



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Cambridgeshire

HM Inspectorate of Probation, October 2023



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government and speak independently.

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

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Foreword

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

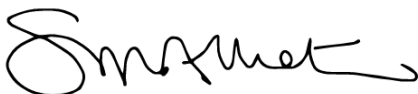
Staff are skilled and knowledgeable. There is a clear focus upon staff training and staff are motivated to learn about youth justice and the factors that impact upon the children they work with. The YJS and its staff are highly regarded by partners, who understand the unique contribution they make in supporting children.

The quality and range of partnership arrangements was a strength. The YJS is developing a robust trauma-informed approach, and this is effectively underpinned by the work of a team of psychologists who support the assessment and direction of work with children and their families. However, partnership working with children's social care needs developing, to ensure better coordination and joint work to keep children safe and promote their wellbeing. The YJS also needs to improve the quality of its contingency planning to make sure that risks to victims are clearly understood and plans are in place to effectively protect them, particularly when children's circumstances change.

The out-of-court disposal scheme needs review and evaluation to ensure that its application meets its intended aims; decision-making currently lacks clarity and a better use of the full range of possible outcomes could support the service in reducing the number of children coming into contact with the youth justice system. The quality of assessment and planning activities with children receiving out-of-court disposals needs improvement to ensure consistency and quality. That said, once children receive an out-of-court disposal, the quality of interventions delivered was to a very high standard.

Given the diverse range of communities across Cambridgeshire, a sharper focus on the needs of children across all protected characteristics would be helpful. The management board need to drive this strategically, to ensure there is equality of access for all and a range of services to meet the needs of the children in Cambridgeshire. The board needs to be fully sighted on the quality of service delivered. Despite some good reports from the quality assurance processes, there remains a wide variation in the quality of out-of-court disposal casework, particularly assessment and planning activity.

Overall, this inspection highlighted many areas of good and effective work with children, but also some areas that need further development. In this report we make four recommendations intended to support the YJS to build on its positive foundations and further strengthen the work being delivered.



Sue McAllister
Interim HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Cambridgeshire Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started August 2023

Score 19/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Requires improvement



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Good



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Good



2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



2.4 Reviewing

Good



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Requires improvement



3.2 Planning

Inadequate



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Requires improvement



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Good



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

Recommendations

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

The Cambridgeshire Youth Justice Service should:

1. improve the quality of assessment and planning in out-of-court disposals to promote the safety and wellbeing and to keep other people safe
2. improve the quality of contingency planning to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and managing the risk of harm to others, including ensuring contingency plans clearly specify who needs to take what actions in given situations and fully consider the required actions following changes in children's circumstances.

The Director of Children's Services should:

3. make sure that joint work with the YJS is consistent and effective in meeting the safeguarding needs of children.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary should:

4. review the use of Outcome 22 in Cambridgeshire and work with the YJS to monitor whether its implementation impacts on the level of disproportionality by ensuring that all children are offered interventions at the earliest opportunity.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Cambridgeshire YJS over a period of a week, beginning 07 August 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 08 August 2022 and 02 June 2023, out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 08 August 2022 and 02 June 2023, and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 08 August 2022 and 02 June 2023. We also conducted 28 interviews with case managers.

In December 2022, Cambridgeshire local authority brought all young people's services together to create the youth support services, within which the YJS sits, alongside adolescent services and the child exploitation team. These three services share a service manager. The youth support services are under the line management of the executive director for children, education, and families.

The local authority has historically had responsibility for Cambridgeshire and the city of Peterborough YJS'. However, a recent decision has led to a separation, with Peterborough now developing its own infrastructure. The management board will continue to oversee the work of both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough YJSs, but the uncoupling of the senior management team has resulted in the creation of a single head of service role for Cambridgeshire YJS.

The YJS is served by a single police force, Cambridgeshire Constabulary; an assistant chief constable chairs the management board.

The pattern of offending in Cambridgeshire mirrors the national picture, with violence against the person being the most frequent offence. There is a growing issue with child exploitation and a number of county lines running drug operations in the county.

