool for staff to routinely assess children's needs and offers support to those who need it.
- The YOS victim and restorative justice work is an area of strength. The involvement of victims, the support offer to families and the restorative justice training being delivered to partners is impressive.
- We saw an excellent example of a two-day life skills programme delivered to children with funding from the Marcus Rashford Holiday Activities and Food project.

### Areas for improvement:

- The YOS would benefit from a broader range of creative reparation projects.
- Inspectors noted some excellent examples of joint work between the YOS and children's social care, but in some cases, issues had to be escalated to managers. Although these were swiftly resolved, the services would benefit from regularly reviewing of joint working arrangements.

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## 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.

Outstanding

### Strengths:

- Policies and procedures are regularly and proactively reviewed, improved and communicated to help staff assume responsibility and act quickly and effectively.
- The YOS has two office bases: one in central Aylesbury and the other in High Wycombe. Staff consider the venues to be safe for them and for the children they work with. Staff also meet children in other places where they feel safe and use community venues, home visits and schools to meet with children.
- The delivery environments, supported by effective information technology (IT), enable staff to undertake appropriate personalised work and engage effectively with children in a variety of locations that meet their needs.
- The IT systems support effective and integrated service delivery. Staff can record and access key information whenever and wherever required.
- All staff who responded to our survey felt that the IT available (such as laptops, Wi-Fi, remote access, and the case management system,) helps them to deliver quality services.
- The YOS has a full-time dedicated performance review and information manager, who is knowledgeable about YOS work, produces detailed data reports for the management team and analyses quality assurance findings to identify themes and areas for improvement.
- The YOS has processes for reviewing serious incidents, and action plans to address learning points.
- The 'Life Path' work that is undertaken with children at the end of their order is collated to understand the child's journey through the justice system and their experiences of the services they have received. The YOS has taken action in response to their feedback.
- The YOS harnesses opportunities to learn from others by applying findings from reviews, research and inspection.
- The YOS uses data to seek additional funding for projects to tackle issues that can lead to children becoming involved in offending. This includes the development of a project to support black, Asian and minority ethnic children who are transitioning from primary to secondary schools.
- During fieldwork, the inspection had to be moved from face-to-face to online. The ease and speed with which this was achieved was impressive and demonstrates the agility of the YOS's IT systems.

### Areas for improvement:

- Not all policies and procedures pay attention to diversity.

## **Involvement of children and their parents or carers**

The YOS gains feedback from children during the Life Path work that staff complete with them to reflect on their experience of the youth justice system and the support they have received from the YOS. The YOS collates this feedback to consider service improvements and to share any relevant information with partner agencies. The service is also currently arranging meetings for board members to talk to children so that their direct feedback can be considered at a strategic level.

Before the inspection fieldwork, 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 17 children who consented, and 10 replied. They were asked to rate the YOS on a scale of one to 10. Five gave it a 10, three rated it 8, one rated it 9, another gave it 5 and one did not give a rating.

Children commented:

*“My workers are very useful in terms of helping me when needed for the YOS work and external support. They are always on top of things when they need to be and provide an outlet and great support to me, they are the nicest people I’ve ever met.”*

*“My YOS officers are amazing and have helped me to improve my life for the better I came from a really dark place to now being more confident with a full-time job and being happy in general.”*

During fieldwork, inspectors spoke directly to six children and three parents or carers. We sent a set of questions directly to one child and they responded.

