

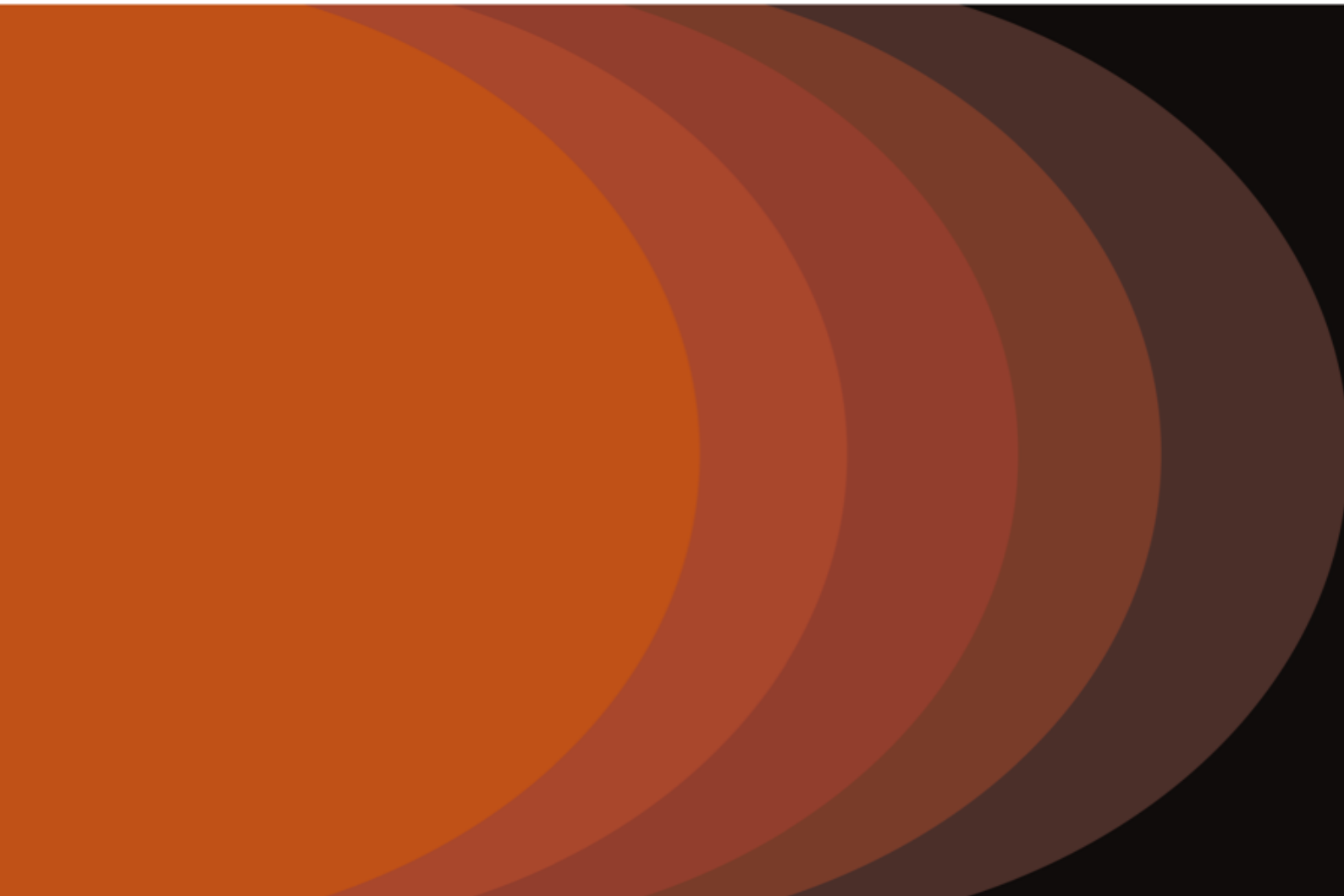


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Waltham Forest

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2024



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Foreword

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

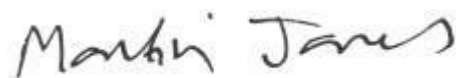
In many respects, the YJS has all of the necessary components required to deliver a high-quality service. The management board is generally well-attended, and a number of key partners have shown a sustained commitment. The service itself is well resourced, with access to a wide range of appropriate services in borough, including some targeted specifically at children who are overrepresented in the YJS cohort. Staff are well motivated and there is also a genuine desire to listen to the voice of children through the very impressive 'Voices in Partnership' programme.