Cambridgeshire YJS has invested in developing a quality assurance framework and funding a quality assurance officer, and we found some good evidence of how this role had begun to drive improvements, particularly in statutory court work.

There have been investments in new case management and performance monitoring systems. The service's budget has remained stable, and support from the integrated care board has helped to maintain the service to children facing exploitation, once pilot funding ends.

There has been significant change in the children's social care management structure, but posts had been filled and a period of stability should allow for improvements in staffing levels and reduction of staff turnover in social care teams. This is in contrast to the YJS, which has maintained a stable workforce over a period of years.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The board sets clear objectives to maximise children’s potential. There is a strategic focus on preventing offending through the delivery of appropriate services, building safe communities and engaging victims are given equal priority.
- The youth justice management board operates jointly between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The board has a good understanding of the needs in each area. The board has had a robust chair, for a number of years, who has provided consistent direction and is well linked to other key strategic boards across Cambridgeshire.
- There is a clear vision for the development of the board going forward. Board members help set the priorities for the service and contribute to the youth justice plan and its review. Progress against objectives has been regularly reviewed by the board.
- Staff across the partnership have a good understanding of how they contribute to the strategy and vision.
- Equality and diversity are a board priority; ensuring that each child is seen as an individual is central and this is translated into an effective casework.
- Services delivered to children are accessible and relevant to their needs. The board is generally well sighted on gaps and has a strong track record of collaborating to identify funding and resources for pilots and interventions that benefit YJS children. For example, SAFE (Safer Relationships for Exploited Children, a service working with children deemed to be at risk of exploitation).
- The YJS is effectively linked into relevant partnerships at strategic and operational levels, both within and outside of the local authority.
- The board receives good-quality information on the service’s performance, progress on past plans, and learning from case reviews and inspection reports. The board requests thematic reviews of cases to further its understanding of practice.
- The YJS has begun work to better understand the disproportionality of children within the service; groups that are overrepresented have been identified and an action plan to address this is in place.
- The YJS has a stable and experienced leadership team; managers lead on specific areas of practice and their responsibilities are clear. There are plans to ensure continuity of management support when the current head of service changes roles.

Areas for improvement:

- The board needs to be fully sighted on the quality of service delivered. Despite some good reports from the quality assurance processes, there remains a wide variation in the quality of out-of-court disposal casework, particularly assessment and planning activity.
- Several key areas that the board has started to consider have not yet impacted on frontline delivery - most notably, the out-of-court disposal scheme, social care support for YJS planning to keep children safe, and disproportionality and diversity.
- The board needs to consider the implications of the potential underuse of Outcome 22², as this enables children who have given 'no comment' interviews to be offered an intervention and be diverted from court at the earliest possible stage. Further work is needed to assess the impact of this on children from marginalised and overrepresented groups.
- There is no clear strategy on how disproportionality will be addressed, or how children from marginalised or minority groups will have equality of access to services. While casework shows a good focus on individual needs, better attention across all protected characteristics is required.
- Some board members have little direct line of sight on the quality of work provided by their organisations.
- The board recognises that it wants to do more to incorporate the views of children and families, a participation and consultation strategy has resulted in a number of improvements, but at present the ability of children and families to influence strategic change is too limited.
- The staff group are not all well sighted on the way the board works or sets direction. In our staff survey, 12 out of 39 staff were not very aware of the activities of the management board.

² Outcome 22 is a deferred prosecution involving diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- The service is delivered by a staff team who advocate well for children and who are responsive to their needs.
- Staffing levels are sufficient and stable at all grades, with some recent staff progression.
- Staff are well trained and motivated to learn more about youth justice and the factors that impact on children. They are positive and work as one team.
- The YJS and its staff are highly regarded by partners, who understand the unique contribution they make in supporting children and their role in supporting wider areas of work, including criminal and sexual exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, and intrafamilial abuse.
- The management team work well together, and staff feel confident approaching managers for advice and guidance. Despite some imminent key changes to the management structure, the team has remained stable.
- When allocating cases, managers prioritise consistency, allocating staff who have previously been supporting the child so that relationships can be maintained, and children and families do not have to retell their stories.
- A child-first approach is evident, and staff are receiving training in the principals of this approach. Staff do all they can to encourage positive engagement with children and their families, advocating and challenging, when appropriate, to ensure children's needs are met.
- A team of psychologists provide the basis for the service to have a trauma-informed approach to working with children and families. They also deliver support to staff to manage vicarious trauma.
- Workloads are actively managed. There are frequent discussions between staff and managers about cases and workload.
- Staff routinely receive individual and group supervision, provided by team managers. Staff describe managers as supportive and accessible.

