

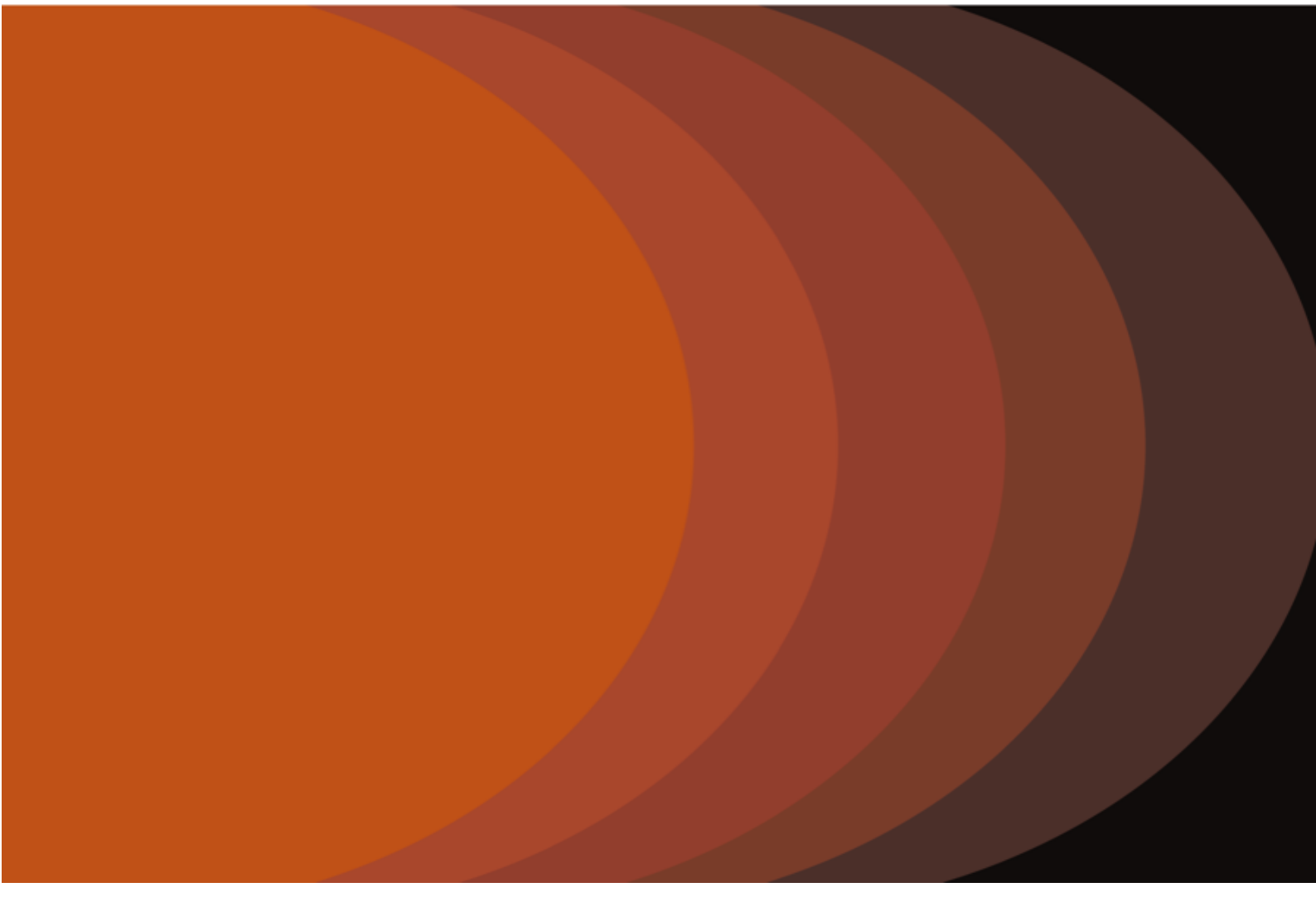


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Northamptonshire

HM Inspectorate of Probation, October 2023



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Foreword

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

Overall, Northamptonshire YOS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Outstanding'.