However, there is inconsistent police representation at the management board, and this is having an impact upon the understanding, analysis, and oversight of out-of-court disposal practice and policy. We saw inconsistent engagement from senior police leaders, despite the best efforts of the management board to develop the local approach to prevention and diversion. The management board also needs a greater link between strategic planning and operational practice and implement more robust measures to satisfy itself of the quality of work undertaken.

For children receiving court orders, assessment and planning activities were generally undertaken well. However, the quality of intervention delivery and review activity was not assessed as sufficient for a number of children in our inspected cases. Despite a range of provision and services, we found work with other agencies to keep children safe was poorly integrated, and work to consider the safety of children, victims, or others was not always completed or delivered effectively.

The quality of work in delivering out-of-court disposals was also inconsistent. Assessment activity lacked analysis and detail, and in some instances did not inform the well-attended joint decision-making panel. This then impacted on the quality of planning as well as the implementation and delivery of interventions. As with court orders we did not always see integrated activity with partners when required, and work to support children's safety and wellbeing or address risks to others was not undertaken consistently.

A more robust approach to quality assurance from the YJS management team is needed to drive forward improvements to practice as we saw evidence that some staff do not always know what 'good looks like'. If the service recalibrates its approach to quality assurance and can achieve and maintain a consistent level of practice, then we have no doubt that improvements can be made.

















Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Waltham Forest Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started January 2024

Score 11/36

Overall rating	Requires improvement	
1. Organisational delivery		
1.1	Governance and leadership	Requires improvement 
1.2	Staff	Requires improvement 
1.3	Partnerships and services	Requires improvement 
1.4	Information and facilities	Requires improvement 
2. Court disposals		
2.1	Assessment	Good 
2.2	Planning	Good 
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Requires improvement 
2.4	Reviewing	Requires improvement 
3. Out-of-court disposals		
3.1	Assessment	Inadequate 
3.2	Planning	Inadequate 
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Inadequate 
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Requires improvement 
4. Resettlement¹		
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Requires improvement 

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

Recommendations

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

The Waltham Forest Youth Justice Service should:

1. review quality assurance arrangements, to ensure that a consistent understanding of good practice is embedded across the service
2. ensure that high-quality, timely assessments are always presented to the out-of-court disposal joint decision-making panel, and are used effectively to inform decision making
3. evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development activities
4. ensure that learning from reviews of serious incidents is disseminated, understood by staff and reflected in practice
5. ensure that all children are always seen at an appropriate venue if they do not feel safe coming to the office, and monitor the frequency of home visits
6. improve the recording and monitoring of all protected characteristics to ensure service provision is always reflective of need.

The Youth Justice Management Board should:

7. monitor and assure itself of the effectiveness of integrated working practices at an operational level between services working with children open to the YJS or who are at risk of entering the youth justice system
8. gain an understanding of why the YJS is working with so many post-court interventions, and utilise this information to inform future policy and practice as well as consider future resourcing.

The Metropolitan Police should:

9. ensure that there is regular and consistent strategic engagement at the management board (at the appropriate seniority) and review the use of Outcome 22 to ensure that all children are offered and supported to access interventions at the earliest opportunity.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Waltham Forest YJS over a period of a week, beginning 15 January 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 01 February and 09 August 2023; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 16 January and 02 November 2023; and resettlement cases that were sentenced between 02 February and 12 April 2023. We also conducted 40 interviews with case managers or their line managers.

Waltham Forest is an outer London borough in the north-east corner of the city, with a population of approximately 278,400 people. As of March 2023, 40.2 per cent of children in the borough were classed as living in poverty, well above the national average of 29 per cent.

The area is ethnically diverse, with an estimated 53 per cent of residents from a Black, Asian, and minority ethnic background. The top six countries of origin for residents born overseas are Romania, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Pakistan. The top five languages spoken locally, other than English, are Urdu, Polish, Romanian, Turkish, and Lithuanian. Twenty-eight per cent of children receiving free school meals are of African or Caribbean descent, while only 17 per cent of the borough population is from this background.

At the point of the announcement of the inspection the rates of offences per 1,000 of the 10–17-year population sat at 9.6, which is significantly above the London and national averages at the time, of 6.9 and 5.8, respectively². In October 2021, Waltham Forest was one of 15 London boroughs not to be allocated any of the new police officers deployed to the city. At the point of inspection, 79 per cent of the YJS caseload were from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background. Only 34 per cent were of statutory school age and 92 per cent were male. Twenty-nine per cent were care experienced.

The YJS is part of the youth and family resilience service (YFRS), sitting within the children's social care division of the People's Directorate within the borough. The portfolio of the head of the YFRS also includes the behaviour, attendance, and children missing education (BACME) service, alongside the YJS. There is a strong focus on tackling children's educational need and the structural barriers associated with this, as a means of preventing offending behaviour further down the line.

