



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Northumberland

HM Inspectorate of Probation, July 2023



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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.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Northumberland YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Northumberland YJS was rated as 'Good'. We reviewed, but did not rate, the quality of resettlement policy and provision, as there were no resettlement cases within the timescale covered by the inspection.

The service adopts a whole-family approach in reaching out to children to meet their practical needs and help them to desist from committing further crimes. A personalised approach makes sure that children's individual needs are understood, and measures are put in place to help them achieve, attain, and live their best lives. Staff and volunteers are undoubtedly the organisation's most significant asset. They are passionate, kind, enthusiastic, and go the extra mile for the children they supervise. They show resilience, a desire to learn, and want to improve the quality of work they deliver. Staff have access to a broad range of interventions to support children and their parents and carers. Co-location of services works well. The health offer is impressive and making a difference in improving children's emotional wellbeing.

Leaders across the partnership have worked together well to design a clear vision to help children to thrive. Robust governance arrangements ensure that there is effective integration of services to meet the needs of YJS children across Northumberland. Partners take ownership of their responsibilities, actively working as one team to overcome the barriers that children face.














The head of service leads the YJS well. She is influential across the partnership, knowledgeable, and skilled, with a desire to drive the service to achieve better outcomes for children. To improve further, the management board needs to ensure that the voice of children and their parents and carers is considered in strategic decision-making. Additionally, more work is required to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diversity needs of all its children, especially those with different protected characteristics. A review of the out-of-court disposal policy is needed to ensure that it effectively considers and manages the needs of children who specifically live in Northumberland. Furthermore, the YJS needs to do more to support children's safety and wellbeing and their potential to inflict harm to others, especially in court work. Our inspection found that not all staff understood and consistently applied the systems and processes to keep children safe and prevent them from causing harm to others.

In this report we make four recommendations to further improve the work of Northumberland YJS. We trust that they will assist the service as it continues to make a lasting difference in the lives of the children it supervises.



Justin Russell
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Northumberland Youth Justice Service		Score	26/36
Fieldwork started April 2023			
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	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Good	
2.2	Planning	Good	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
2.4	Reviewing	Requires improvement	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Good	
3.2	Planning	Outstanding	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Good	
4. Resettlement¹			
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Not rated	

¹ The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YOS rating.

Recommendations

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

The Northumberland Youth Justice Service should:

1. ensure robust contingency plans are in place for all children that address their safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others
2. improve the quality of court work assessment, planning, service delivery, and reviewing to keep children safe and manage the risk of harm they present to others.

The Northumberland Youth Justice Service Management Board should:

3. ensure that the voice of children and their parents and carers is more robustly heard and utilised at strategic decision-making level
4. forensically analyse and segment out-of-court data, use findings to identify what works well, and utilise this to influence strategic and operational practice.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Northumberland YJS over a period of a week, beginning 17 April 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 18 April 2022 and 10 February 2023, and out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 18 April 2022 and 10 February 2023. We also conducted 15 interviews with case managers.

Northumberland is the largest unitary authority in England by geographic coverage and is also the most sparsely populated with only 64 people per square kilometre.² It is home to around 320,600 people (Census 2021). The county is 97 per cent rural, with 50 per cent of the population living in the south east urban area. It is the 116th most deprived area (out of 317). In Northumberland, 97.7 per cent of the population are white.

Northumberland has 45,550 pupils attending schools: 19.6 per cent access free school meals; 98 per cent use English as their first language; 3.9 per cent of pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP); and 11.5 per cent have special educational needs or disability (SEND) support. There are 588 children on early help plans, 845 on child in need plans, 429 child protection plans, and 456 looked after children.

Northumberland Youth Justice Service (YJS) is located within Northumberland Adolescent Services (NAS). The service also includes a 14+ statutory social work team, 18+ leaving care service, accommodation team, SORTED drug and alcohol service, and a participation and advocacy team.

The YJS comprises 29 members of staff, including restorative justice workers, youth justice officers, exploitation workers, child to parent violence and abuse (CPVA) specialist workers, a violence against women and girl's worker (recent appointment), volunteers, and seconded staff from a range of agencies.