Areas for improvement:

- The staff team do not fully reflect the diversity of the local community; six per cent of the workforce are black or minority ethnic, compared with 13 per cent of the local population.
- Some volunteer panel members would appreciate better communication and a closer connection to the service, but the majority were happy with the support they received.
- The quality of management oversight of work is varied. A new recording method shows better evidence of some management oversight, but in many cases, it was difficult to track if the actions requested by managers had been completed.
- There are staffing shortages in the adolescent services team, and while recruitment is ongoing, these complementary services are not fully operational.

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:

- A trauma-informed approach is embedding across the partnership. There is a strong focus on supporting staff and children working with the YJS. This has helped change the outlook of police towards children who commit offences.
- Children, both on court orders and out-of-court disposals, access a wide range of services to meet a variety of needs, this is underpinned by a psychologically informed approach to best understand the child.
- Analysis is used to identify areas of need and there is clear adherence to the evidence base. Profiles of children and service need are developed for those with protected characteristics and from marginalised groups.
- Formulations developed by the psychologists utilising multi-agency sharing of information have become central and critical to the development of services to children. These formulations develop a shared understanding of children's risks and needs and form the basis of interventions and service delivery.
- The head of service has responsibility for the SAFE and adolescent services teams. It is intended that the alignment of these services will foster more effective co-working and seamless service delivery to children.
- The 'transforming lives' programme is available for children at emerging risk of exploitation; evaluation has shown this is providing some real change in children's lives.
- A nurse assesses and responds to the physical health needs of children and ensures that they are accessing relevant services.
- Good attention is paid to the emotional and mental health of children. Children are able to access support through the nurse and the Psychology Team offer therapeutic support around common concerns such as anxiety, depression and self-harm. However, they often offer the support around complex trauma, which CAMHS do not currently have a remit to deliver.
- Work to understand and improve educational attainment is supported by two advisors who provide an excellent link between the YJS and education providers. They give case managers detailed information of attendance, attainment, and behaviours in schools. The child's educational experiences were clear in the cases we inspected, with plans developed to make any necessary improvements.
- A high-level operational group works with schools and colleges to improve access to education.
- Casework included clear decision-making on who was best placed to work with the child and the sequencing of work, fitting with the service's child-first approach.
- Restorative approaches were well used and ensured that the needs and wishes of victims were known.

- There were appropriate links with national services to manage and reduce risk when needed, including the counterterrorism 'Prevent' channel and the National Referral Mechanism for potential victims of modern slavery.
- There has been a bespoke intervention for adolescent-to-parental violence; the Break for Change service promotes clear boundaries and supports the management of behaviours in the family home. The Break for Change is no longer running but there are plans to run a similar programme in the near future.
- The partnership has developed a 'high harms' board to discuss those with the highest levels of need or posing the greatest risk. It provides a level of strategic scrutiny to hold each partner to account, unblock barriers to service delivery, and ensure a collective responsibility in managing and holding risk.
- The YJS has retained a high-risk and intensive surveillance and supervision (ISS) team who provide a comprehensive package of supervision and support to children.
- There is good provision for children who display harmful sexual behaviours, including a specific intervention for those who use the internet and social media to commit harmful behaviours.