The YJS's top priorities are to reduce serious youth violence, drive a 'child first' approach, and reduce racial disparities. It seeks to undertake these ambitions through integrated activity with relevant statutory and non-statutory partners locally at a strategic and operational level. The YJS also has strong links with three other London YJSs: Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Newham. Caseloads have reduced. However, contrary to many other YJS's, in regard to the ratio of court to out-of-court interventions it is working with, the proportion of post-court work is higher. In the 12 months prior to the announcement of our inspection, the YJS worked with 24 out-of-court cases that fitted inspection criteria and 92 post-court and resettlement cases – a far lower ratio of out-of-court cases than we now ordinarily encounter during inspection of YJSs.

² Figures calculated by HMIP using YJB annual statistics: 2021 to 2022 and ONS population estimates, mid 2021.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 13 meetings, including with staff, volunteers, managers, board members, and partnership staff and their managers.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The YJS has an appropriate 'child first' vision. The recent conscious decision of the management board to align governance arrangements with those of the safeguarding children's board was a positive way of reinforcing this approach.
- The management board is chaired by the lead member for children from the council. She is knowledgeable, passionate, and sits on a range of strategic forums, as do other board members, and this represents assurance of strategic join-up across the partnership.
- The board consists of all appropriate statutory and non-statutory members. Attendance is generally good, and the board shows signs of stability and understanding of youth justice matters. Members were able to provide tangible examples of when they had advocated successfully for YJS children.
- There is a keen ambition to hear the voice of the child more effectively at a strategic level. Current arrangements via the Voices in Partnership (VIP) engagement strategy are already strong and it is positive that further development is a priority.
- Serious youth violence is a concern in the borough, and we saw an integrated approach to tackling this, with a focus on addressing racial disproportionality, although this has yet to evidence consistently positive outcomes for children.
- Our decision rules and guidance outline that an 'Inadequate' rating is usually consistent with less than half of domain two and three ratings being 'Good' or 'Outstanding' and more than half of the remaining ratings being 'Inadequate'. While this was the case, having reviewed all of the inspection evidence, and considered all key questions and prompts, we are satisfied we have sufficient evidence to agree a 'Requires improvement' rating for governance and leadership.

Areas for improvement:

- The quality of work that we inspected, particularly for children on out-of-court disposals, was inconsistent and insufficient. We were not assured that the messages being delivered by the YJS management team were translating into effective practice.
- While the YJS leadership team is experienced and well regarded, we observed some gaps in knowledge, particularly in regard to risk assessment feedback which was given to practitioners as part of quality assurance or management oversight activity.

- The management board needs more robust measures to satisfy itself of the quality of work undertaken by the YJS and use this to be more effective in challenging the accuracy of the quality assurance information and feedback detailed in reports presented at board meetings.
- We heard of examples of independent scrutiny but did not see this reflected in the work we inspected.
- There has been inconsistent police representation at the management board. This is having a detrimental impact on the strategic direction of police activity in the borough, particularly regarding the oversight of out-of-court disposal policy and provision.
- The board are not well sighted on the Turnaround programme and regular attendance and updates to the board by those delivering Turnaround would assist in further developing the board's oversight of progress of the borough's prevention and diversion activity.
- While there is evidence that the board understands the risks and factors impacting on YJS service delivery, there has been little discussion of the large number of court orders that the YJS works with. The reasons for the high ratio of court to out-of-court interventions are understood by the YJS head of service and other relevant senior leaders in the authority. However, a more sophisticated understanding of accompanying performance data is still needed at the management board itself to fully understand the impact for the service.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- This is a well-resourced service. Workloads are manageable and staff have a strong belief that they can have a positive impact on the children they work with.
- The vacancy and attrition rates are low; this is a service that staff want to be a part of. Many staff have been in the service for a lengthy period of time and motivation is high.
- Business support arrangements are strong, flexible, and support operational delivery.
- Staff are diverse and are representative of the community within which they work. Eleven out of 13 of them said that their own diversity needs at work are well met.
- The service has access to an impressive array of specialist workers. The recent development of a 'health hub' has been a particularly positive way of utilising these specialisms and ensuring that the health needs of children are met.
- Volunteers are well motivated and drawn from diverse communities with different lived experiences.
- Victim work is coordinated by a skilled and enthusiastic practitioner.
- Reward and recognition arrangements are well regarded by staff, a number of whom have received 'team member of the month' nominations.