Local priorities are influenced by wider goals detailed in the YJS strategic plan 2021-2024. Priorities include first-time entrants, reducing reoffending, and custody. All staff are expected to remain curious about what life is like for children and young people in Northumberland who are at risk of offending or involved in the criminal justice system and provide challenge to the systems and practices in their own organisations that exclude, stigmatise, and blame children and young people who are at risk.

The YJS has developed a substance diversion pathway whereby specialist drug and alcohol workers lead on assessments and intervention plans. The service is committed to a trauma-informed approach which builds on strengths and effective relationships with children to support resilience and achieve positive outcomes. The service offers every victim of youth crime a voice. The health hub aims to provide health and wellbeing support for children and young people who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, providing them with low-level mental health support and signposting to specialist services in the community where needed.

² Data on this page has been supplied by Northumberland YJS.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 16 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 YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- The Northumberland Adolescent Services (NAS) has engaged effectively with partners, stakeholders, and the management board to set a clear strategy for the YJS. This has been articulated well in the YJS business plan (2022-2023).
- The management board includes partners at the appropriate level of seniority. Partners are active in their contribution and positive ambassadors for YJS children. The board is led well with an experienced chair who has good links with various departments in the council, and provides high support and challenge, which supports creativity and innovation. Partners are held to account appropriately.
- Joint working arrangements support the delivery of effective work with children.
- Local strategic partnerships (community safety, reducing reoffending, serious youth violence) understand the needs of YJS children and direct resources appropriately to meet their needs. For example, additional resources to support work with girls have been secured.
- The head of service is highly influential, and this enables the partnership to achieve positive outcomes for children.
- There is effective dialogue between the YJS leadership team and the management board. This creates a positive organisational culture and enables the service to mature.
- The YJS leadership team promotes openness, positive challenge, and innovation as evidenced, for example, by the fire service's use of virtual reality (VR) technology to help children learn.
- Business risks to the YJS are understood well by leaders and there are appropriate controls and action plans to mitigate risk.

Areas for improvement:

- The partnership needs to enhance its work on diversity across all protected characteristics.

- Not all volunteers are given opportunities to input into the YJS business plan, and there needs to be more effective contact between volunteers and board members.
- The consideration and integration of the voices of children and their parents and carers at a strategic level in board meetings is limited.
- Although the more recent board members describe a thorough induction via sessions with the chair of the board and the YJS head of service and team manager, there is no standardised induction

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The NAS provided excellent pastoral and professional support to staff during the pandemic. All staff have a wellbeing action plan that supports positive mental health and assists in building resilience.
- Staffing resources are planned, used competently, and reviewed appropriately to respond to the changing needs and profile of children being supervised by the YJS.
- The workloads of practitioners and managers are realistic, and appropriate attention is paid to ensure that staff are not under pressure. There are effective arrangements to ensure that the quality of work during planned and unplanned absences is uncompromised. Cases are correctly allocated to practitioners with suitable skills and qualifications. Joint working on cases provides additional accountability, learning, and development.
- Staff are supported well in their professional development and progression into other roles. NAS invests in staff to attend bespoke courses. This helps succession planning.
- Staff receive regular case management supervision coupled with biweekly pastoral sessions. This supports them to develop and reflect on the quality of work they deliver to children. Staff are determined to deliver high-quality services.
- All staff have access to in-service learning opportunities on the council's learning platform. This helps them to deliver interventions well to children and enhance their partnership working. Training completed by staff in the past 12 months has included: child criminal exploitation (CCE), child to parent violence (CPVA), AIM3 (assessment, intervention and moving-on), trauma-informed practice, diversity, and mandatory safeguarding.
- The partnership promotes and values a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Employment opportunities are openly advertised, and the NAS offers an extensive package of measures to recruit and retain staff.
- Staff describe a structured and comprehensive induction process, consisting of formal and informal activities and arrangements. All new staff are required to complete a number of youth justice modules on 'learning together'. New employees shadow staff completing youth justice tasks as they develop their learning and are assigned a mentor for the first three months.

Areas for improvement:

- The workforce is predominantly white and female; more work is needed to establish a diverse workforce.
- Leaders should take more responsibility for listening to volunteers. Group supervision for volunteers has historically been valued by them, and its reintroduction should be considered. Not all staff report that they are asked for their views about development of the service.

