

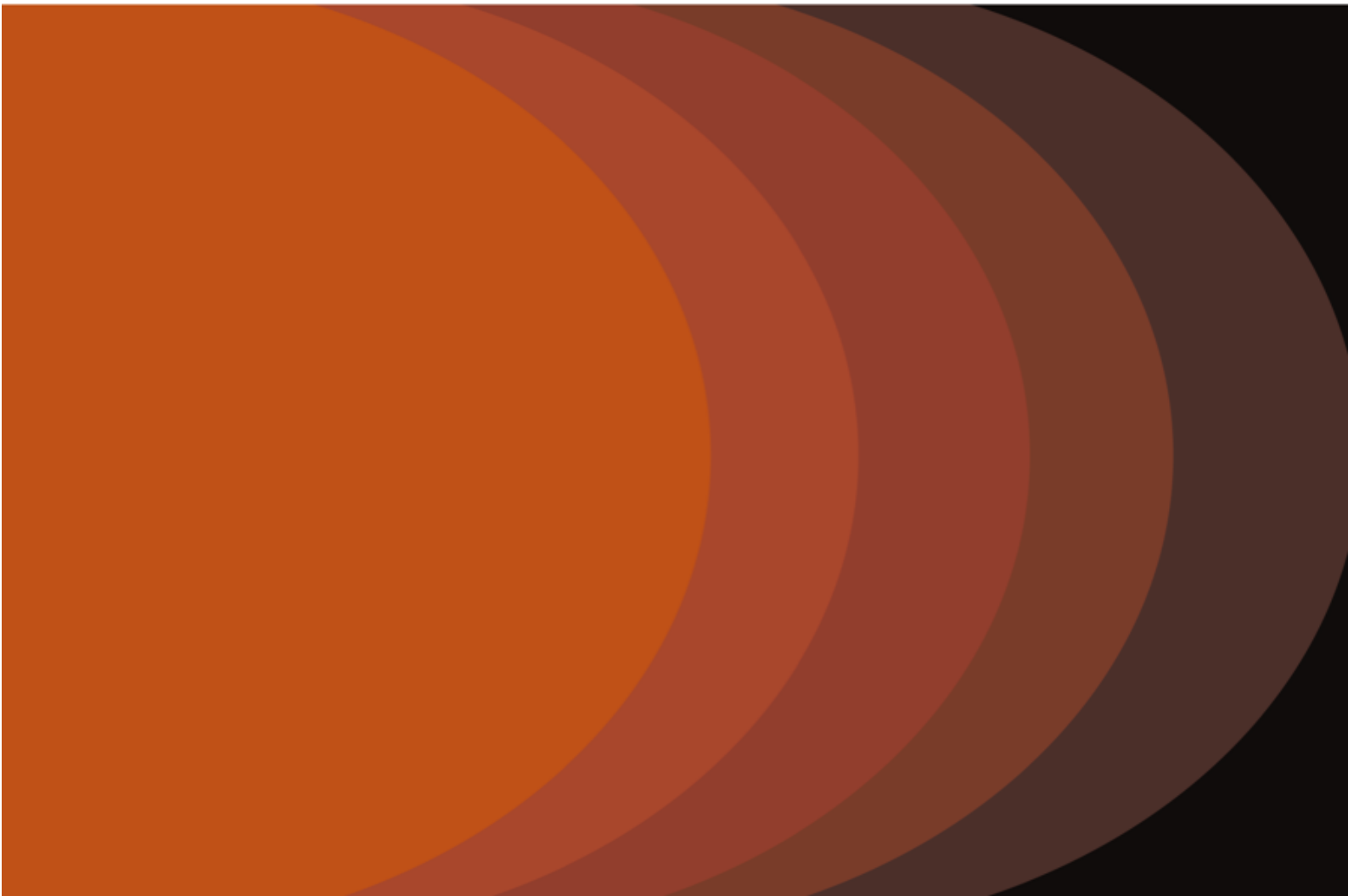


HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in  
**Solihull**

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HM Inspectorate of Probation, December 2023



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## Acknowledgements

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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 justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Solihull 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, Solihull YJS was rated as 'Requires improvement'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was not rated, as there were no resettlement cases within the timescale covered by the inspection.