The YOS partnership is located within a wider Children's Trust. The trust provides clear direction for the service and positive alignment to the rest of children's services in Northamptonshire. This is a well-governed service. We found that the use of data by the board was to a high standard, and that great efforts had been made to make the information useable and to foster appropriate engagement and challenge by board members.

There is an experienced and committed board chair who has the support of an exceptional head of service and a committed, dynamic, and thoughtful management team. We found an effective partnership and identified detailed evaluative work by the police in relation to prevention and diversion which positively influenced strategic thinking and operational delivery. Board members take an active role in developing the work of the YOS, particularly the police and health representatives, and we saw some excellent examples of board members advocating for the work of the YOS in their own organisations, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for YOS children.

The delivery of work with children was of a consistently high standard across statutory and out-of-court disposals. The development of positive working relationships with the children, combined with the range of options for specialist referral available to case managers, meant that children positively engaged with the YOS and could access appropriate services to support them. The positive results from our children's survey are a testament to the quality of working relationships on which the service is built.

A theme throughout our inspection, however, was that the diversity of children's needs (their protected characteristics in equalities legislation) was not always considered or responded to. We found instances where a child's heritage, learning ability or sexuality were identified but not clearly considered when formulating initial assessments or planning activities, and suggest this is an area for development. We also found that for assessment activity in out-of-court disposals there needed to be a greater analysis and understanding of the factors which support children to stop offending.

Through delivering the recommended improvements we have identified we are confident that Northamptonshire YOS will build on their positives and take their service from strength to strength, further improving the lives of the children it is working with.



Marc Baker
Chief Operating Officer

Ratings

Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service

Fieldwork started July 2023

Score 24/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Outstanding



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Good



2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



2.4 Reviewing

Good



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Requires improvement



3.2 Planning

Good



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Good



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Outstanding



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

Recommendations

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

The Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service management board should:

1. take steps to appoint to the management board senior managers with an education focus
2. review the Probation Service investment in Northamptonshire YOS to ensure it reflects the expected level of seconded staff for a youth offending service of this size. Improve work with the voluntary sector and consider a board representative from this area of interest, in particular to increase the range of individuals working with the children who reflect their heritage or other protected characteristics.

The Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service should:

3. develop the effective management oversight of, and training opportunities for, case managers to improve their awareness of and responsiveness to children's diverse needs
4. improve children's access to the health and justice team through a more flexible referral process
5. increase management oversight of planning for post court work and the assessment of children in out-of-court disposal work to ensure this drives high-quality case management analysis and practice.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (YOS) over a period of a week, beginning 17 July 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 11 July 2022 and 05 May 2023; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 11 July 2022 and 05 May 2023; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 11 July 2022 and 05 May 2023. We also conducted 41 interviews with case managers.

Northamptonshire YOS is hosted by Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT). This configuration is different to children's services in other local authorities. The youth offending service is owned by the North and West Northamptonshire unitary councils but is managed and operates independently of them.

Northamptonshire YOS works with the North and West Northamptonshire Councils and partners including health, police, education, community safety partnership, to deliver the best outcomes for children, young people, and the community.

The executive director of children's services (DCS) North Northamptonshire Council is the chair of the YOS management board. The DCS for West Northamptonshire Council is the deputy chair.

The current YOS head of service was appointed in September 2019. After undertaking a thorough assessment of service performance, a 'back to basics' performance drive was implemented. Performance improved across all areas over a sustained period. In 2021, the YOS revisited its performance approach, which led to the production of the 'heads up performance accountability report'. This report highlights up-and-coming pieces of work, which enables staff and managers to better plan their work. Improvements have been implemented following quality assurance activities including gathering the voice of service users and a staff survey.

As well as post-court case management responsibilities, the YOS has a prevention and diversion team, including the 'Turnaround' programme. This is an expression of the service commitment to diverting children away from criminal justice outcomes, wherever possible. The service works with partners to deliver out-of-court disposals through a panel who agree the most appropriate disposal. These arrangements are well embedded, and a full evaluation is planned for 2023-24 to ensure the YOS continues to take a contemporary, evidence-based approach.