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 are up-to-date analyses of the needs of children. These cover desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm factors, as well as diversity needs across some protected characteristics. This is informed by management information taken from Asset Plus, audits, thematics, and quality assurance reports.
- Children and their parents and carers are actively invited to provide feedback, and this is used well to improve operational service delivery.
- Children have access to impressive specialist and mainstream services that help them to desist from offending and keep them and others safe. These include speech and language therapy (SALT), where the worker has produced some excellent child-friendly resources; You Only Live Once (YOLO), a knife crime programme; the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), where there are no waiting lists; SORTED, addressing substance misuse; education, training and employment (ETE) clinics; family hubs; and mentoring initiatives. The variety and volume of reparation activity are noteworthy.
- There are well-established, embedded, effective links and relationships with a range of statutory partners, providers, and agencies offering desistance, safeguarding, (MASH [multi-agency safeguarding hub]) and public protection panels (risk management). Oversight is provided effectively through various memorandums of understanding and service level agreements.
- The child to parent violence and abuse (CPVA) offer is innovative and achieving positive outcomes for children and their parents and carers.
- Partners collaborate well together to ensure that engagement with children and their parents and carers is positive.
- The YJS has very strong links with local sentencers and this ensures that courts are aware of the services available to support sentencing.

Areas for improvement:

- The number of victims engaging with the restorative justice offer is higher than the national average but could be increased further.

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:

- The YJS has a range of policies, procedures, and guidance documents that enable staff to carry out their responsibilities. Of the staff that responded to the Inspectorate's staff survey, all reported that they understood 'quite well' or 'very well' the policies and procedures that applied to their roles.
- Policies are regularly reviewed and updated within agreed timescales.
- Services for children are delivered in accessible places and safe environments. These include reparation activities as well as direct work with children. Staff can easily access family hubs across the region and see children in public spaces. Lone working policies operate well, and staff feel protected.
- ICT access, enabling staff to carry out planning, service delivery, and reviewing, works well
- Staff can work effectively from office and remote bases.
- There are a range of quality assurance processes which include random and scheduled auditing, deep dives, and thematics. Auditing is completed by peers, managers across NAS, and members of the board.
- There are effective processes to ensure that the YJS learns from things that go wrong. These include critical learning reviews and audits. Learning is disseminated very well across the service.
- Views of children and their parent or carers are sought formally, at key stages of the supervisory process, and on completion of interventions.

Areas for improvement:

- Some management information that is available and presented to the management board is too broad and lacks detailed analysis and interpretation. More forensic analysis is needed, such as on the impact of out-of-court decision-making.
- The service has yet to fully understand the range of protected characteristics and embed consideration of these into its practice.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

Northumberland YJS has an effective operational engagement and participation strategy, which it uses to gather the views of children and their parents and carers. There is evidence of active listening and change arising from feedback. The YJS and its partners are committed to helping children develop confidence in their contributions to improve services. These have included events with service providers and children, direct feedback about the quality of services received, and opportunities to revise materials. This has produced an environment which values the voices of children and their parents and carers.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 16 children who consented, and 11 children replied. We also spoke to one parent and six children.

All 9 respondents to our text survey gave a score of either nine or 10 out of 10 for the help they felt they had received from the YJS.

One child wrote:

"Before the YOS, I was getting into a lot of trouble. Then, when they entered my life, I changed how and what I did and the people I hung around with that got me into trouble. The YOS helped me massively."

In our telephone and face-to-face interviews, five out of the six children who responded reported that they understood what the YJS is trying to achieve. When asked if they thought the staff had the right skills, they all responded 'yes'. One child said:

"My officer is wonderful - I was struggling after the offence, getting rejection from jobs and in a rough state with my parents. I now see a worker for mental health support - we have weekly sessions. My YOS worker encouraged me to attend when I initially said no!"

One child, when asked about whether he had received any help to prevent him from future offending, replied:

"Yes, the process of getting me diagnosed for ASD [autism spectrum disorder] started at court and my case worker helped with this. I now have a diagnosis and support from Forensic CAMHS and SALT."