Areas for improvement:

- Work with children's social care and the SAFE (child exploitation) team has been affected by staffing difficulties in the social care team. Work to keep children safe was varied and had been impacted by vacancies in social work teams. Where this was most evident was in the lack of effective joint planning. The executive director of children's services and director of social care are new in post and fully committed to improving partnership work with the YJS.
- We found evidence that some aspects of children's diversity were seen in isolation rather than explored in context. Children's direct experience of discrimination, exclusion, and life experiences are not always seen holistically.
- Probation services have not been able to second either the full-time probation officer or the 0.8 probation service officer (PSO) roles, which are a statutory responsibility. The YJS has recently appointed an experienced PSO. Steps have been taken to mitigate the associated risks of these vacancies and ensure the smooth transition of young people moving from the YJS to probation when they become 18.
- More work is needed to ensure multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) are used effectively, especially category 3 for high-risk domestic abuse cases.
- The potential benefits of a speech and language therapist have been identified and funding for this role is in place. Discussions between the YJS and health provider are under way to agree how best to deliver the service to YJS children. Given the high levels of children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in the YJS cohort, this is a priority service area.
- The board needs to improve the sharing of collaborative partnership data and intelligence to enable it to better understand the cohort of all children known to the YJS, and identify and respond more effectively to specific factors, such as exploitation and serious youth violence.
- Despite the range of meetings to focus on risk of harm to others, the actions arising were not always included in children's plans.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Good

Strengths:

- There are policies and guidance to direct and support effective service delivery; these are known and utilised by staff. Information-sharing protocols are in place and understood across the partnership.
- There is an escalation process in place and staff feel supported by managers to raise concerns. There are regular meetings between operational managers to raise and resolve issues with other agencies and partners.
- The YJS has three office bases and community venues are used to see children, including schools and community centres. Home visits are used extensively to support understanding regarding the child's situation and facilitate building a relationship with parents or carers.
- The YJS police officers have access to police and YJS IT systems, the transitional advisors and health professionals can access their relevant IT systems.
- As part of the changes to the joint management of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire councils, a new IT system was rolled out. This is a large infrastructure programme with new laptops and phones. There were some issues with the rollout, but these were planned for and addressed.
- The YJS has a quality assurance framework in place and had funded a quality assurance officer post. The issues we identified in casework are similar to those highlighted through audits and quality assurance. Staff are positive about the quality assurance work and are keen to receive feedback. We found examples where this had brought about positive change. There is evidence that the YJS reviews cases when serious incidents occur and learns from the outcomes of inspections to help improve practice.
- The service has developed a child and parental participation strategy to obtain views and support service developments.

Areas for improvement

- Not all policies have a focus on disproportionality and an increased emphasis on the implications for children across all protected characteristics is required, for example, the service needs to better consider and understand the needs of children who identify as eastern European, Gypsy, Roma or Traveller, girls, and black and minority ethnic.
- The quality of management oversight in casework needs to improve. Although all staff we interviewed were satisfied with the level of management oversight and support received, we found that it did not lead to the necessary changes in over 70 per cent of the out of court cases we assessed.
- While psychologists provide good oversight of casework and the work of the quality assurance officer has been well received, results in casework show that the combined systems are not consistently having the desired effect and the quality of work is very variable, particularly for out-of-court disposals.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS is fully committed to involving children and parent or carers in feeding back their views and helping to shape the service.

At case management level, obtaining children's views and then using them to inform their interventions was routine and a positive aspect of the work we found. Children's voices were heard and utilised effectively in the work completed with them.

At board and strategic level, there is recognition that more needs to be done. There has been the development of some good initiatives, including an equality, inclusion, and diversity survey with children and families, and the development of a custody pack of materials to support and prepare children who are at risk of custody. However, greater emphasis needs to be placed on using children's and parents or carers feedback to drive strategic understanding and review service provision.

We used three methods to gain views and perspectives of children, parents and carers and offered text, telephone calls and face to face opportunities during our inspection. The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of inspection to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to 24 children who consented and nine children replied. We also interviewed two children face to face in a meeting facilitated by the service and conducted three follow-up discussions by phone: two with children and one with a parent.

The full data is provided in the data annexe. Below is a summary of the responses to some of the questions, and some comments received.