There is a clear focus on disproportionality, with all aspects of the service's work carefully monitored for the over-representation of children from different heritages, girls, children with special educational needs, and children looked after by the local authorities. The data show that black and mixed heritage children in the 'offending population', remain over-represented. The group recorded as 'ethnic minority' – predominantly children of eastern European heritage – are also over-represented. There are comprehensive plans to address these areas of disproportionality.

Monitoring gender in the caseload has led to the development of a specific intervention for girls working with the YOS and there has been a reduction in the numbers of girls over time. With regard to special educational needs, a revised education offer was adopted in September 2022, aligned to the recommendations of the HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic education, training and employment inspection (2022). The trajectory for first-time entrants is downwards, with comparatively low rates of reoffending. Positive performance is based on a thorough understanding of the needs of children and a strong partnership approach to providing services that meet these needs.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Good

Strengths:

- There is clear direction of the vision and priorities from the YOS management board. The position adopted - to successfully divert many young people from the path of criminality, offering them the opportunities for positive personal growth and development - recognises the importance of partnership working.
- The YOS management board is committed to see 'children first' and champion the needs of children throughout the work.
- There are clear equality objectives in the strategic plan within the priorities for tackling disproportionality. There is positive identification and analysis of the prevalence of children's needs in relation to gender, substance misuse, looked-after status, special educational needs, and mental health care and emotional wellbeing.
- The board chair has occupied the position for the last 18 months and is supported by an equivalent grade deputy chair. The chair has managed the board through a significant period of local authority restructuring.
- Board members take an active role in developing the work of the YOS. The police and health representatives have translated their understanding of the needs of children working with the YOS into substantial investment of people resource into the YOS team.
- There is strong evidence of police and health board members advocating for the work of the YOS in their own organisations.
- Members of the management board also attend other boards (e.g. health and wellbeing boards) within the relevant authorities. This enables them to advocate for the needs of YOS children.
- The voice of the child is clear in the work of the YOS, at both operational and strategic levels. The board receives a regular analysis of the feedback given by children at the end of their contact with the YOS. The experience of children is also heard through regular case presentations, including a presentation by a child currently working with the YOS.
- There is clear understanding of partner roles in relation to work with the YOS, with strong partnership working from health, police, and substance misuse services. Effective collaboration was reported to us by children's services. There is evidence of the use of trauma-informed approaches across the partnership.

Areas for improvement:

- A senior leader with a specific education remit would be a beneficial addition to the board to ensure that the educational needs of children in Northamptonshire are understood at a strategic level.
- There is no representation from the voluntary sector sitting on the board and this may add a valuable perspective.
- Attendance by some board members has been inconsistent.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- This is a vibrant, enthusiastic, and engaged group of staff. There has been little staff turnover in the previous couple of years, making this a stable and experienced workforce.
- Staff are confident that they have the skills, knowledge, and experience to work with what is a complex caseload, which was reflected in many of the cases inspected.
- Almost all staff thought that their workload was manageable. Workload is actively managed, and the workload management tool takes into account: the risk of serious harm posed by the child; safety and wellbeing levels; the number of appointments conducted by the case manager each week; the case manager's role (for example, are they the primary or secondary worker); and the distance the case manager needs to travel to complete appointments.
- All staff receive formal monthly supervision (informal support is positive with effective follow-up to check progress and any additional help that may be needed). At the heart of work with staff is concern about the individual's wellbeing. There is access to individual support beyond the confines of supervision, via the trust's staff support arrangements. One member of staff said: "the support I have received is unbelievable".
- In our inspection we found, for post-court work, there was consistently strong management oversight, which assisted in supporting the needs of the children.
- The management team have a clear understanding of the application of formal performance management processes.
- Personal development opportunities are available to staff. These include a raft of training opportunities through a variety of media.
- There is a clear staff induction policy, the supporting guidance addresses an appropriate range of issues, including an explanation of the Children's Trust equalities strategy.
- The trust sponsors staff to participate in the Staff College women in leadership and black and Asian leadership initiatives, with the head of service taking part in the former in 2022. The trust holds regular equalities forums and an annual equalities week, offering professional development opportunities to raise awareness, understanding, and skills in equality, diversity, and inclusion issues.