One child told us about his positive experience of the YOS and his worker:

*“It’s been a different experience because I’ve never had someone who is there for me whenever I need them to be.”*

*“She gives an honest opinion, that’s the most important thing for me. Not being judged. She makes it easy.”*

Another child told us about how their work with the YOS helped them:

*“The YOS has kept me out of trouble, supported with my emotional and mental health and helped me maintain my job. Within last nine to 10 months, the YOS has helped me become better as a person.”*

*“They’re just so compassionate. They can relate to me. They can put themselves in my shoes. They know how I feel – that’s one of the main things that’s helped me.”*

*“I am not a very open person but with my case workers, I become an open person. I can share my views and thoughts and feelings and not feel judged.”*

Another child spoke about the help they received to access health support:

*“I started taking medication for dealing with ADHD. My case manager supported me in accessing CAMHS and getting a diagnosis. My temper has improved.”*

One parent told us about how the YOS helped them access support:

*“I was very sceptical of services being involved. The YOS have made things less scary.”*

*“They have helped my son to learn to be himself and to take ownership of his own career path and take responsibility for his own actions.”*

Another said the following about their child’s worker:

*“She has been wonderful. To everything I have asked for, the response has been ‘We’ll do it.’ She has been marvellous.”*

## Diversity

- Staff recognise the importance of having difficult conversations with children, and they are skilled at doing this in supportive ways to promote the best understanding of the specific needs of each child.
- The service has high aspirations for children, and staff advocate and challenge appropriately to make sure their specific needs are recognised and addressed by relevant services.
- Staff focus on the children's education and learning needs. The YOS education officer is active in tracking what is happening with children who have special educational needs.
- The service has links to the SEND team, which means there is swift access to education, health and care plans, and there are processes to identify children who do not have a plan but may need one. This work is supported by the YOS speech and language therapist, who screens and assesses children to make sure any additional needs are understood.
- The focus on addressing disproportionality at strategic level is evident in practice. Case managers are confident in speaking to children about their heritage and lived experiences, including discrimination and racism.
- The service has had a peer review exchange with another YOS to assure itself that disposal decisions are consistent across different ethnic groups of children.
- Anti-racist practice sessions have been delivered to board members by a specialist third-sector provider.
- Staff appreciate that children and their families have not always had positive experiences of professionals. We saw examples of this being dealt with thoughtfully and sensitively to encourage families to engage with the service.
- The YOS has access to mentoring provision which means that those children who require an additional level of support can get it.
- Children are screened for speech and language needs. The YOS has developed a communication passport for those with identified needs, which
- is shared with other professionals to help them understand both the presentation and needs of children.
- Children have swift access to a range of health services to meet a spectrum of needs.
- The YOS recognised that the ethnic diversity of the workforce did not reflect the community. In response, the YOS successfully embarked on an alternative recruitment path to increase diversity within the workforce.
- A significant number of children were assessed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism spectrum disorder or presenting with traits that required further exploration. The service has responded to this by ensuring that relevant referral pathways are in place and that information sharing between the YOS and the SEND team are effective.
- The diversity of the YOS volunteers does not reflect the community. The service recognises this and is considering ways to address it.

## Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 11 community sentences and one custodial sentence managed by the YOS.

### 2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

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?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	<b>92%</b>
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>92%</b>

The quality of the assessments completed for children subject to statutory orders was impressive. Practitioners worked well with other professionals to gain the fullest understanding of each child, their life experiences and what factors might be contributing to their behaviour. Children's diversity needs were considered in every case. There was a clear focus on identifying strengths and protective factors and considering how these could be harnessed to promote ongoing desistance. Assessments were consistently balanced, with equal focus on children's safety and wellbeing and protecting the public as well as taking account of desistance factors.

Case managers assessed for barriers that might impact on the child engaging, whether these were linked to motivation or structural inequalities. They considered how any obstacles could be best addressed. Children and their parents were fully engaged in the assessment process. This gave them the opportunity to raise concerns about possible unmet needs, such as speech and language or learning needs, which they felt needed to be understood and addressed.

Case managers paid attention to a spectrum of concerns affecting children's wellbeing, such as experiences of bullying and difficulties at school. They liaised with education providers to get a full understanding of the child's problems. They took account of the child's home circumstances, including family separation, neglect and domestic violence, and considered the impact of these experiences on the child and their safety and wellbeing. Staff understand how safety and wellbeing and risk of harm are interrelated and pay full attention to both equally in their assessments.