When a parent was asked about whether their child had been able to access the right services to stay out of trouble, the response was:

"Yes, access to mentors has given structure and support. The mentor has been really helpful, and she has taken me to activities."

When asked 'what do you most like about the YOS?', one child replied:

"The support I have received has been amazing. They are very supportive and motivating. At the beginning I felt really intimidated and they helped to boost my confidence. I can now do things I would have found too hard to do before."

The quality of relationships that had been established was a clear strength, as evidenced by the following quote:

"My worker is always there for me with advice. She has helped me a lot. She won't tell me what to do, but she will advise me on it, and I can talk things through with her."

Diversity

The information below highlights some of the staffing and children diversity data held by Northumberland YJS.

- 29 per cent of children on the current caseload are girls.
- 90 per cent of staff working in the YJS are female.
- 4.3 per cent of children in the area covered by the YJS are Black, Asian or minority ethnic, and 1.2 per cent of children on the current caseload are Black, Asian or minority ethnic.
- 5 per cent of staff working in the YJS are Black, Asian or minority ethnic.
- 26.7 per cent of children on the current caseload have a learning disability, a learning difficulty or an education, health, and care plan.
- 26.7 per cent of the current caseload have protected characteristics (sexuality, disability, religion, other ethnicity etc.).

Diversity is explicitly integrated within the YJS business plan and there is a commitment to embracing difference, tackling structural barriers, and addressing challenges in a transparent way. The service has a good understanding of the ethnicity of its cohort and has concluded that there is a rising number of girls coming to its attention. This has triggered further analysis and resulted in the appointment of a women and girls' worker. In October 2021, following the publication of the Inspectorate's thematic report into the experience of mixed heritage boys, the YJS undertook an analysis of its cohort. While there were no adverse findings, the YJS continues to monitor trends regularly. For example, it has carried out work to understand the disproportionality outcomes for its cohort of children who are looked after by the local authority.

The diversity of the board could be further enhanced through hearing the perspectives of people with different lived experiences. The chair of the board and partners agree that an expansion of representation would bring additional value to the board. Furthermore, staff within the YJS and partnership are mostly white and female. A range of diversity information is available around disproportionality and there is evidence of some evaluation. More analysis explaining the data is needed. This is acknowledged by the partnership.

The YJS is responsive in meeting diversity training for its staff across the NAS. For example, opportunities to develop cultural competence, and professional curiosity into the impact of discrimination and prejudice on day-to-day life. All of the 11 staff who identified a diversity need in our survey reported that these had been responded to 'very well'. For staff who needed reasonable adjustments (adapted furniture and software on laptops), these had been provided promptly. In addition, managers had been sensitive to respond to the individual circumstances of staff, such as childcare, emergency needs, and individual vulnerabilities due to Covid-19. The service has yet to embed diversity across all protected characteristics. The out-of-court panel report prompts practitioners to consider diversity issues, including looked after children and those with SEND or on an EHCP, but does not prompt ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or gender (other than recording it). The resettlement policy refers to the management of diversity needs through discussions with children and their parents and carers at the initial planning stage of resettlement. The policy could be enhanced to include guidance throughout the supervisory process.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at six community sentences managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating³ 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?	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	67%

Assessment work to support children in desisting from further offending is a notable strength. Practitioners ask the right questions to gain an understanding of why they have offended. They make good use of historical and current information. Additionally, they understand diversity needs and personal circumstances well. We found that practitioners had made some appropriate use of information held by other agencies in the assessment process. Furthermore, they had robustly reviewed the child's level of maturity, and the needs of victims were addressed well. Practitioners consistently invited and included the voice of children and that of their parents and carers to inform what they believed were the root causes of the child's offending.

Assessment activity sought to identify any risks to the child's safety and wellbeing in most cases. Practitioners collected relevant information from other agencies appropriately and used it well to enhance their understanding of the risks to children's safety.

Assessments to identify all relevant factors associated with keeping other people safe were weaker. We found that practitioners had not consistently identified all relevant factors. In some cases, it was unclear to whom the child presented a risk and what the nature of this risk was. More forensic analysis is needed to ensure that behaviours, past and present, are more fully understood. Often, too much reliance was placed on self-reporting, and information was not cross-referenced.