To the question 'How good are the services you have received from the YJS?', all three people interviewed replied that they were 'very good'.

A similar picture was given by those who completed the text survey question 'How do you rate your local YJS service?', with the majority rating the service as a 9 or a 10 (on a scale of 1 'poor' to 10 'fantastic').

Comments included the following:

"... help me in a massive way ever since YOS got my mind on a lot better things, like work, being mature, and a good citizen."

"Has helped me understanding the punishments 'n different crimes 'n that fighting isn't the answer to everything."

When asked about the thing the YJS did best, the parent we spoke with said:

"The case manager wants what's best for (her child) and offers a good level of support".

She also stated a 'good relationship' had been established with the YJS worker and she was grateful for this.

Diversity

The service has a strong focus on meeting the individual needs of children, resulting in work that was personalised and tailored. However, this focus was not always apparent in the identification and response to children across all of their protected characteristics. The board and partners need to do more to assure themselves that children from black and minority ethnic, and marginalised groups have equality of access to services.

The YJS has a policy to ensure that equality, inclusion, and diversity are at the centre of service delivery. This is underpinned as an objective of the board.

As a direct result of a presentation on the findings of the HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic on the experience of boys from black and mixed heritage backgrounds, the board now has access to data on stop and search, and this is subject to robust scrutiny.

At operational level, staff demonstrate a good understanding of the needs of children who identify as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller and they work to gain respect and trust from the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community. One member of staff has undertaken training to better understand how to work with the Gypsy, Roma or Traveller community. We saw several cases where the views of parents and their experience of discrimination had been fully taken into account in preparation for work with the YJS. Staff demonstrated sensitivity in preparing documents, particularly court documents, and showed good levels of consideration and understanding of children and families.

However, there needs to be a deeper understanding at strategic level of the cohort of children accessing YJS provision and a greater focus upon ensuring that service provision meets the needs of all children. Some key strands of work have not yet been successful at ensuring the systems to keep children safe respond to the significant differences across children's protected characteristics, and greater consideration is needed, for example understanding the visibility and experiences of black and minority ethnic children in what is a predominantly white area, or ensuring the needs of girls are specifically catered for.

Just under 30 per cent of YJS children have a diagnosed learning need and an education, health, and care (EHCP) plan, this has led to a strong focus on staff recognising and supporting additional learning needs. The link between additional learning needs and communication has been made, and the service has obtained funding to employ a speech and language therapist (SALT). We also found many examples of how individual children's neurodiversity and learning needs had been incorporated into the delivery of interventions and services.

The focus on diversity and protected characteristics was stronger in out-of-court disposal work. In some cases, there needed to be a more nuanced balance between the experience of a child with a protected characteristic and their wider individual needs. Further work on intersectionality is needed and this needs to be reflected in assessment activity.

The staff group does not fully represent the community it serves and despite its efforts, the service has not yet been able to recruit a more diverse workforce.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	76%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	65%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	65%

The assessment of children's desistance needs was consistently strong and utilised the information held by other agencies. Two transitional advisors obtained useful information of children's educational histories, attendance, and attitudes in school/college, and provided an accurate picture which could be used to identify any work needed to improve or sustain children's access to appropriate education.

The views of parents or carers and children were sought and represented in assessments. Aspirations were noted and then used in a positive manner to support the motivation of children. The ability and motivation of the child to make changes, their maturity levels, and willingness to engage with the order of the court were assessed well. Staff formed good relationships with children and families to support engagement and to understand any barriers that could have a negative impact upon the child. Underpinning the Asset-plus assessments, the psychologists provided advice, support, and formulations on the child's needs. These gave additional insight on the best way to work with children and were welcomed by staff.

However, in some instances we found safety and wellbeing assessment activity was too narrow, focusing on immediate presenting issues, but not taking full account of previous histories and issues. In too many cases, we saw the child's history with social care was recorded, but details of how the involvement had occurred, work needed to mitigate or reduce safety and wellbeing issues, or reasons for cases being closed was unclear. The effects of enduring neglect and prolonged exposure to domestic abuse, or the present situation for the child, were not always considered. Some children were identified as being at risk of exploitation, but the exact nature of this remained unclear, with assessments not supported by details from the specialist team.