<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 at web link.](#)

## 2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

	<b>% 'Yes'</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	<b>100%</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	<b>100%</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>100%</b>

The consistent quality of planning to support children's desistance, safety and wellbeing and to protect the public was exemplary, meeting our standards in every case.

Planning considered the child's cognitive ability and maturity and what they needed to be able to engage with their plan of work. Learning style and speech and language therapy assessments were completed to understand children's individual needs. An inspector noted an excellent piece of work to adapt an intervention plan so that it could be understood by the child, who was diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder. The plan was revised into a format that the child could use to track his own progress.

Overall, planning was well sequenced, setting out when services such as CAMHS would work with the child, and prioritising the delivery of interventions according to risk and need.

Planning routinely promoted children's safety and wellbeing. It set out how risks would be addressed through interventions and external controls. Effective planning was strengthened by the involvement of children and their parents or carers. We noted good examples of parents or carers, as well as extended family members, being appropriately supported to create their own plans to keep their child safe. In addition, other agencies that were working with the child had knowledge of plans and were involved in delivering interventions or in planning. This joined-up approach promoted effective communication and alignment of plans, such as child protection and Child in Need plans. The positive impact of this was evident in the quality of the services delivered.

We were pleased to see consistent, individualised contingency planning that set out what action would need to be taken, and by whom, should concerns about the child's welfare escalate or concerns about risk of harm to other people increase.

<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 at web link.](#)

## 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

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

	<b>% 'Yes'</b>
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	<b>100%</b>
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	<b>100%</b>
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	<b>100%</b>

Inspectors were impressed by the consistent approach and skill demonstrated by case managers. They showed commitment and creativity in their work with children who were subject to statutory court orders. The delivery of interventions paid equal attention to supporting children's desistance, safety and wellbeing and making sure other people were safe.

The services delivered to support desistance were well targeted and reflected the factors linked to offending that were identified in the child's initial assessment. Interventions were well sequenced and prioritised appropriately. The children's needs and diversity were given thoughtful attention to ensure that the work delivered met their specific needs and promoted engagement. We saw positive examples of genograms being used to understand family backgrounds and discussions about identity, including ethnicity and experiences of discrimination.

Case managers actively involved parents and carers, providing support for them in doing so. Interventions built on children's strengths and protective factors and focused on integrating them into mainstream services to promote desistance in the long term.

Case managers delivered sessions with children that focused on their offending to help them understand and consider what might be driving their behaviour and how it affected other people.

The implementation and delivery of services promoted the child's safety in every case, and this was supported by the active involvement of other organisations and services. Interventions delivered to effectively support the safety of other people were well targeted, giving sufficient attention to the protection of actual and potential victims. Risk management processes and effective management oversight promoted a swift response to changes in circumstances and the effective management of risk of harm to others.

<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 at web link.](#)

## 2.4. Reviewing



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

Outstanding

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

	<b>% 'Yes'</b>
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	<b>100%</b>
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	<b>100%</b>
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>100%</b>

Reviewing was an ongoing process, supported by discussions and reflection in supervision. It was informed by risk management panels and other professional meetings, and by continually assessing the child's progress. Case managers revised planned interventions in response to children's changing circumstances.

Reviewing focused on developing children's strengths. Staff were responsive when protective factors broke down. For example, they intervened, where possible, to prevent children being excluded from school. In addition, they were proactive in arranging professionals' meetings to manage safety and wellbeing concerns.

Case managers ensured that children had ongoing support for their diversity needs and that there were no barriers to the child's ability to engage with the court order. Children and their parents and carers were involved in reviewing the interventions being delivered through ongoing meaningful discussions.

We noted excellent examples of reviewing in relation to work being delivered to a child with speech, language and communication difficulties to help him reflect on his progress and plan for any additional support. Another good example was the reviewing of progress undertaken with a child who was transitioning to adult probation. The review reflected on his achievements during his time with the YOS and helped him to prepare him for the future.