We found evidence of some under-recording in some cases, especially in the assessment of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm. While practitioners were able to explain a broader understanding of these aspects of casework, they needed prompts to help them to be more precise.

³ 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 on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating⁴ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%

Planning activity to address desistance was personalised and undertaken jointly with children. Plans were aligned with other agency plans in the Northumberland Adolescent Services (NAS) to prevent repeat offending and help the child and their family to understand the roles of each service provider. There was an appropriate balance of attention to both strengths and areas of concern, and practitioners explored the child's motivation and maturity well in almost all the inspected cases. In many cases, considerable care had been taken to make sure that planning conversations included attention to diversity needs, some of which were complex. Practitioners liaised well with the substance misuse worker and education worker for guidance on designing a plan that met the child's desistance needs.

Planning to address children's safety and wellbeing was variable. Engagement with other agencies to ensure that safety and wellbeing plans were aligned was not consistent. For example, the nature of historical involvement with children's social care and domestic abuse within the family was often not forensically analysed. Planning, too often, focused on addressing safety and wellbeing linked to the index offence, rather than wider safety and wellbeing concerns. Contingency planning was also weaker. Inspectors did, however, find some positive examples of suitable planning to address emotional regulation and mapping exercises to mitigate exploitation risks.

Planning to keep other people safe was variable and required further development. On occasions, planning failed to promote the safety of other people appropriately. There was a gap in some practitioners' understanding of the potential for sexualised offending. This meant that referrals to specialist workers were overlooked. The specific concerns of actual victims and needs of potential victims were not consistently covered well. Furthermore, while the level of involvement with other agencies was strong, much more work was needed to collect information from public protection partners, especially in cases which had been classified as low to medium risk. Planning did not set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people in one-third of the inspected cases. Again, contingency arrangements needed to be clearer.

⁴ 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 on our website.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁵ 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?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	67%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	83%

Practitioners are skilled at establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with children and families that lead to positive outcomes. Children accessed a range of services which addressed areas of concern (health services), including pro-social identities, education, and emotional wellbeing. They were also signposted to various opportunities to build on strengths and encouraged to access mainstream services, including the Acorns project, which provides support to victims of domestic abuse. In every inspected case, sequencing of interventions and the delivery of services were proportionate and achievable within the timescales. Practitioners were proactive in overcoming structural barriers and involved the appropriate members of the board to achieve positive outcomes. In one case, a child was struggling to register with a general practitioner (GP). The partnership worked together and within 24 hours the child had a named GP. In another example, a child with complex learning needs was helped to access the right services that best met their needs.

The delivery of work to keep children safe was variable. Planned work was not always provided as intended. For example, where other agencies were involved in delivering work, this was often poorly coordinated, with no correspondence or feedback sought by YJS practitioners. Activity lacked cohesion and there was too much focus on the index offence. The impact of other critical factors, for example, adverse childhood experiences, was not always considered robustly. This meant that not all safety and wellbeing needs were understood by the practitioner.

Work to keep other people safe was generally robust, but would benefit from further quality assurance, especially for the effectiveness of joint agency working. Not all cases had been given sufficient attention to the safety and protection of actual and potential victims. Here victim awareness work was often not delivered in a timely way, and information from risk management meetings was not always integrated well into the delivery of services. More professional curiosity is needed when children disclose information which could lead to them potentially causing harm to others.

⁵ 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 on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁶ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	50%

The reviewing of work to assess the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending was strong. Practitioners completed formal, informal, and dynamic reviews as personal circumstances changed. Consideration of a child's strengths and their diversity needs, as well as an analysis of personal and familial circumstances, were evident in casework. Practitioners consistently reviewed children's motivation and suitably considered any barriers that they identified whether individual or structural. Discussions with children and their parents and carers were evidenced well in all the inspected cases. This helped practitioners to gain a fuller understanding of the children's wider day-to-day lived experiences, and empowered parents and carers to engage with their children's supervision.

The quality of reviewing activity in keeping children safe was variable. Where required, reviewing activity did not always respond appropriately to changes linked to safety and wellbeing, in particular, deteriorations in personal relationships. Information from strategy meetings, as part of keeping children safe, was not always gathered systematically and used to inform and adjust plans. When risk classifications were changed, the rationale for the change in some cases remained the same.