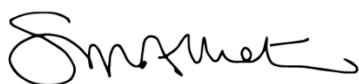
Solihull YJS has experienced significant change since 2015, because of reorganisation activity in children's services in the council, during which staffing in the YJS was halved from a total of 33 to 16.5. It has only been in the past 12 months that the service has begun to recover, and it is to its credit that it achieved seven 'Good' gradings across a number of standards in this inspection.

The service seeks to place children at the heart of its work to meet their needs and help them to desist from reoffending. A personalised approach ensures that children's diversity needs are understood well, and that measures are put in place to help them achieve their best. Staff and volunteers are undoubtedly the organisation's most valuable asset. They are considerate, feel a sense of belonging, and are compassionate and positive advocates for the children they supervise. They demonstrate a desire to learn and to improve the quality of the services they deliver.

The head of service leads the YJS well. She is knowledgeable and skilled, with a desire to push the service to achieve positive outcomes for children. During the past 14 months the board has been galvanised by a tenacious chair who provides clarity of direction and purpose. While there are some strengths in the strategic partnership (probation and violence reduction), education and health, specifically speech, language and communication outcomes for children, need to improve. Furthermore, the board needs to ensure that the voices of children and their parents or carers are better captured to inform strategic developments that drive practice improvements.

Staff have access to a broad range of services to help children and their parents or carers. The use of virtual reality (VR) headsets, to help children involved in knife crime and gangs to understand the risks of these behaviours is innovative and creative. Work linked to supporting children's safety and wellbeing and the potential to cause harm to others is, however, variable. This needs to improve. Our inspection found that, across court and out-of-court work, not all staff consistently understood and applied the systems and processes to keep children safe and prevent them from causing harm to others.

Solihull YJS is an improving service, after experiencing considerable structural challenges in its recent past when staffing was significantly reduced. It can now rightly be proud of the progress it is making. In this report we make five recommendations to improve its work further. We trust that they will assist the service as it continues its development journey.



**Sue McAllister**

Interim HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## Ratings

**Solihull Youth Justice Service**  
Fieldwork started September 2023



**Score 17/36**

**Overall rating** **Requires improvement** 





### 1. Organisational delivery

1.1	Governance and leadership	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
1.2	Staff	<b>Good</b>	
1.3	Partnerships and services	<b>Good</b>	
1.4	Information and facilities	<b>Good</b>	

### 2. Court disposals

2.1	Assessment	<b>Inadequate</b>	
2.2	Planning	<b>Inadequate</b>	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
2.4	Reviewing	<b>Requires improvement</b>	

### 3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1	Assessment	<b>Good</b>	
3.2	Planning	<b>Good</b>	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Good</b>	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	<b>Good</b>	

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

4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	<b>Not rated</b>
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<sup>1</sup> The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YJS rating.

## Recommendations

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

### **The Solihull Youth Justice Service should:**

1. improve the quality of assessment and planning work to keep children safe and manage the risk of harm they present to others,
2. ensure that management oversight is consistently effective in reviewing Asset Plus activity, so that practitioners are clear about what they need to improve.

### **The Solihull Youth Justice Board should:**

3. ensure consistent attendance at the management board from senior education leaders to achieve positive education outcomes for all children,
4. address the gap in speech, language and communication provision for children and ensure that services are provided which assess and respond to children's communication needs,
5. integrate the voices of children and their parents or carers into strategic decision-making.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Solihull YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 18 September 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence began between Monday 19 September 2022 and Friday 14 July 2023; and out-of-court disposals that were delivered between Monday 19 September 2022 and Friday 14 July 2023. We also conducted 15 interviews with case managers.