In eight cases there were changes in the child's circumstances that required their safety and wellbeing to be reviewed. In each relevant case, this was done well and resulted in a written review and changes to the plan of work. Other agencies contributed appropriately to reviewing the child's safety. Similarly, reviewing of the risk of harm to others took a multi-agency approach and was done to a sufficient standard in every case where it was needed.

<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 at web link.](#)

## Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 16 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions, eight youth cautions and six community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 10 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?	<b>63%</b>
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	69%

In most cases the final out-of-court disposal decision was based on information held by the YOS, police and other agencies before the YOS contacted the child and their parent or carer. As a result, in a number of cases, the child and their parent or carer's views were not considered as part of the decision-making process.

Assessments for desistance met our standards in most cases. When compared to post-court work, there was less evidence that diversity factors had been fully identified and considered. Similarly, there was less focus on identifying each child's strengths and protective factors. However, where structural barriers were noted, their impact on the child's ability to make progress were analysed. Parents and carers were involved in the assessment process in most cases, which gave case managers a better understanding of the child's circumstances and home life.

We found that, where there was evidence to suggest concern about the child's safety and wellbeing, this was not always identified and analysed. In some cases, there were gaps in the information from other agencies. For example, in a small number of cases, inspectors noted that liaison with children's social care was not always as effective as it could have been. In just under half of the cases, there was no stated classification level and there was not always a written assessment relating to safety and wellbeing.

In most cases, where complex family dynamics and risk in the child's home were a feature, staff had explored and analysed, however in a minority of cases these were not always fully explored to promote safety

<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 at web link.](#)

## 3.2. Planning



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

Requires Improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	81%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	69%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>63%</b>

Planning for desistance was effective in most cases. Case managers could have done more to set out how children's strengths and protective factors could be harnessed and enhanced through the delivery of interventions. There was a focus on exit planning and attention was given to reintegration and ongoing support for children. Children and their parents and carers were usually involved in the planning process, and case managers took their views into account when considering the work that would be delivered. In most cases, we assessed that the interventions most likely to support desistance were appropriately planned for.

Planning did not consistently support children's safety and wellbeing. In some cases, this was because there was no evidence of work being delivered to address the concerns evident in the case. In a minority of cases there were gaps in information from other agencies that undermined the quality of planning. However, in most cases other agencies were appropriately involved.

Planning to address risk of harm to others was not always evident in cases, despite issues being identified. There was evidence that case managers had drawn on information held by other agencies, but this had not sufficiently informed planning, for example in relation to potential risks to family members. Where planning for risk of harm was assessed to be sufficient, we found it to be proportionate to the assessed risk level and supported by clear contingency plans should the risk escalate.

<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 at web link.](#)

### 3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

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?	88%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	<b>75%</b>
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	<b>75%</b>

The delivery of interventions to support desistance is an area of strength. The quality of work delivered was consistently of a sufficient standard. Case managers effectively engaged with children, most of whom were subject to voluntary disposals. Interventions focused on addressing the problems and needs identified in the assessment that were most likely to contribute to any further offending. Addressing problematic attitudes and behaviours, supporting access to appropriate services, and advocating for children all contribute to effective work to promote desistance.

Parents and carers were involved in the delivery of interventions. This encouraged them to motivate their child to comply with their intervention. We saw a good example of a practitioner demonstrating an ability to successfully engage a family who had previous negative experiences of services and were initially reluctant to accept support.

The implementation of out-of-court work to support children's safety and wellbeing could be better coordinated with the consistent input and involvement of other services, particularly children's social care. We saw good examples of practitioners prioritising children's welfare and advocating for them and their families. When they encountered barriers, they escalated cases accordingly and managers intervened appropriately.

In most of the cases where we identified that the child posed a risk of harm to others, interventions were delivered to reduce and manage the risk. Interventions included the delivery of weapons awareness sessions; victim empathy interventions; and work to address and challenge problematic thinking and behaviour. In one case, we noted a good example of funding being used to secure a six-month programme of intervention for a child after their disposal had ended. This helped to provide ongoing support and contributed to reducing any risk of harm to others.