Areas for improvement:

- Further development work is necessary to move all case managers from viewing equality work as treating people all the same to a more sophisticated and detailed understanding of the impact of a child's protected characteristics on their individual lives.

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:

- Extensive data is available to the organisation. This includes 'heat maps' depicting ethnicity, gender, outcomes, and offences. The information is presented by geographical location and overlays the data gleaned from multiple deprivation indicators.
- Further information available includes an analysis of the wider needs of children, including accommodation, missing from home status, education, special education needs and disabilities, mental health and emotional wellbeing, and substance misuse.
- The development of services is data-informed. In reviewing first-time entrant data, the YOS was advised to look at adjacent services which appeared to have lower rates. The approach taken was to develop a detailed understanding of the comparators' performance and see what could be matched to service improvement locally.
- In terms of information and analysis, the voice of the child is based on end-of-order feedback. This is collated, analysed, and presented to the board at regular intervals. The data is summarised in the annual plan and influences service delivery.
- The YOS has a substantial partnership offer of specialist services to children, including health, education, substance misuse, police and probation (funded post) staff. Secondments are supported by up-to-date and monitored service level agreements and partnership agreements.
- The speech and language therapist has developed a communications passport as an aid for the needs of children with neurodivergent conditions or other communication difficulties.
- There is a positive and well-supported volunteer group working as referral order panel members.
- We found positive collaboration between the multi-agency safeguarding hub, child exploitation prevention arrangements, and the YOS.

Areas for improvement:

- There are inconsistencies in children accessing health-based services and the referral process requires review.
- The Probation Service funds a post in the YOS but this worker's access to nDelius and OASys (probation case management and assessment tools) is not in place.
- Although the offer of services includes a range of restorative activities, the opportunities for children are limited in being able to respond to their individual circumstances.
- It would be beneficial to recruit a greater diversity of volunteers which better reflects the local population.
- There are inconsistencies in the provision of victim information and not all victims who could be referred were, referred to the YOS.

1.4. Information and facilities



Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

Outstanding

Strengths:

- We found an appropriate range of policies available to staff and wider employees of the Children’s Trust on the internal SharePoint system. There are clear processes regarding the access, review, and communication of policies. Almost all staff understand the policies and procedures that apply to their role at least quite well.
- The Core-plus system generates useable and accessible management information. The YOS has the support of a dedicated performance and systems analyst with considerable understanding and expertise.
- Information exchange is contained within carefully established protocols and policies. These are effective in supporting the work of the YOS.
- Almost all staff reported that they knew how to access services from partners and providers at least some of the time. One member of staff observed that:
“Our YOS has numerous different roles but each department works together as one team to support each other and deliver good quality services for children.”
- The YOS works within the Children’s Trust health, safety and wellbeing policy, which outlines responsibility throughout the organisation.
- There is a clear commitment to learning, using audits, supervision, mock inspections, and peer reviews. Further inputs include the results of HM Inspectorate of Probation reports, including thematic inspections, and a careful review of cases where things have gone wrong.
- We found that information on the diversity of the children is used to drive improvements in service delivery, for example, in developing a girls’ intervention based on analysis of the needs of girls in the YOS group of children.
- In reviewing disproportionality, the YOS looked at the work from a range of perspectives, including ethnicity, special education needs, communication difficulties, gender, and care history.
- The views of children and their parents or carers are collected, analysed, and considered in all improvement processes.
- There is a strong commitment to the use of evidence to drive service improvement, for example, the prevention and diversion story board uses sophisticated evaluation to support service improvement.
- There is a range of appropriate locations for contact with children, such as local hubs and home visits.

Areas for improvement:

- The premises occupied in Northampton are jaded in appearance and in need of refurbishment to make them more child friendly.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

In keeping with the practices developing within Northamptonshire Children's Trust, the voice of the child features prominently in all strategy and policy documents concerning the development and improvement of services. The YOS has a well-developed approach to eliciting, analysing, and using information representing the voice of children and their parents or carers. Case studies feature in every board meeting and, at a recent board meeting, there was a presentation by a child, via a video link.