Areas for improvement:

- Sickness rates are high. There are clear attempts to manage the impact of this for the team, but these are not always successful, and this can impact on operational delivery.
- The YJS needs to improve the way it collects and stores staff and volunteer information, and ensure that this is understood and easily accessible.
- Arrangements for learning and development need review. The quality of some training has not always been sufficient. There has been an overreliance on 'bitesize' training, which has not always been fully understood by staff. Managers need to be proactive in ensuring that staff fully understand training and guidance and embed this in practice. The management board need to continue to assure itself of the effectiveness of more recent face-to-face training arrangements. Regular discussions take place among the management team to discuss workload and staff development. While this is positive, the production of more formal guidance documents, such as an allocations policy or a standalone workforce development strategy, could strengthen arrangements.
- Management oversight and supervision arrangements are embedded in the service. However, we saw a number of examples where the cascading of feedback relating to policy and provision or direction about specific cases had not been sufficient. Managers have not always followed up with practitioners robustly, to ensure that information has been understood and actions completed.

1.3. Partnerships and services



A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- There is a sufficient level of understanding of the demographics of the children open to the YJS. We saw examples where this understanding had led to specific commissioning of activity from agencies such as Wipers, which runs courses for Black children in the borough, and the drama therapist, who provides additional support for girls who offend.
- Partnership managers and practitioners consider the needs of YJS children open to their services. There is a willingness to engage in developing service provision.
- Children's profiles of offending are understood and there is an appropriate offer locally; violence reduction arrangements and substance misuse services are appropriately targeted at children committing these offences.
- The BACME service works closely with the YJS under the YFRS umbrella. There is evidence that this has helped develop an understanding of factors impacting on behaviour and attendance at school. Although tangible improvements are still to be made and sustained, this approach is a positive one.
- The Your Choice programme has been an effective cognitive behavioural intervention for children at both ends of the spectrum of risk – those on open prevention interventions and those on Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS).
- The ambition to develop a 'fair access panel' for college placements is innovative and could enhance education, training, and employment opportunities for the post-16 cohort.
- A range of multi-agency risk management meetings and forums are in place which provide a platform for coordinating services to meet children's needs.
- Our decision rules and guidance outline ratings of 'Requires improvement' and 'Inadequate' in intervention and delivery for domains two and three are usually consistent with an 'Inadequate' rating for partnerships and services. Having reviewed all of the inspection evidence, and considered all key questions and prompts, we are satisfied we have sufficient evidence to agree a 'Requires improvement' rating.

Areas for improvement:

- Although the YJS has access to a wide range of varied interventions, we did not always find these to be well utilised by practitioners in the cases we inspected, and throughout the week of fieldwork there was not always a universal understanding of how to access all of them. This is an area that the YJS needs to revisit and review urgently.
- A greater understanding of the prevalence of all protected characteristics for children open to the YJS is required, to ensure that services meet all of children's diverse needs.
- There has been some activity to understand the needs of girls open to the YJS, and particularly the complex and vulnerable behaviours that they display. However, the analysis of the impact and effectiveness of this support is underdeveloped.

- There is no up-to-date strategic health needs assessment in place. Such a review could help to improve the offer of the recently created health hub. Additionally, it would help to determine whether consideration should be given to increasing the resourcing of speech and language therapy. The offer of one day a week screening and assessment provision is less than we have seen in many other similar-sized YJSs.
- The absence of a child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) clinician has delayed the application of the Trauma recovery pathway. Resourcing is now in place, and this is a priority.
- The coordination of activity between the YJS and social care to keep children safe is not always effective. We also saw examples where exploitation concerns existed and national referral mechanism (NRM) processes should have been considered but were not.

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Policies and procedures are stored on a shared drive and are accessible to staff. They are updated regularly.
- The children and young people working with the Voices in Partnership strategy have some oversight of the development of guidance for staff. We saw high-quality videos that they had produced to assist with this activity.
- The current building is old and dated but is fit for purpose as a YJS facility. The borough has acquired £10 million capital investment to build a new purpose-built high-need support centre, where the service will be based from May 2024. This looks to be an excellent facility.
- Information and communications technology arrangements work well and staff reported no issues when working away from the office.
- The adolescent-at-risk PowerBi dashboard is an effective reporting system, whereby staff within children's services can view a range of live-time information for relevant children. The YJS has access to this platform. If used effectively, it is an important tool for ensuring good-quality oversight.
- The YJS is committed to developing an evidence base for the work it is doing. It has recently commenced participation with Bedfordshire University to review disproportionality.