Solihull is a small metropolitan borough council in the West Midlands region, with a population of around 216,245 people. Solihull YJS is a small service within children's services, now consisting of 25 full-time equivalent staff. Solihull YJS is covered by the:

- West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner area, covering Coventry, Solihull, Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley
- Birmingham and Solihull Local Justice Area, which is serviced by a shared youth court in Birmingham
- Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board and Partnership NHS Trust.

Solihull is one of the least deprived local authorities in the West Midlands, but a significant proportion of the north Solihull population live in the most deprived 10 per cent of England. Nineteen per cent of children under the age of 16 make up the population of Solihull. Just under 17 per cent are classified as having special educational needs, which is in line with the England average. Forty-three per 10,000 children are on a child protection plan (England average 42), 114 per 10,000 children are looked after (England average 70) and 464 per 10,000 are children in need (England average 334). The area is becoming more diverse, with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities now accounting for 18 per cent of the population.

The number of first-time entrants to the YJS fell by 60 per cent between 2017 and 2021.

In 2015 Solihull YJS underwent significant structural changes as part of a children's services reorganisation. This resulted in sizeable reductions in YJS staffing (50 per cent). Since then, recovery has been a challenge, and it has only been in the last 12 months that capacity and staffing have increased. Solihull children's services has been on a rapid improvement journey since its Ofsted inspection in October 2022, which graded the service 'Inadequate'.

A new operating model is being embedded and has resulted in an increase in capacity. Exploitation and missing teams also sit under the same service manager, allowing for more joined-up work to support vulnerable children.

Changes to the YJS, and the expansion of the teams, has enabled the service to provide a holistic response to children, who often present as victims of/at risk of exploitation but also enter the criminal justice system.

## Domain one: Organisational delivery

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To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS 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.

Requires improvement

#### Strengths:

- The management board has set a clear vision and strategy through its effective engagement with the YJS, partners and stakeholders. Business risks to the YJS are understood well by leaders and there are appropriate controls in place to mitigate risk.
- Links to wider key strategic boards largely support positive outcomes for children. Partners are active in their participation and have become more influential advocates for YJS children.
- Local strategic partnerships (serious youth violence reduction, reducing reoffending, combatting drugs and alcohol and corporate parenting) understand the needs of YJS children and appropriately direct resources to meet their needs.
- The management board is led well, with a knowledgeable chair who has vast experience of working in the youth justice system and who has galvanised the board. Partners are appropriately held to account.
- Effective induction arrangements for board members ensure that senior leaders understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Most YJS partnership arrangements support the delivery of effective work with YJS children.
- There is purposeful engagement between the YJS leadership team and the management board. The 'back to practice' initiative is noteworthy.
- The YJS leadership team promotes openness and constructive challenge, creating a safe space for all to contribute.

#### Areas for improvement:

- The partnership needs to develop and enhance its work on implementing the learning from the management information it has gathered across protected characteristics – this needs to be explicitly articulated in its Youth Justice Plan.

- The partnership has not adequately prioritised educational outcomes for children.
- The partnership has not sufficiently considered children's speech and language needs, and for some children this has impacted on their outcomes.
- The frequency of attendance at board meetings needs to be consistent across all statutory partners.
- The partnership needs to broaden its links with specialist community providers who deliver services for children with a range of lived experiences.
- Volunteers should be given more opportunities to contribute to the Youth Justice Plan and other key documents.
- The management board needs to review the way it gathers children's and parents' or carers' views and the way it uses these views to inform its vision and strategy.
- There is a disconnect between the strategic oversight of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm practice, and effective management oversight, particularly in post-court work.



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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.