The YOS 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 52 children who consented, and 30 children replied. In a small number of cases, the child's parent or carer also responded.

These are some of the responses we gathered to our questions:

How do you rate your local YOS?

The ratings given by children were mostly very positive.

"Because they help me with my problems, so I feel like I can actually get through day to day." "She never made me feel bad or guilty for why I have a YOS worker; she was always so kind towards me and really kind and friendly."

"Our YOS worker is great. She is knowledgeable, interested, invested. She cares. She has developed a very good rapport with her YOS worker when others haven't been able to. She has made relevant referrals in a timely manner when she has identified a need." (Parent)

"Because my YOS worker not only taught me why what I was doing was wrong but also treated me with respect and supported me mentally as well, and is helping me to understand my emotions better and how to deal with things that have happened in my past, while she's also helped me and my mum with school issues and is now supporting me with college."

How has your YOS helped you to stay out of trouble?

"My YOS worker is absolutely amazing. She has helped me through a lot and I couldn't thank her enough. Ever since she came into my life a lot of things had changed for the better, my anger isn't as bad anymore, my mental health is not as bad and she just is amazing."

"My YOS worker helped me keep out of trouble by helping me get my emotions under control and made me realise that there will always be a consequence following my actions."

"My YOS worker was more of an older wiser sister than a boring professional so she's relatable and easy to talk to without judgement - she gave advice without nagging."

Diversity

At an organisational level, the YOS has a range of policies and approaches to address disproportionality and diversity in its work with children.

We found:

- There are clear equality objectives in the strategic plan to tackle disproportionality. There is good identification and analysis of children's needs in relation to gender, substance misuse, looked-after status, special educational needs, and mental health care and emotional wellbeing.
- Considerable effort has gone into increasing the staff group's confidence in addressing children's diversity, both through understanding and developing ways of working that take diverse needs into account. However, in the delivery of services, we found inconsistent practice by case managers in relation to the child's diversity. When done well, case managers displayed understanding and sensitivity to the child's needs. Too frequently, we found that needs had been recognised, but that the work was not well enough adjusted to address the child's culture, background, sexual orientation or level of disability.
- The speech and language therapist has developed a communications passport as an aid for the needs of children with neurodivergent conditions or other communication difficulties.
- We found that information on the diversity of the children is used to drive improvements in service delivery, for example, in developing a girls' intervention based on analysis of the needs of girls in the YOS group of children.
- In reviewing disproportionality, the YOS looked at the work from a range of perspectives, including ethnicity, special education needs, communication difficulties, gender, and care history.

The staff group is predominantly female but in terms of ethnicity, broadly reflects the demographic characteristics of the local population. Three quarters of staff reported that their individual diversity needs were at least quite well met by the YOS.

Our survey of volunteers indicated that the diverse needs of people giving their time to undertake this work – in referral panels or supporting restorative activity – were appropriately considered by the YOS, when necessary. The YOS has held promotional events at the local university and libraries in order to recruit a wider range of volunteers than the predominantly white, female group currently supporting the YOS work.

Of the group of children sentenced to custody, the majority were identified as black. In our inspection of resettlement cases, there was evidence of work being delivered with the children to address the range of diversity factors that were part of the child's life. However, we found cases where the issues were only partially addressed, for example, identifying a child's ethnicity but not considering broader issues of heritage.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 17 community sentences managed by the YOS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating² for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	88%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	71%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	69%

Assessment work on desistance was strong with most children across almost every aspect. Reflecting the strength of working relationships developed by case managers, we found active engagement of the children or their families in every case inspected. Assessments contained a good level of analysis, providing detail and insight into children's personal circumstances and relationships, and how best to support a child's desistance.

We found that consideration of a child's diverse needs was not consistently given. In one case, we noted:

"The assessment lacked diversity and identity exploration, and the case manager had not considered this beyond mentioning he is of dual heritage."

Instances of alleged discriminatory behaviour were not always explored by the case manager.