Similarly, in some instances we found the risks that children posed to others were known, but not fully considered or analysed. In particular, the triggers to the use of violence were sometimes omitted. The influence of other factors, including drug and alcohol use as disinhibiting, were not routinely considered or assessed. This resulted in assessment activity that missed some key actions, including how risk to others, including children and parents or carers, as a direct result of substance misuse and violence within the family home, would be considered and addressed.

³ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	82%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	53%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	53%

Most of the cases we assessed were referral orders. Objectives to support desistance were set by the panel and the case managers worked with children to turn these into meaningful work. The recent development of child-friendly plans was positive, as was the adaptation within plans to help children and families engage with planned work.

Planning built on the child's strengths and protective factors in almost every case, and always included the views of children and parents or carers in a meaningful way.

The services needed to address desistance were planned in almost all cases. These were proportionate to the court outcome and could be delivered in the life span of the order.

The majority of children needed additional planning to help keep them safe, but there was a lack of joint planning between the YJS and other agencies, including children's social care, for children on other safety plans or at risk of exploitation. Sometimes there was good communication between workers and good delivery of interventions, but planning was too often done in isolation and the benefits of robust integrated planning was not realised.

Planning to meet the needs and wishes of victims did not always receive the focus needed, even when children could have ongoing contact with the victim at home, school or in the community. Contingency planning to respond to safety and wellbeing issues and to keep victims safe required development. Lacking specific actions and not specifying who was responsible for them, contingency plans were often too vague. There was a reliance on holding risk management meetings, but in too many instances there was a lack of directed action resulting from these. Contingency planning to protect victims was effective in five out of fifteen relevant of cases, and to protect the child in seven out of thirteen relevant cases.

⁴ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁵ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	94%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	76%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	82%

Children and families benefited from a wide range of services delivered quickly to help them stop offending, stay safe, and to protect other people. Despite deficits in planning activity, case managers knew what actions to take in delivering interventions and liaised well with other agencies and services to make sure that children were able to access services in a way that met their needs.

The approach of case managers was based on developing effective relationships with children and parents or carers, working in an open and honest way, and being consistent. Where possible, the case manager remained working with the child if they came back to the YJS following a further offence. This meant that the histories were already known, and children and families could avoid having to establish new relationships with professionals. This helped the child undertake planned work and encouraged engagement.

Careful thought had been given to how work with children could best support improvements to their situations. As a result, we found many examples of how children had been supported to manage better in school, and work to strengthen family relationships and parenting. An impressive aspect of work was the promotion of community integration, providing a network of support for the child at the end of their orders. This included the use of restorative justice approaches and reparation.

We saw some excellent examples of how children's culture was understood and supported, and how contact with them was adapted to meet their needs. Home visits were seen as an important strand of service delivery, and used where appropriate, with other venues outside of the family home when needed.

In a few cases, joint delivery with social care was missing, but YJS workers tried hard to fill gaps. We found that YJS workers identified who had the best relationship with the child and capitalised on this, so that they could undertake work with them in the most effective way.

⁵ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	88%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	82%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	76%

Review panels were held consistently for all children and used to highlight progress and achievements, celebrate positive changes, and take stock of what work had been undertaken. Children received praise when they had undertaken work and were able to demonstrate progress. Case managers were good at highlighting children's achievements to the panel, their efforts to engage with services, and to outline any further work that may be needed. Panel review and end reports clearly demonstrated how work had impacted upon children, and we routinely saw evidence of improvements with school, education, and work, and the stabilisation of children's emotional and mental health.

The recent introduction of a new contact recording system had improved analysis of work and, therefore, provided good evidence of ongoing review of the effectiveness of case management.

Staff were responsive to changes, quickly identifying changes and talking to children about the implications of these. Where possible, staff adapted the delivery style to accommodate barriers to engagement, and we saw that throughout the order new referrals were made to services to meet new and emerging needs.