Areas for improvement:

- Not all children feel safe coming to the office, due to postcode peer rivalries. Arrangements are in place for children to be seen elsewhere, but the application of arrangements is not always undertaken sufficiently well. We also saw some instances where home visits should have taken place with greater frequency.
- We were not assured about arrangements for sourcing and risk assessing reparation placements. The YJS provided a risk assessment after our fieldwork for one placement which lacked clarity on specific consideration for the safe undertaking of reparation activity for the child and their supervisor.
- Like many organisations, the YJS operates hybrid working from home/office arrangements. As an operating model this has clear benefits, but a number of staff in the YJS noted that it can potentially impact negatively on the timeliness and responsiveness of personalised approaches with children when practitioners are working away from the office.
- There is a quality assurance framework in place and activity is undertaken regularly. The YJS and the board must assure themselves of the accuracy of findings from this activity. We noted a number of examples where our assessment of quality differed significantly from that of the YJS.
- The efficacy of the dissemination of 'lessons learnt' reviews to the YJS needs review; staff seemed unsure of outcomes of recent learning activity regarding serious incidents which had occurred in the last year.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS has a strong commitment to hearing the voice of children and young people in the borough. The main way they achieve this is via the Voices in Partnership programme. This approach has incorporated the voice of children in developing an extensive suite of prosocial activities and in shaping operational delivery. For example, the programme facilitates children's participation in job interview panels for new staff at the YJS, and has partnered proactively with young carers and the youth independent advisory group to give a child's perspective of how to develop the direction of the violence reduction partnership strategy. We were also shown an excellent video produced by the programme that is being used to educate practitioners across the borough about 'debt bondage'.

The YJS is assessing the impact of this strategy and will incorporate the findings into the next annual youth justice plan. In the meantime, children continue to be approached to assist with VIP projects and activity.

There is also a willingness to engage parents with the YJS's work. For example, a gang workshop delivered to parents provides an opportunity to gain feedback from those impacted by their children's offending behaviour.

Additionally, the YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the six children who consented, and five children and/or parents replied. Although this was a small number of responses, feedback was consistently positive. One child noted:

"I was visited frequently by someone to re-educate me about the severity of knife crime, and it helped me look at things differently to how I would've before."

We also spoke to four children either on-site or by telephone during our fieldwork. Again, feedback was positive, with one child noting:

"My case manager was really supportive with education and motivated me to go to college. He also supported me when I had difficulties with my tag and believed me when I reported issues, this was really positive to know that he had trust in me."

It is of note that, while feedback was positive, a couple of the children we spoke to also raised concerns that we identified within our fieldwork about the office location. For example, one child noted:

"The location of the office is not good; it is on the estate and is crazy if I want to avoid certain people and not be seen."

The YJS must ensure that it listens to feedback like this from children when developing plans to ensure that children are always seen in appropriate venues.

Diversity

In Waltham Forest, the most recent Youth Justice Board annual data (2021/2022) indicates that when comparing the offending population with the general population of those aged 10–17 years, minority ethnic children are overrepresented; 66 per cent of the youth population who offend are from such a background, whereas this figure is 28 per cent nationally.

Seventy-nine per cent of the YJS caseload are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background. The figure may be higher, as the data provided by the YJS for white children was not broken down further, so did not include Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children.

The YJS staff group is racially diverse across all grades, including volunteers, and provides assurance that children are interacting with positive role models, representative of their community. The management board is less diverse, and the board chair noted that she is very aware of this and would like to improve representation.

The service's monitoring of the data for all nine protected characteristics of the children needs to improve. The understanding of data is reliant on staff updating records accurately, and there was no systematic approach in place to ensure that this happened.

The YJS is aware of racial disparities within stop and search data, and, following consultation with children, has developed a programme to provide young people with information on their rights when they are stopped. Additional training is also delivered to police officers.

Practitioners told us that they are confident in having difficult and complex discussions about diversity with children, particularly early in the intervention while they are still getting to know the child, and we saw evidence of this in some of the case files that we inspected. However, this activity was not consistently reflected in case recording across children's needs; for example, the sexuality of the child was not clear in 37 of the 44 cases we looked at. In addition, children within the domain three cohort had their diversity needs analysed sufficiently in only nine of 20 cases.

The 'autism alert' card, while not unique to the borough, has been rolled out well. It is likely that those children who now have a card will therefore receive a more empathetic response from police and other professionals.

The management board advised that 50 per cent of children referred to Turnaround are female, so the partnership's challenge will be to ensure that the preventative provision of the Turnaround and youth-at-risk workers has a positive impact and that girls, and indeed children with other diverse characteristics, do not start progressing unnecessarily into the YJS's pre-court cohort. The lack of a deferred prosecution scheme locally, combined with the lack of a clear means of ensuring that diversity needs are fully considered when police issue a street-delivered community resolution, present a risk to this goal.