Good

### Strengths:

- Solihull YJS provides good pastoral care, including a weekly 'Wednesday Wellness' gathering. The team wellbeing plan is used to get staff and create a sense of belonging. The YJS workforce is diverse and is representative of the local population.
- Staffing resources are planned and used effectively, and appropriately reviewed to respond to the changing needs and profile of the children being supervised by the YJS. The workloads of staff and managers, including volunteers, are now manageable following a workload review and the recruitment of additional staff.
- Comprehensive arrangements are in place to ensure that workload and practitioner capacity is managed effectively during planned and unplanned absences.
- Cases are largely correctly allocated to practitioners with suitable skills and qualifications. Joint working of cases provides additional accountability, learning and development.
- The YJS supports staff well in their professional development, and invests in them so that they can make progress in their careers. Staff receive regular case management supervision, space in learning circles, and practice development events to improve their practice. Staff are resolute in delivering high-quality services.
- Staff describe a structured and comprehensive induction process that combines formal and informal activities and arrangements. New staff are each allocated a mentor.
- 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: safeguarding (at different levels according to role and experience), risk management, domestic abuse, introduction to child and adolescent development, restorative practice, exploitation tier 4, trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy and child-first effective practice.
- The partnership champions and values a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Employment opportunities are openly advertised.

### Areas for improvement:

- Learning, development and training are not yet leading to effective and consistent work to address safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others.

- Clinical supervision is not readily available.
- Management oversight, particularly in terms of overseeing the quality of assessment activity, is not yet consistent and needs improvement to drive and embed effective practice.
- Reward and recognition arrangements should be strengthened or enhanced.

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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:

- There is a comprehensive and up to date analysis of the desistance needs of YJS children. The analysis considers safety and wellbeing and risk of harm factors, as well as diversity needs across protected characteristics. This is informed by management information extracted from Asset Plus, audits, thematic inspections and quality assurance processes.
- Children and their parents and carers are actively invited to provide feedback to support service development.
- There is good access to most mainstream and specialist services that help children to desist from offending and keep them and others safe. These include SOLAR (Solihull Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) for (emotional wellbeing), a weapons programme that is delivered creatively through VR handsets, SIAS (Solihull Integrated Addiction Services) for (substance misuse) and the MAC (Midlands Arts Centre) music project.
- The co-location of partner agencies in Elmwood Place allows good collaboration.
- There are well-established links and relationships with various statutory partners, services, and agencies that provide desistance and safeguarding (such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, and exploitation and missing team) and public protection interventions (such as risk management panels). These are overseen through various memorandums of understanding (MOUs), service level agreements, and terms of reference for different service providers.
- The YJS has good links with local sentencers, and this ensures that courts are aware of the services available to support sentencing.

### Areas for improvement:

- The YJS could do more to identify interventions specifically for mixed-heritage children and set up projects that would benefit broader community groups.
- There is a need to increase the number of reparation projects and consider how these could be accredited to provide a qualification.
- Joint training with partners to improve safety and wellbeing and risk of harm work is needed.
- The achievement of positive ETE outcomes for all children needs a clearer focus and prioritisation.
- Ensure children have access to appropriate speech, language and communication services

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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.

Good

### Strengths:

- The YJS has a number of relevant policies, procedures and guidance in place that enable staff to undertake their responsibilities. All staff in our staff survey reported that they understood 'quite well', or 'very well' the policies and procedures that applied to their roles.
- Policies are regularly reviewed. Inspectors found an extensive list of current policies that apply internally and externally to the work of the YJS. This sets out the current status of the policies and when subsequent reviews were scheduled.
- Services for children are delivered in accessible and safe environments. Most children are seen in community locations, or appointments take place in children's homes.
- Information and communication technology access enabling staff to carry out planning, service delivery and reviewing works well.
- Staff can complete their work effectively from office and remote locations.
- There are a range of robust quality assurance and management monitoring processes, which include auditing.
- The YJS benchmarks its work against findings from new research and thematic inspections.
- Effective processes are in place to ensure that the YJS learns from things that go wrong. These include learning circles, reviews and audits. Learning is disseminated well across the partnership.
- Information-sharing, MOUs and governance arrangements are robust.

### Areas for improvement:

- Elmwood Place does not provide a suitable environment for positive engagement with children.
- Quality assurance of case work is not consistent.
- Strategic and operational implementation of learning from data and management information needs to improve.
- The YJS should carry out additional deep dive analyses to better understand children's needs and determine its activities.