We found some good examples of work focused on the child's safety and wellbeing. In most relevant cases, there was a strong appreciation of the child's vulnerability to exploitation, and there was effective use of information from available sources to assist in understanding the issues which affected a child's safety. The use of a vulnerability screening tool in considering the risk of exploitation, when necessary, was an aid to the effective analysis of the child's current circumstances. In every case, the classification of safety and wellbeing was reasonable.

In a small number of cases, we found that the links between adverse childhood experiences and current behaviour had not been sufficiently analysed. We also found examples where critical information, such as the age and family details of a child's partner, were not clearly established, even though the child may have been at risk from that partner.

When risk of harm issues were addressed, as they were in most children's cases, they were done well. A particularly strong feature was the risk and safety and wellbeing meetings which reviewed high-risk classification children at least monthly.

In a minority of cases, we found that further analysis of information and professional curiosity would have led to improved assessment.

² The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

Our rating³ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	88%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	76%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	59%

Planning for desistance was appropriately considered in almost every case inspected. We found planning work was adjusted to the individual circumstances of the child, and adapted to neurodivergent conditions when this was appropriate. Methods such as completing short sessions, not asking the child to write, and basing the work on discussions rather than visual aids were discussed and planned for. We saw some good examples of care being taken to address the child's needs in relation to diversity, although this was not always done well.

Plans sought to engage partnership staff, with consistent linking to education, training, and employment (ETE) specialists. We found good examples of liaison with the Probation Service prior to the child transferring to adult supervision, although these were not always as carefully planned as they could have been. In almost every case, there was meaningful involvement of the child and their parents or carers in the processes of planning, and there were sufficient services to address factors related to desistance.

With most children, sufficient attention was paid to their safety and wellbeing. The risk, safety, and wellbeing panel featured strongly where safety and wellbeing concerns were identified. In one case we saw that:

"Risk, safety, and wellbeing minutes depict clear action points to address concerns about the child's safety, and incorporate multi-agency work, such as the social worker completing an exploitation assessment and updates to the National Referral Mechanism This is reflected in risk management planning with the practitioner also seeking to strengthen positive factors, such as home life and education."

In relation to the risk of harm the child may present to other people, we found a mixed picture. We saw some positive examples of multi-agency working, the use of restrictions on the child's movements (through curfew and electronic monitoring), and well-developed contingency planning. However, for a third of children where risk of harm to others was identified, the risks to other people were not addressed sufficiently. In these cases, we found that behaviours – either past or present – had not been fully explored. This meant that, in some cases, issues concerning past behaviour and how that linked to risks of future behaviour, such as within new personal relationships, were not effectively considered.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁴ 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?	88%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	88%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	82%

The development of working relationships, combined with the range of opportunities available to the case manager, meant that desistance work was sufficient in almost all of the children's cases. In contrast to assessment and planning, we found that in the delivery of services, the diversity needs of the children were appropriately considered in most cases. In all cases, the child and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved in the delivery of services.

The range of services available was suitable to the needs of the child, with good attention paid to services needed to support community integration after the period of supervision in every case.

Focus on the child's safety was sufficient in almost all cases. A typical example was identified by the inspector:

"Delivery sufficiently supported the safety of the child and includes focus on welfare checks around the child's general safety and wellbeing as a routine part of contact, particularly where the child is late. ETE is identified as a key protective factor and there is evidence of education sessions and support with ETE activities as part of delivery. The child is about to be transferred to probation and there is evidence of joint working to prepare for transition."

In another case we found:

"Delivery to support the safety of the child was primarily focused around work with multi-systemic therapy to support travel and retrieval safety strategies when the child travelled to London, where he was most at risk of criminal exploitation. There was also evidence of the YOS's proactive approach in working to support the child's education when concerns of discrimination were raised by him and his mother."

We found good information exchange with police was central to support the safety of other people effectively. The use of external controls, such as curfew, aligned with interventions to address substance misuse and, in particular, exploring knife crime and consequences of violent behaviour, contributed to the reduction of risk of harm to others.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Good

Our rating⁵ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	82%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	88%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	71%

There was considerable evidence that almost all the work with children was systematically reviewed. This was illustrated in one case as follows:

"The review celebrates the hard work and successes made by the child. His voice is clear, and information is gathered from a variety of sources including family, college, and social care. It also makes clear what still needs to happen as part of the overall intervention."