Domain two: Court disposals

We had a detailed look at 21 community sentences (no custodial 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?	81%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	71%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	71%

We identified a high degree of complex need for the children inspected. This was understood by practitioners, and their analysis of factors impacting on desistance was undertaken well. We invariably saw a good understanding of offending behaviour and this was aided by the fact that in 19 out of 21 cases we saw clear collaboration between the practitioner, child, and parent when completing the assessment. This interaction had helped the YJS get a good understanding of the personal circumstances of the child in all but one case inspected. It is crucial that the YJS has this understanding, in order to determine how best to address structural barriers that might impact on children's positive outcomes.

Assessment activity to keep the child safe was undertaken well in a reasonable majority of cases. The effectiveness of the YJS's approach was reflected in the fact that the practitioner drew on available sources of information from other agencies. This integrated approach ensured that the YJS had a good understanding of other agencies' evaluation of risk factors, which contributed to making the analysis more comprehensive and accurate.

While assessment to keep others safe was also done well, this drew on available sources of information in fewer cases than we had seen for safety and wellbeing. As a consequence, six out of 20 relevant assessments did not effectively analyse controls and interventions needed to manage and minimise the risk of harm to others. It is important that the YJS gets this analysis consistently in place, as it is critical to the quality of planning and intervention delivery.

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

2.2. Planning



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	76%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	71%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%

Planning activity was undertaken well in a reasonable majority of cases, with a good balance between supporting desistance and keeping the child and other people safe. We saw a strengths-based child first approach to planning which increased children's engagement and participation via the development of a tailored suite of personalised objectives.

Given the diverse nature of the borough, however, it was surprising to see that children's diversity issues had been sufficiently considered in only 13 of the cases we inspected. Inspectors noted that a full consideration of factors such as culture and heritage or learning needs was not always present. This lack of consideration may impact on the YJS's relationship-based approach to work, and children's engagement further down the line, particularly if the child does not think that the practitioner fully understands them.

In planning to keep the child safe, it was positive to see that sufficient contingency planning had been undertaken in 14 of 20 relevant cases. This activity appeared to have been assisted by attendance at, and engagement with, multi-agency risk planning meetings and by practitioners' understanding of relevant risk information acquired from others at the assessment stage. Access to a wide range of information is crucial to ensuring that plans are in place and workable, particularly if the child's circumstances deteriorate and a proactive response is needed.

Overall, planning to promote the safety of others and address risk were sufficient. Risks were well understood, and appropriate mitigations put into place. However, plans that addressed specific concerns related to risks to actual or potential victims were only done well in 10 of 18 relevant cases. Specifically, we did not always see sufficient planning in place to monitor the external controls and interventions needed to promote safety. It is critical that the focus on working constructively with the child must not be at the expense of considerations for victims and other people impacted by the child's behaviour.

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.	Requires improvement
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Our rating³ 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?	71%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	57%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	52%

There was evidence that the YJS continued to take a 'child first' approach to supporting children's desistance needs. For example, service delivery reflected the wider familial and social context of the child in 17 instances and was strengths-based in 16 instances. We saw a commitment to engaging the child and tailoring interventions to their specific needs, in line with what had been identified within earlier comprehensive assessment and planning activity.

However, service delivery to keep the child safe was not done as well. The coordination of activity with other relevant services and organisations was not always robust, and in eight out of 19 relevant cases service delivery did not promote safety and wellbeing. We saw a number of factors that impacted on our rating in this area: concerns relating to contextual safeguarding risks were not always explored sufficiently with partners; home visits were not always carried out with the frequency we would have expected; and when there were emerging risks, practitioners sometimes lacked professional curiosity and did not explore fully how interventions might best be altered. Where delivery was done well, we saw evidence that it was sequenced and delivered with partners in a timely manner and that the YJS attended and engaged with multi-agency forums to enhance overall provision for the child. More consistent demonstration of this sort of activity is needed.

Activity to keep others safe also required strengthening. Consideration of victims was sufficient in only seven of 17 relevant cases. While victim awareness work was undertaken, it was not always clear how it had been adapted to fit the cognitive abilities or learning needs of the child. In addition, we found engagement with other agencies was not effectively coordinated and found instances where children had been arrested for alleged further offending but information was not effectively shared or follow up checks undertaken.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	62%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	57%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	57%

Sufficient reviewing activity across desistance, keeping the child safe, and keeping others safe was seen in too few instances for us to have assurance about the effectiveness of the YJS's approach. Of particular concern was the way that reviewing activity was coordinated when a child transitioned to another area or another service. Plans and assessments were not always updated and changing circumstances were not consistently captured, reviewed, and analysed.