## Involvement of children and their parents or carers

Solihull YJS has recently produced an engagement and participation strategy (September 2023), although listening to the voices of children and their parents or carers has been central to its ambition to improve service delivery for many years. We found evidence of formal and scheduled activity that is enabling the YJS to learn from the experiences of children and their parents or carers. This included two bespoke events run twice yearly and regular collection of information from exit interviews and a range of questionnaires following the completion of interventions. This has resulted in a culture that acknowledges and values the voices of children and their parents and carers. There is, however, a need to ensure that the information gathered is heard at board level and applied to inform strategic developments.

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 10 children who consented, and five children and parents or carers replied. We also spoke with five parents and three children.

All five respondents to our text survey gave scores of between seven and 10 out of 10 for how they rated the YJS.

In our telephone interviews, all three children 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 parent said:

*'The officer is great. She gets my daughter. She doesn't use long and complicated words when speaking with her. This helps my daughter to open up because she has lots of learning needs.'*

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:

*'Education is a problem. I don't think that the officer has much authority with the school. She tries her best, but my daughter is not getting the best education she deserves.'*

One child's reply to the same question was:

*'The drugs stuff was good. I didn't know how bad things were getting. Chatting made a big difference. It's still hard but I think I will get there.'*

When asked 'what do you most like about the YJS', one parent replied:

*'The care they show is brilliant. They have literally saved my life. I don't know where I would be without them.'*

Another child's reply to the same question was:

*'My worker put me at ease and was never pushy. I've gone through a lot in my past and I felt she proper cared and was interested in me even though I had done a bad thing.'*

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

*'The worker was very knowledgeable and used different ways of talking about different things. It's not always easy to talk about personal things but she gave me space and never rushed me.'*

## Diversity

The information below highlights some of the YJS's data on the diversity of its staff and children.

- 10 per cent of children on the current caseload are girls.
- 61 per cent of staff working in the YJS are female.
- 26 per cent of children in the area covered by the YJS are black, Asian or minority ethnic, and 35 per cent of children on the current caseload are black, Asian or minority ethnic.
- 39 per cent of staff working in the YJS are black, Asian or minority ethnic.
- 62 per cent of children on the current caseload have a learning disability, a learning difficulty or an education, health and care plan.
- 70 per cent of the current caseload have multiple protected characteristics (such as sexuality, disability, religion or ethnicity).

There is a clear commitment from the management board to addressing diversity and disproportionate outcomes for children. Services are personalised and this theme is evidenced well in the casework that inspectors reviewed. Disproportionality data is understood well; however, activity to address findings is developing but not yet rooted.

There is a comprehensive and up to date analysis of the children's desistance needs. The analysis considers diversity needs across the protected characteristics.

The out-of-court disposal policy needs to make clearer reference to diversity and trauma and how these should be considered in the decision-making process. The resettlement policy refers to managing diversity needs through discussions with children and their parents or carers at an early stage of resettlement planning. It promotes a personalised approach but provides limited guidance on effective diversity work. There is no reference to understanding the child's lived experience, or to trauma and prejudice.

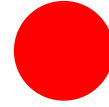
Inspectors found some excellent examples where the children's learning needs (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder) were managed sensitively and effectively. The increase in mentoring opportunities for children is a positive development and targeted matching would be helpful where children feel this would help them. Most staff are confident in having conversations with children about their protected characteristics. This is encouraging. YJS staff undertake mandatory equality and diversity training, as required, and staff meetings are used well to develop diversity practice. This is supported by presentations from external speakers, for example on the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in the West Midlands. Staff who identify a diversity need have their needs met well. If staff need reasonable adjustments (such as adapted furniture or software on laptops), these are provided in a timely way.

The diversity of the YJS staff team is strong. The equality and diversity adviser adds value to the work of the YJS, as evidenced by the collection of data on the protected characteristics.