One area for consideration is the review and response to diversity factors; while these were considered in light of learning disability or neurodivergence, the needs of children with other protected characteristics were not always followed through.

⁶ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 16 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of five youth conditional cautions and 11 community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 10 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating⁷ 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?	50%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	63%

The assessment of desistance needs was strong, but the risk that children posed to others and their safety and wellbeing needed a greater focus within assessment activity.

Assessment contained sufficient analysis of children's behaviour, including the child's acknowledgement of responsibility for the offence. This had usually been gathered by the police and was used to inform the out-of-court disposal outcome. Children who gave a 'no comment' interview or did not accept full responsibility tended to be charged to court.

Using a mix of screening and assessment tools, the children's diverse needs were identified and then assessed by case managers. There was good consideration of the child's personal circumstances based on a range of information from other agencies. The child's strengths were identified effectively and provided a good basis for future work.

The needs and wishes of victims were identified in nine of the relevant 14 cases but analysis did not build on trends and patterns of repeated behaviours sufficiently.

The assessment and analysis of safety and wellbeing were accurate in half of the cases. However, although information was available, it was not used effectively to fully understand all of the factors that children faced, including potential school exclusion, domestic abuse, risk from gangs, and substance misuse. The lack of a regular social care representative on the panel led to missed opportunities to provide some of the wider context to children's safety and wellbeing needs.

⁷ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	94%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	38%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	56%

The quality of planning was variable and focused primarily on desistance, rather than fully considering the safety of the child and the risk they posed to others. There was too little planning to keep children safe and promote their wellbeing, and too limited focus in planning that considered how to manage the identified risks to other people.

Recent changes to the decision-making panel had introduced more scrutiny to planning activity and were intended to ensure that all aspects of planning were given equal priority. However, while there was a consistent focus on promoting desistance actions to keep children safe were infrequently planned for and more work was needed to promote the safety of victims.

Planning to meet desistance needs was effective in all but one case, with the YJS identifying and prioritising the work needed to prevent children from committing further offences. This included planning around referrals to a range of other appropriate agencies and support.

Planning to keep children safe was too often undertaken in isolation from other key agencies and workers involved with the child, including social workers and, in one instance, an independent domestic abuse advisor. Plans did not always specify the roles and responsibilities of other workers, or the partnership's response to meeting some complex and long-term needs. As the YJS has a time-limited and mainly voluntary contact with the child, joint planning with other agencies, especially those with a statutory involvement, is critical in making sure that safety and wellbeing needs are identified and met when the YJS is no longer involved or if the child chooses to disengage with the YJS. Contingency planning often did not specify who was responsible for taking actions when situations changed or if concerns increased.

Further planning was needed to keep victims safe; particularly where the needs of victims in frequent contact with children were not fully considered. This included those who lived with them or victims attending the same school.

⁸ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Outstanding
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Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	94%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	88%

Children who received out-of-court disposals can access the same range of services and interventions as children on court orders. Despite deficits in planning, case managers knew what services were needed and took appropriate action to make sure that referrals were made and that children received the required support and help.

Given the limited time that the YJS could be involved with them, we saw effective and quick relationship-building with children and parents. Contacts were frequent and offered flexibly to help those who were working or had caring responsibilities.

Referrals to other agencies were prompt and there was excellent use of advocacy so that the needs of children were known and shared. This included providing further information to social care to influence a shift from early help to statutory services, prevent evictions, and to support schools to maintain children in education and training.

The relationships with most agencies were strong, enabling case managers to share critical information and work with partnership workers to deliver services jointly. This also supported and assisted children to understand the benefits of accepting help and support.

We found individualised work with children, including specific safety plans such as supporting with mental health issues, work with residential placements to improve placement stability following incidents, and effective work with schools to manage risks.

There was individual work to support children to think about their decision-making, the effects of their behaviour on parents and victims, and their future.

Most services offered ongoing voluntary contact once the out-of-court disposal with the YJS had ended.