<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 at web link.](#)

### 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.

Requires Improvement

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:

- The YOS has a multi-agency out-of-court disposal decision-making panel in place, and this supports timely information-sharing between professionals.
- There is a Thames Valley Police (TVP) youth offending teams partnership agreement in place, which sets out the working arrangements.
- In addition to the TVP agreement, there is a Buckinghamshire YOS/early intervention and out-of-court disposal case manager guidance document in place to support practitioners and managers in the delivery of prevention and early intervention work.
- The YOS has put processes in place to monitor the 'street community resolutions' that are issued and to assess whether the child would benefit from an offer of voluntary support. The YOS's monitoring of these police-delivered interventions is good practice.
- All children who come to the attention of the police who have had a previous 'street community resolution' are referred to the YOS for discussion at the joint decision-making panel to be considered for support and intervention. This provides a level of assurance that support is being considered for children who repeatedly come to the attention of the police.

#### Areas for improvement:

- Decision-making on all outcomes below youth conditional caution (youth caution or community resolution) can be made by the panel, following an initial screening process, without the need for a pre-decision assessment. This means that the decision is based on information held by services. As such, there is scope for strengthening the voice of the child and their parents or carers in the out-of-court decision-making process.
- Inspectors noted some delays in interventions starting once disposal decisions had been made.
- The TVP and youth offending team's partnership agreement and the YOS/early intervention and out-of-court disposal case manager guidance document reference disproportionality work in schools and considers risk of harm. Whilst safeguarding and risk of harm is considered as part of existing case management documents, the out-of-court disposal guidance should be strengthened to make specific reference to safeguarding and the management of risk of harm.
- Management oversight of out-of-court disposals did not consistently promote high-quality casework practice. It was effective in only five of 13 cases.

## 4.1. Resettlement

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### 4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Outstanding

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 one case managed by the YOS that had received a custodial sentence.

Our key findings were as follows.

#### Strengths:

- The YOS resettlement policy (March 2022) promotes a high-quality, constructive, and personalised resettlement service for all children. The policy sets out a strengths-based approach that considers identity shift, safety and wellbeing, and promotes a personalised resettlement service for all children.
- Resettlement policy is based on seven pillars and is child-focused. It sets out what should be covered at initial planning meetings, including release on temporary licence (ROTL), SEND needs and education, health and care plans. Any barriers are explored and addressed at the earliest stages, with a focus on accommodation from the outset. The expectations in terms of management escalation are covered.
- The policy sets out caretaking requirements for any child who is released to live in another borough. It refers to considering diversity and provides direction and guidance to staff on effective resettlement practice in line with relevant research recommendations.
- The policy was rolled out to staff at a team meeting to ensure they understood its purpose and the expectations of them in delivering on it.
- All staff who work with children being resettled from custody have received training to assess, identify, plan for, and respond to each child's resettlement needs.
- Resettlement cases are discussed at the YOS risk management panel, where attention is paid to risk of harm to others as well as the child's safety and wellbeing. These issues are also discussed at resettlement meetings. The YOS restorative justice/victim worker, police and health representatives are present for these discussions.
- The quality of work in the resettlement case we inspected was excellent. The child was fully engaged, kept up to date on plans and multi-agency work was noted as a strength. Effective work was undertaken to manage risk of harm and support the child's safety and wellbeing, with a consistent focus on diversity.
- Resettlement work has been the subject of a specific quality assurance exercise to assess the quality of provision and how well children's individual needs are met.
- The resettlement policy references several documents and reports for further reading. These include the HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic report on resettlement, as well as guidance on the effective resettlement of girls and a report on ethnicity, faith and culture in resettlement.

- There is no specific feedback from children, parents and carers in relation to resettlement work, but this would be captured as part of the YOS's Life Path work.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Victim issues are considered at the risk management panels and resettlement panels, but the policy could define the role of the YOS restorative justice/victim worker more clearly and set out the support available to victims.

## 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.](#)