In most cases, the child and their parent or carers were meaningfully involved in the review processes.

The work undertaken was, in some cases, changed in the light of increased understanding of the child's needs in relation to diversity. For example, adjustments were made to match the child to a worker who more closely reflected their heritage and identity. However, this was not evident across the cases inspected and there could have been more such work with more children.

The focus on the child's safety and wellbeing was clear in almost every case. A particular strength was the multi-agency perspective provided by the risk, safety, and wellbeing panels. As a consequence of review, the work was re-focused on key issues, such as educational engagement. This led to increased liaison with children's social care, engagement with mental health services, planning for transition to probation, increased use of home visits, and monitoring of progress when the National Referral Mechanism had been activated due to concerns about child exploitation.

In most cases, there was sufficient focus on reviewing the risk of harm to other people that the child presented. This was characterised by frequent discussions with the police, the use of external controls such as police curfew, and regular checks of significant relationships in the child's life. Where risk of causing harm concerns increased in the child's life, there were examples of highly responsive multi-agency work, including further specialist assessment work. In a small number of cases, the review process did not pick up on work to address the risk of harm, and the reviewing process did not formulate clear enough actions.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 27 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These included four youth conditional cautions, three community resolutions, and 20 other disposals. We interviewed the case managers in 22 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	63%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	78%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	67%

The process of assessment is a combination of triage (screening), social triage (more extensive screening), and, where conditional caution is an option, a full Asset Plus assessment. Many of the assessments were completed at considerable pace, as the YOS balanced the need for speedy decision-making by the multi-agency panel with understanding of the needs of the children.

The analysis of factors that support desistance was of variable quality. When done well, case managers were tenacious, working closely with the child and their parents or carers and gathering information from police, health, children's social care, and education sources to develop an informed view of the child's likelihood of being involved in further offending.

In almost half of the cases, however, the child's diverse needs were not sufficiently analysed. In these circumstances, the child's diversity of heritage, learning ability or sexuality were identified but not clearly considered in formulating an assessment.

The focus on safety and wellbeing was clear in most of the children's cases, with risk, safety, and wellbeing panels convened at an early point to provide a multi-agency perspective on the child's progress. Assessment work was typically based on the inputs from a breadth of other agencies. An indication of the sensitivity of the work was provided by the early identification of potential child exploitation, leading to a referral to the National Referral Mechanism to clarify the child's status as a victim of criminal exploitation.

Risk of harm to other people was assessed well enough in a reasonable majority of the children's cases, drawing on available sources of information. Where a victim or victims were identified, enough attention was given to their needs and wishes in most cases.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating⁷ 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?	81%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	78%

Shortfalls in the focus on desistance in assessment were offset by planning work, in which we found consistent good quality planning activity.

In over a third of cases, however, diversity issues had not been planned for sufficiently. We found examples of children or their families reporting experiences of racism or discrimination which were not explored further by the case manager. Furthermore, where children with neurodivergent conditions failed to engage with the case manager, there was no reference to the issues in planning documentation

There was an appropriate level of ambition shown for the children by the case manager. In one instance there was a well-developed and forward-thinking plan:

"Planning looked at how best to engage the child based on her experiences at school and needs. The child was NEET [not in education, employment or training] at the start of the disposal and there was a focus on this, looking at tutoring and planning to build on her interests in working with young children. There was also a focus on building confidence and life skills which the child had asked for."

In most children's cases, the focus on safety and wellbeing was to an appropriate standard. Case managers liaised well with health and justice pathway colleagues, the substance misuse team, police colleagues, and children's social care. We also saw effective working arrangements with early help services, the provision of mentoring support, leaving care personal advisors, and schools, as well as evidence of positive liaison with the Probation Service in planning to protect the child from a former partner.

In most cases, the safety of other people had been planned for effectively, where this was possible. Typically, we found that planning was centred on keeping the victims safe through work with the child around appropriate emotional responses, or with consideration of the negative consequences for other people of further offending behaviour.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁸ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	93%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	78%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	89%

Delivery to support the child's desistance, was effective in almost all cases inspected. This reflected the strength of working relationships that case managers were able to build with the children and their parents or carers.