A strengths-based approach was less visible in reviewing activity. and this seemed to have been impacted by an observable change in meaningful co-production activity. We noted that children and their parents or carers were not consistently sufficiently engaged in review activities.

There was evidence that the YJS was aware of changing circumstances impacting on the safety of the child. However, reviewing activity did not consistently lead to the necessary adjustments to planning. We saw instances where specific changes in circumstance, such as placement moves, new involvement with offending peers, or a family member's self-harm, were all noted but did not lead to the practitioner making any change in their approach to working with the child. The YJS needed to take a more proactive approach to understanding changes to the child's life and considering the impact of these changes upon the child.

We saw a similar picture with reviewing and managing the risk of harm to others when circumstances changed. Again, necessary adjustments were not made consistently and we saw examples where emerging risks such as adolescent-to-parent violence were not addressed or considered effectively. However, where the YJS did make adjustments, we saw evidence that new meaningful plans were developed and appropriately recorded, and when done well it was clear that some practitioners knew what good reviewing practice looked like.

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.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 20 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of 15 youth conditional cautions and five youth cautions. We interviewed the case managers or their line manager in 18 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	55%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	25%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	25%

Arrangements were in place which should have resulted in good-quality out-of-court disposal assessment activity, but it was clear that practice required strengthening. There was an inconsistent understanding about the parameters for completing an assessment and we were incorrectly informed that assessments were only carried out for youth conditional cautions at the pre-joint decision-making panel (JDMP) stage. We found instances where some information was available, but had not been utilised to inform assessment activity and it was unclear how the JDMP was making informed decisions in the absence of quality assessment activity.

Where assessment activity was undertaken staff identified a number of pertinent factors with the children they assessed, relating to areas such as lifestyle; education, training, and employment; self-identity; and living arrangements. However there was insufficient analysis of potential key structural barriers impacting on these areas in a number of cases.

The assessment of how to keep children and other people safe required strengthening. Assessments consisted of too much description, rather than analysis, which was not supported effectively by information from other agencies. There was limited assurance, therefore, that JDMPs were always making decisions with all of the relevant information available.

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.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	65%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	40%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	50%

Planning activity to address children's desistance need was done relatively well. This was in part due to the well-attended JDMP and other multi-agency panel meetings in the borough. These meetings enabled us to see evidence that, despite the inconsistent quality of some YJS assessments, the needs of the child were being discussed collaboratively. This planning activity also gave some assurance that the strong focus on tackling education needs articulated within the youth justice plan appeared to be operationalised at these meetings.

However, positive planning activity to address desistance was not always replicated with quality planning to keep the child and others safe. For children who were known to other services due to safety and wellbeing concerns, we did not always see consistent integrated planning. For example, in one instance where a child was going missing and there were concerns that coordinated planning with children's social care was limited. When there are identified concerns and multiple professionals working with a child, integrated planning is essential to ensure that all parties know who is responsible for what, and how the plan will be delivered.

Alongside this, we found limited robustness in contingency arrangements to address safety and wellbeing concerns if risks increased. We found instances where the YJS made no further contact with social care colleagues after the initial panel and risk meetings and as a result, there was little in place to address contextual safeguarding concerns as they emerged during the intervention. A good, integrated contingency plan would have highlighted the need for communication between services to re-evaluate risk as new concerns emerged or developed.

Consideration of victims was not consistently addressed, and in the plans we saw, we did not consider they were sufficiently personalised to ensure that planned victim awareness work would be understood by the child and that learning would be embedded.

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.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Inadequate
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Our rating⁸ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	50%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	45%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	60%

When we reviewed service delivery to support the child's desistance, consideration of their diversity needs within the context of delivery of the intervention was inconsistent. In one case we inspected, 'Google Translate' was used to support delivery. The scope for potential issues with this approach, particularly in terms of ensuring the child's comprehension, were not considered. While this was not a typical picture, it was illustrative of a common theme in those cases we assessed where interventions were not sufficiently tailored or focused to meet the child's needs. This is a crucial consideration because if the child does not engage with the service being delivered, it has less chance of producing successful outcomes.

Work with other agencies within service delivery to keep children safe was poorly integrated, with insufficient evidence of effective involvement of other services. We saw examples where there should have been referrals or discussions with substance misuse services, CAMHS, social care, and the police to analyse and understand emerging risks, but this interaction had not taken place.