## 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.

Inadequate

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?	50%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	<b>33%</b>
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>33%</b>

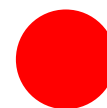
The analysis in assessments to support children in desisting from further offending was variable. Practitioners did not always ask the right questions to gain an understanding of why children had offended. They often failed to make good use of historical and current information. Additionally, their understanding of the children's diversity needs and personal circumstances was not consistent. We found that practitioners had not always made appropriate use of information held by other agencies in the assessment process. Furthermore, assessments did not routinely include the structural barriers that were leading some children to offend. However, practitioners had a better understanding of the child's strengths and protective factors. They consistently invited and included the voice of children and that of their parents or carers to inform what they believed were the root causes of the child's offending.

The analysis in assessment activity to identify any risks to the child's safety and wellbeing was weak. Practitioners did not consistently draw on relevant plans held by other agencies to enhance their understanding of the risks to children's safety.

Assessments identifying and analysing all relevant factors associated with keeping other people safe were not robust in too many of the inspected cases. 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, practitioners relied too much on self-reporting, and did not cross-reference information. This led to weaker judgements and put actual and potential victims at risk of harm.

<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 on our website.](#)

## 2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	50%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	<b>33%</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	50%

Planning activity to address desistance was not always personalised and undertaken jointly with children. Plans were generally not aligned with other agency plans to prevent repeat offending and help the child and their family to understand the roles of each service provider. There was suitable attention to both strengths and areas of concern, but practitioner's exploration of the child's motivation and maturity was variable in the inspected cases. Practitioners took considerable care to make sure that planning conversations included attention to diversity needs, some of which were complex. They liaised well with the substance misuse worker and health practitioner for guidance on designing a plan that met the child's desistance needs.

Planning to promote children's safety and wellbeing needed improvement. 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, child-to-parent violence and domestic abuse within the family was often not forensically analysed. Planning too often focused on addressing safety and wellbeing concerns linked to the index offence, rather than wider safety and wellbeing concerns, and did not address the controls necessary to achieve safety for the child. Contingency planning also required strengthening.

Planning to keep other people safe was variable and required further development. On too many occasions, planning failed to promote the safety of other people appropriately. There was a gap in some practitioners' understanding of trauma and the link to further offending. This meant that referrals to specialist workers were overlooked. The specific concerns of actual victims and the needs of potential victims were not consistently covered well. Furthermore, while the level of involvement with other agencies, where required was stronger, much more work was needed to collect information from public protection partners, especially in cases that had been classified as low-to-medium risk. Planning did not consistently 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 much clearer.

<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 on our website.](#)



## 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	67%
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?	<b>50%</b>

Practitioners were mostly skilled at building and maintaining meaningful relationships with children and families that supported positive outcomes. Children accessed a range of services that addressed areas of concern (emotional regulation and substance misuse), including pro-social identities and constructive use of leisure. They were also signposted to various opportunities to build on strengths and encouraged to access mainstream services, including FITCAP, a project that provides mentoring support. However, the sequencing of interventions and the delivery of services were not always achievable within the timescales available. Practitioners were often creative in their work. In some cases we found that practitioners had modified the way they delivered services and were using a range of techniques to engage with children, for example playdough, picture cards and case studies. These arrangements were working and supporting desistance.

The delivery of work to keep children safe was variable. Planned work was not always offered as intended. For example, where other agencies were involved in delivering work, this was often coordinated inconsistently, with limited correspondence or feedback sought by YJS practitioners. Activity lacked structure and there was too much focus on the index offence. The impact of other critical factors, for example child-to-parent violence, 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 not consistent and would benefit from further management oversight, especially for the effectiveness of a robust delivery of services to keep other people safe. Practitioners had not sufficiently emphasised the safety and protection of actual and potential victims in all cases. They did not always deliver victim awareness/empathy work in a timely way or integrate information from risk management meetings effectively into the delivery of services. More professional curiosity is needed when children disclose new information that could lead to them potentially causing 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 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 rating<sup>5</sup> for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	83%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	<b>50%</b>
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>50%</b>

When required, work to review the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending was strong. Practitioners completed formal, informal and dynamic reviews, as personal circumstances altered. Consideration of a child's strengths and their diversity needs, and an analysis of their personal and familial circumstances, were clearly evident in reviewing activity. Practitioners consistently reviewed children's motivation and appropriately took note of any barriers that they identified, whether personal or structural. Discussions with children and their parents were evidenced well in almost all the inspected cases. This helped practitioners to gain a fuller understanding of the children's broader day-to-day lived experiences, and empowered parents and carers to engage with their children's supervision.