Practitioners failed to respond consistently and effectively to keeping other people safe in half of the inspected cases. This area of work, which the YJS itself had highlighted in its improvement plan, needs to improve. On occasions often, plans to protect others from harm were not amended. Inspectors found some delays in case managers responding effectively to new information from and about children. In some cases, there was an over-reliance on focusing on the index offence rather than taking full account of other relevant behaviours, experiences, and information. Written reviews were mostly completed promptly in almost all cases, as required. This ensured that other practitioners involved in delivering risk of harm work had access to up-to-date information.

⁶ 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 on our website.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected nine cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions and seven community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in nine cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating⁷ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	89%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	89%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	78%

In almost all cases, the practitioner had sought to understand the responsibility the child took for their behaviour, attitude towards their offending, and reasons for becoming involved in offending. This analytical method enabled practitioners to dive deeper into the child's identity and how adverse childhood experiences may have contributed to their offending. Diversity issues were examined well, and inspectors found a robust analysis of strengths and areas of concern. The scrutiny of the child's familial and social circumstances was strong, and practitioners understood the impact of early traumatic experiences on current behaviours. Assessments were supported by multi-agency case formulations at the YJS out-of-court disposal panel, and consultations from specialist service providers, for example health and substance misuse. Practitioners took time to assess if there were any structural barriers affecting the child's progress.

Practitioners had used a range of information from other agencies appropriately to support their assessments of children's safety. In almost all cases reviewed, there was a clear written assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing. Concerns around neglect, separation, and the impact of poor emotional wellbeing were recognised well. While the risks to others were generally understood well, in one-third of the inspected cases the analysis of risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who was at risk and the nature of that risk, was weaker. However, in this element of public protection, practitioners needed to access information kept by other agencies and sources in all relevant cases. Inspectors found that some practitioners did not fully understand the broader risks or harm to others, in particular the risk of harm the child presented to other children.

⁷ 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 on our website.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁸ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	89%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	89%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	89%

Planning to tackle desistance took a whole-family approach, was personalised, and co-designed with the children. In all the inspected cases, planning was appropriate to the disposal imposed, and targets agreed were realistic and achievable within the timeframes. Effective joint working in the partnership ensured that plans were aligned with those completed by other agencies. In most of the inspected cases, there was a proportionate focus on strengths, protective factors, and areas of concern, and practitioners considered the child's motivation and maturity well. In most but not all cases, services had been included to support access to mainstream provision, such as positive use of leisure. In almost all cases, diversity needs had been considered appropriately. For example, planning included work to be completed with Forensic CAMHS around sexual behaviour, monitoring of medication for ADHD, bespoke victim awareness work, sleep hygiene, and family work.

Overall, planning to address children's safety and wellbeing was done well. There was effective liaison with other agencies. This ensured that plans fitted together well, and the role of each service provider was clearly understood, including attendance at future strategy discussions meetings. Inspectors observed good partnership work with CAMHS, SALT, and SORTED. The work identified to reduce child to parent violence and aggression (CPVA) was appropriate. Practitioners had identified referrals to specialist services, and contingency arrangements were mostly recorded well.

While overall planning to keep others safe was sufficient, consideration of the needs of actual and potential victims was variable. On occasions, safety plans were not completed comprehensively, and the nature of the risk of harm to others not clear. There were opportunities for external controls to be put in place, for example curfew arrangements, but this did not always happen. Relevant agencies were identified in planning to keep others safe, and risk management was seen as a joint responsibility among public protection agencies. This was evidenced, for example, in the multi-agency looked after partnership arrangements (MALAP). Planning included information-exchange arrangements and a commitment to future meetings to review risks. In planning to keep others safe, contingency planning was variable.

⁸ 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 on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	100%

The quality of services delivered to help children to not repeat their offending behaviour was impressive. We found examples where accommodation support, interventions with schools, and close working with SORTED were improving the child's emotional wellbeing and supporting desistance. Restorative justice interventions were varied and mostly linked to repairing the harm that the child had caused. Many of the letters of apology that we reviewed were suitable with good reflection and insight from children. Practitioners had regular contact with children and their parents or carers, and this led to high levels of engagement. We found strong advocacy from practitioners to support positive education outcomes actively. Additionally, the Extinguish fire awareness initiative delivered by the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service was not only teaching children about the dangers associated with fire, but helping them to gain learning to support them with life and work skills. This was building a prosocial identity.