Consideration of the venue for effective service delivery by the YJS was not always undertaken in a systematic fashion to assist with supporting the safety of the child. For example, one mother expressed concern for her child's safety in attending to sign for his out-of-court disposal. No options were offered for this child to sign at an alternative venue and this resulted in him disengaging and having to go to court. This is a good example of how failure to implement a personalised approach can escalate a child through the youth justice system.

Services delivered to manage the risk of harm to others also required strengthening. One factor that impacted on this was that, while the YJS had good operational links with the police, staff did not always undertake good liaison or analysis of intelligence to understand how best to deliver services to keep others safe.

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.](#)

3.4. 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 was a strong offer of prevention and diversion activity. Children on the cusp of involvement with the criminal justice system received a strong offer of support, and those receiving a formal out-of-court disposal had access to a wide suite of interventions.
- The underlying 'child first' ethos of the YJS's approach was sound, with a strong emphasis on understanding the impact of family and school interventions on children's behaviour.
- There was evidence that risks to the child and to others were considered within policy and guidance.
- The list of attendees at the JDMP was impressive and when a pre-panel assessment was undertaken well, everything was in place to ensure that a holistic, well-rounded decision was made about the best intervention for the child.
- Processes were in place to ensure that engagement with interventions was facilitated. There had been some review of how well children were participating in out-of-court disposals, albeit with underdeveloped analysis.
- There was sufficient consideration of victims at the JDMP.

Areas for improvement:

- A more coherent policy needs to be developed, encompassing all areas of decision-making and provision across the complex prevention and diversion landscape in the borough. This guidance needs to reference explicitly how disproportionality would be addressed.
- The police were not sufficiently well engaged at a strategic level to ensure effective oversight of out-of-court disposal arrangements, to promote consistency both within the borough and when compared with successful arrangements in place elsewhere in London.
- The absence of Outcome 22 in the borough was having a potentially adverse impact on Black and mixed heritage children, who, research suggests, are more likely to give 'no comment' interviews. The Metropolitan Police should expedite a decision on the roll-out of this approach as a matter of urgency.
- The monitoring of police-delivered community resolutions outside of the joint decision-making process needed to improve. We were not assured that diversity needs were routinely considered by the police when community resolution decisions were made and there was no systematic review of overall efficiency. Where we saw evidence of monitoring, it was done by the local authority, rather than the police.
- The quality of assessments presented to the JDMP was poor. Although the structure of the panel itself was good and meetings were well attended, decisions were

consistently made using a potentially inaccurate assessment of risks to the child and to others.

- There had been no independent scrutiny of JDMP decisions in over two years. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- Feedback from children and parents had been sought, but had yet to be utilised demonstrably in a review of policy and provision.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

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 three cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- There was an up-to-date policy in place which was developed with social care colleagues. It placed sufficient focus on the principles of constructive resettlement and the seven pathways.
- All staff working with children in custody had received constructive resettlement training and told us that they felt confident in supervising children in custody. The bespoke resettlement plan document provided an effective template to develop planning activity during the child's time in custody.
- There were some positive arrangements for sourcing accommodation. The YJS had access to the London Accommodation Pathfinder and there was an agreement with social care ensuring that accommodation was in place at least two weeks before release.
- The Virtual School was well engaged with the resettlement strategy, and we saw evidence that it proactively focussed upon trying to ensure positive education, training, and employment outcomes for children.

Areas for improvement:

- The guidance laid out within the resettlement policy was not always implemented well in the cases that we inspected. The seven pathways of support were not always maximised effectively. Staff advised us that the principles were viewed as being slightly abstract or unachievable when put into practice; for example, structural barriers often prevented activity to source accommodation as soon as the child was incarcerated.
- There was no explicit reference within the policy to approaches that would reduce disproportionality. In addition, within the context that two of the three children we inspected were girls, there was sparse reference to girls.
- Access to resources in custody was seen as a challenge when attempting to deliver a personalised approach.
- The policy lacked clarity on information exchange with the secure estate, particularly regarding the use of the Youth Justice Application Framework.
- The quality of resettlement work that we saw in the inspected cases varied. In one case, a child's health needs had not been met due to 'insufficient time'. Joint planning with social care was not always well coordinated and one child's Looked After Child review had not taken place until two months after sentence.

- There was provision for consideration of victims in the service's policy, but one child had been placed back in the placement where she had assaulted her victim; the assessment of victims' needs was poor.
- While there had been a review of the policy in April 2023, there was little evidence of a systematic approach to the review of policy and provision. Data was collected, but we did not see how it was used in review, and feedback from the HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand had been considered in an action plan but not incorporated within a review of the resettlement policy itself.

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.](#)