The quality of reviewing activity to keep children safe was variable. Where required, reviews did not consistently respond appropriately to changes linked to deteriorations in personal relationships in the home. Information from risk management and 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 explanation for the change in some cases remained the same.

Practitioners failed to carry out consistent and effective work to keep other people safe in half of the inspected cases. This area of work, which the YJS itself had highlighted in its quality assurance findings, needs to improve. In some instances, plans to protect others from harm were not modified. Inspectors found some delays in case managers responding to new information from and about children. Some focused too much on the index offence rather than considering all relevant behaviours, trauma and information from parents or carers. Written reviews were not always completed promptly as required. This meant that other practitioners involved in delivering risk of harm work did not have access to the most up to date information.

<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 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 three youth conditional cautions, four community resolutions and two other disposals. 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 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?	89%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	<b>67%</b>
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	<b>67%</b>

Overall, analysis of desistance was done well, and youth justice officers had sought to grasp the responsibility the child took for their behaviour, their attitude towards their offending and their reasons for becoming involved. This approach allowed practitioners to delve deeper into how children's lived experiences may have contributed to their offending.

Practitioners' attention to the role that diversity factors had played in the children's offending was impressive. It was clear they had invested time in building a clearer picture of the child's lived experience. Youth justice officers actively sought information from other agencies. This helped them to consider patterns of previous behaviour and any barriers to engagement.

Assessment work to identify and analyse risks to the child's safety and wellbeing was weaker. Practitioners, while accessing information well, did not always use the information from other agencies, especially findings from their assessments. Inspectors did not agree with a small number of risk classifications made by case managers, these incorrect classifications should have been identified by managers.

Assessment activity did not comprehensively identify and analyse the risk of harm to others posed by the child. We found several examples where case managers had underestimated the risk of harm to others. This included a failure to identify who is at risk and the nature of that risk. Too often assessments lacked a forensic analysis and the context of risk of harm was not recognised well enough.

<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 on our website.](#)

## 3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating<sup>7</sup> 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?	<b>67%</b>
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	<b>67%</b>

Planning was appropriately linked to work to support the child's desistance. Plans largely included key services or identified which services would deliver these interventions and within what timescales. This was captured in a child-friendly 'my family plan', which was completed with the child and their parents or carers. Plans mostly identified how the child learns, and this supported effective work to reduce the likelihood of further offending.

Given that practitioners had spent a considerable and meaningful amount of time with children and their parents and carers, they had access to substantial amounts of information. This helped them to assess how prepared children were to engage with services.

However, planning did not always adequately promote the safety and wellbeing needs of all children. In these cases, there was insufficient evidence to reassure inspectors that all staff fully recognised the need for robust plans that would help to keep children safe. The information included in planning frequently lacked detail. Furthermore, practitioners had not aligned their plans with those prepared by children's social care. Additionally, planning to involve other partners was often variable.

Planning activity to promote other people's safety was inconsistent. Practitioners did not always liaise effectively with the police, and risks to actual and potential victims did not always come through in plans.

Contingency planning was too generic in a small number of cases, and did not always include the timings of the action needed. The absence of robust arrangements led to the potential for further harm being caused to others, often in the home. Encouragingly, inspectors found that practitioners engaged well with the victim worker who was identified to deliver restorative justice work. Comprehensive plans that consider the safety of all actual and potential victims are needed. This will help practitioners to ensure that, in their supervision of children, they remain focused on reducing harm to others.