Service delivery to keep children safe was done well overall. However, inspectors found that there were some delays in responses from some partners, including children's social care. Furthermore, in one case, vulnerability issues were not fully considered, as inspectors believed there was evidence that the child could be being sexually exploited, given the inappropriate behaviour and attitudes they were exhibiting around sexualised language. Inspectors found a timely response from a practitioner to whom a child had disclosed that they had been harmed by their parent; the police officer in the YJS was immediately notified and action taken. We also found some useful 'vape' awareness work being carried out with children.

Inspectors found that in the cases inspected, enough services were delivered to keep other people safe across most aspects of case supervision overall. There was positive evidence of practitioners using adaptations of materials to help children understand in a more meaningful way the harm they had caused. The delivery of anger management interventions was apparent, and liaison with the appropriate public protection agencies took place as required. We also found evidence of innovative work; in one case, the practitioner had used a 'flip the narrative' approach to help a child address and deal with conflict.

⁹ 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 on our website.](#)

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 shared protocol with Northumbria police and all the youth justice services in the region. This includes an out-of-court disposal (OCD) policy, which incorporates joint and defensible decision-making. The out-of-court policy is supported by guidance notes. It covers pre-panel, at-panel and post-panel information-gathering, eligibility criteria, enforcement, and escalation arrangements effectively.
- Outcome 22 – where police defer a prosecution until the accused has been given the opportunity to engage with an intervention activity – is an embedded disposal option. This offers diversion and access to YJS services.
- The voice of victims is a strength in the decision-making process.
- The YJS has a multi-agency out-of-court disposal panel with the appropriate level of representation. External scrutiny of the panel is completed at a pan-regional level and provides auditing and quality assurance.
- Engagement procedures are clear and YJS practitioners can return to the panel when children are not engaging.
- The panel has access to the same range of interventions that are available for post-court cases. These include YOLO, a knife awareness programme, SALT, CAMHS, SORTED, and wider community-based services.
- The YJS collects and has access to considerable management information. At the management board, data trends, local outcomes, and reoffending rates are reviewed and considered.

Areas for improvement:

- The current protocol was 'signed off' in 2019 and should be reviewed.
- Internal scrutiny of the panel needs to be enhanced to support robust decision-making.
- The out-of-court panel report prompts practitioners to consider diversity issues including looked after children and those with SEND or on an EHCP, but does not prompt ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender (other than recording it). Greater understanding of diversity across all protected characteristics is needed.
- Performance analysis focuses on key performance indicators (KPIs) and performance monitoring, but there is little evidence of a detailed analysis to understand why/how outcomes have been successful.
- Trauma considerations need to be strengthened in the report to the panel.
- Arrangements for risk management procedures in high risk of harm cases need to be strengthened.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. This standard has not been rated because there were no resettlement cases that fell within the inspection timeframes.

Strengths:

- The service has a resettlement policy dated February 2022. It was due for review in February 2023. Robust guidance is included. Pathways including suitable accommodation, health, ETE, and constructive use of leisure all feature well in the policy. The five principles of constructive resettlement are embedded well.
- The policy highlights the significance of the principles of constructive resettlement, including well-coordinated services with partners. The need for effective communication and information exchange with service providers and other key stakeholders is explicit in the document.
- Links with the NAS accommodation service are embedded.
- The importance of developing a prosocial identity and providing individualised services is integrated well into the arrangements.
- Meeting the needs of actual and potential victims is central to the work with children and clearly integrated as a priority of supervision.

Areas for improvement:

- Staff currently undertake generic training and practitioners could be provided with learning opportunities to explore resettlement work specifically. While training, support, and development have been offered to staff to inform and support trauma-informed and wellbeing approaches, further work is needed to ensure these are applied and embedded consistently across the service.
- The policy needs to include more explicitly how the needs of minority ethnic children and specifically girls will be addressed.

Further information

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](#).