Where diverse needs were understood, we found that practitioners adjusted the methods of supervision well in order to sustain the child's involvement in the work, for example, watching videos or drawing pictures in line with the advice contained within the education, health, and care plan – tailoring the work to the child's individual learning style. We noted, however, that children's diverse needs were not addressed in too many cases.

The safety and wellbeing of the children was supported, where necessary, with the majority of children. For example, in one case:

“There was a good focus on substance misuse as the main factor linked to safety and wellbeing concerns, with appropriate links made with the substance misuse team and sufficient exit planning, including signposting to online resources for once the disposal had concluded.”

In other cases, we saw rapid responses to emerging risks to the child that led to satisfactory outcomes due to the effectiveness of information sharing across a range of partner organisations.

For effectively supporting the safety of other people, sufficient services were delivered to manage and minimise the risk of the child causing harm to others in almost all relevant cases. This included attending to the protection of actual and potential victims.

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 in the data annexe.](#)

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

Strengths:

- The work for out-of-court disposals was carefully outlined in the prevention and diversion policy and procedure. This was an up-to-date document setting out the suitability criteria for out-of-court disposals, which were broad enough to allow the use of discretion.
- There was a clear escalation process if the decision-making panel were unable to agree on the most appropriate outcome for a child.
- The policy clearly differentiated between community restorative disposals, youth cautions, and alternative outcomes.
- Arrangements for the partnership decision-making panel were clear and included all relevant partner agencies.
- There was explicit reference to the over-representation of children from minority groups in the priorities associated with the prevention and diversion offer. The work was linked directly to the YOS plan addressing over-representation.
- The social and health triage process took into account risk of reoffending, safety and wellbeing, risk of harm to others, and victims' issues.
- The entire range of services available to the YOS were available to out-of-court disposal cases.
- Non-engagement was accounted for by a process of return to the investigating officer for review of the appropriate decision.
- We found excellent ongoing monitoring and review of out-of-court disposal work, and this was outlined in the prevention and diversion storyboard. There were strong indications of highly effective work.
- The evidence-base for the effectiveness of out-of-court work and a focus on early intervention was well understood, and the police-inspired evaluation has the potential to make a significant contribution to the wider, national evidence base.
- There was an out-of-court disposal scrutiny panel providing robust external scrutiny of the work.

Areas for improvement:

- In delivery, there was inconsistency of practice in relation to assessment and planning work, and the diverse needs of the children were not always sufficiently identified.
- There were cases in our inspection sample that took a long time from reported offence to eventual decisions being made.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The principles adopted for resettlement work include ensuring that children have equality of opportunity and that the case manager challenges discrimination. Through ensuring that positive activities are identified with the child, the YOS aims to support the development of a coherent, prosocial identity.
- In addressing disproportionality, the YOS expects that the resettlement plan reflects the children and families' culture and identified barriers to resettlement.
- The pathways to resettlement include clear specifications for case management and transitions; accommodation; education, training, and employment; health; substance misuse; families; finance, benefit and debt.
- For every child in custody, risk, safety, and wellbeing panels are convened for the multi-agency oversight of the child's case.
- The needs and wishes of victims are incorporated through planning for licence conditions by liaison with the restorative justice team.
- In all cases inspected, appropriate levels of contact had been maintained between the YOS, the child, and their parents or carers prior to release.
- We found that case managers dealt effectively with accommodation, employment, training, and education, and health matters in almost every case inspected.
- There is ongoing monitoring and evaluation of resettlement work through three methods. First, all resettlement cases are audited using a bespoke tool, with feedback given to individual practitioners concerning actions and recommendations. Second, resettlement work forms part of the system of thematic audits and policy revisions are based on the outputs from the audits. Third, resettlement work is monitored where risk levels are high or very high within the risk and safety and wellbeing policies and procedures.

Areas for improvement:

- Only half the staff interviewed in the inspection had received specific training in resettlement work.
- The children's voice features prominently in the resettlement policy and guidance, but there are no specific arrangements for the collation and analysis of this perspective with regard to resettlement work.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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