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available on our website.](#)

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

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

Strengths:

- There is a clear policy to divert children from the criminal justice system at the earliest opportunity, while still addressing risk and need.
- Work to establish prevention services has started, using funding from the Ministry of Justice 'Turnaround project'.
- Partnership agencies screen all children on receipt of the notification from the police to check whether they know the child or family. This provides a good level of information on which case managers commence their assessments.
- Assessment activity includes discussions with children and parents or carers, usually via a home visit.
- Case managers make a proposal for the disposal and the plan of work. These are reviewed by the panel and agreed or adapted as needed.
- All interventions and services available to children on court orders can be used for children on an out-of-court disposal.
- There is a clear escalation process requiring the oversight of a senior police officer in the event that disagreements at panel occur.
- The out-of-court disposal panel monitors and reviews the progress of children on out-of-court disposals.

Areas for improvement:

- There was evidence of joint decision-making, but the rationale for the disposal outcomes were not always clearly recorded on the case management system. There were inconsistencies in decisions made for children in similar situations.
- All police-issued community resolutions to children were reviewed at the decision-making panel; the YJS does not assess these but will give advice on signposting to other services. However, the effectiveness of signposting for children issued with community resolutions was not clear and there was limited analysis of this.
- The out-of-court disposal guidance does not reference children's diversity.
- Leaflets for children stated that a youth caution may be issued to those who did not comply with a voluntary youth restorative disposal, although we were told that these were rarely used. We were concerned about the potential implications for children, when agreeing to a voluntary disposal, should they choose not to engage.
- At the time of the inspection, Outcome 22 was rarely used by the police and YJS as a diversionary option for children. It was not used when a child provided a 'no comment' response in police interviews or if a child did not give an admission of guilt. This restricted the partnership's ability to deliver interventions with children. Further

work is needed to understand how this policy impacts on children and whether it is affecting first-time entrant rates or disproportionality.

- Due to changes in children's services management, the decision-making panel has not had a consistent representative from children's social care. This has been raised by the YJS, and a new representative is due to join. Although there are arrangements that ensure effective information-sharing, the panel understands the need for a consistent representative to signpost children into early help and to be the conduit to social workers who may already be working with the child and their families.
- Either an Asset-plus or a short format assessment is used, but there were inconsistencies on which tool was used and why. This was despite clear guidance that Asset-plus was to be used for children with potential high risk or safety and wellbeing needs.
- While we were told that information comes to the panel quickly, some of the cases reviewed at panels had significant delays, sometimes running into months. This resulted in delays in outcomes for children.
- The out-of-court disposal process needed better analysis and evaluation to understand its effectiveness and impact.
- There is no evidence that the views of parents or children have shaped the scheme.
- An annual out-of-court disposal scrutiny panel reviews cases that have gone through the disposal process. However, this scrutiny has lacked sufficient analysis and evaluation. For example, it has not identified that children who do not take responsibility for offences have to go to court, and receive limited opportunities for diversion.

4. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Good

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

Strengths:

- The resettlement policy covers all aspects of work, including the need to identify suitable accommodation early on.
- Barriers to effective resettlement are known and understood, and there are processes to mitigate these.
- Close links are formed with the custodial casework teams and planning meetings are set up quickly. Case managers attend the majority of these in person.
- Children leaving custody are allocated to the intensive surveillance and supervision and high-risk team in the YJS to provide intensive support.
- The complex case and YJS risk management panels provide oversight of resettlement work, and any issues can be allocated to senior managers to quickly resolve barriers.
- The YJS takes a personalised approach to resettlement. Arrangements for ETE and psychology support are strong.

Areas for improvement:

- Resettlement work is sometimes based on the quality of relationships rather than robust evaluation and review.
- Appropriate accommodation for children on release remains difficult to obtain. More emphasis is needed at strategic level to provide specific pathways for the small but significant number of children affected.
- Diverse needs other than mental health or neurodiversity are not part of the policy, so it misses the provision of specific aspects that the child may need, and the potential of bullying and discrimination for children from diverse backgrounds.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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