<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 on our website.](#)

### 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?	89%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	<b>78%</b>
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	<b>78%</b>

The quality of services to help children to not commit further offences was much better. We found examples where work on developing a pro-social identity and participation in positive activities (sport, leisure and music) were provided, and these were improving the child's emotional wellbeing and supporting desistance. Reparation work was personalised to the individual child and focused on supporting life skills. These findings were also evidenced from direct feedback given to us by the children and parents or carers who spoke with us.

Practitioners maintained regular contact with children and their parents or carers, with good levels of engagement. This was not limited to 'catch-ups' and information-gathering, but also involved delivering a range of interventions that supported the child's development and progress, such as effective mentoring support.

Service delivery to keep children safe was mostly carried out well. Practitioners made good use of specialist services, such as SIAS (substance misuse) and SOLAR (emotional wellbeing). In several cases, practitioners used the learning they had acquired about the impact of adverse childhood experiences to support work on safety.

Work with partners to keep children safe was not consistent, and coordination of this work was variable. Attention is needed to resolve this variability in practice. Initial gaps in assessment and planning for this work were having a negative impact on service delivery. The YJS has numerous assurance and gatekeeping systems in place, but these were not working well enough.

In most inspected cases, enough services were delivered to keep other people safe. There was evidence of risk management meetings taking place. However, the attention paid to the needs of potential and actual victims was an area requiring development, although in some cases we found evidence of victim empathy work being completed. VR handsets were used to help children understand the risks involved in carrying knives. Effective restorative work was being delivered.

<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 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 Solihull youth justice prevention and out-of-court disposal partnership agreement with the West Midlands Police. The out-of-court policy covers pre-panel, at-panel and post-panel information-gathering, eligibility criteria, enforcement, escalation arrangements, decision-making in cases where children have previous offending histories, and arrangements for liaising with partners to support diversion.
- Arrangements are in place to ensure that the voice of victims, children and their parents or carers is included in the decision-making process.
- Children receive effective out-of-court services, and provision is strong.
- Panel arrangements support timely decision-making and diversion. Assessments are completed within 10 working days. Interventions start without delay.
- The YJS has an out-of-court joint decision-making process (triage) where the decision-maker can promptly access information from a range of agencies, including the police, YJS staff, exploitation team practitioner, violence reduction partnership (community navigator), SIAS (substance misuse), the health practitioner (SOLAR) and the children's social care (early help services) social worker.
- External scrutiny arrangements of the joint decision-making process work well and are supported by effective auditing and quality assurance practice.
- Compliance mechanisms are clear, with the use of warnings, engaging with partners and, as a last resort, a final warning and charge to court.
- Children receiving an out-of-court disposal have access to the same range of interventions that are available for post-court cases. Interventions are delivered using a strengths-based approach.

#### Areas for improvement:

- The out-of-court disposal policy needs to make clearer reference to diversity and trauma and how to consider these in the decision-making process.
- There is no education representative on the triage panel.
- There are no internal scrutiny processes or procedures.
- Children and their parents or carers have not yet been directly involved in any evaluation of the out-of-court disposal policy, but plans are in place to address this.

## 4.1. Resettlement

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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:**

- Solihull YJS has recently produced a resettlement practice guidance and process policy dated August 2023. This sets out clear guidance on what practitioners should and should not do. All pathways, including suitable accommodation, health, ETE, and constructive use of leisure, feature well in the policy. The five principles of constructive resettlement are embedded well.
- The policy emphasises 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.
- The local authority's responsibility for the provision of accommodation for resettlement cases is unambiguous.
- The importance of developing a pro-social identity and providing individualised services is integrated well into the arrangements.
- Meeting the needs of actual and potential victims is central to work with children and is embedded as a priority of supervision.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Staff currently undertake generic training. Practitioners could be provided with learning opportunities to explore resettlement work specifically.
- The policy needs to be more explicit about how to address the needs of minority ethnic children and, specifically, girls.
- There is no reference to understanding the lived experience of the child, or the trauma or prejudice they have experienced.
- Practitioners need more guidance on how to support children's emotional wellbeing.

## 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.](#)