



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

2023 Annual Report: inspections of youth justice services



High-quality probation and youth justice services that change people's lives for the better

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of probation and youth justice services in England and Wales. We set the standards that shine a light on the quality and impact of these services. Our inspections, reviews, research and effective practice products provide authoritative and evidence-based judgements and guidance. We use our voice to drive system change, with a focus on inclusion and diversity. Our scrutiny leads to improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

Contents

Chief Inspector's overview	4
Our youth inspections 2022/2023	6
Inspection ratings table October 2022 to October 2023	7
The youth justice landscape in 2023	10
Overview of inspection performance 2022/2023	12
Hearing children's, parents and carers voices: Our commitment:	14
The impact: What children, parents and carers say about their youth justice services:	15
Organisational delivery of youth justice services	18
Governance and leadership	18
Staff	20
Staff survey feedback	22
Partnerships and services	23
Probation secondees	26
Information and Facilities:	28
Supervision of court orders	30
Assessment	34
Planning	35
Implementation and delivery	37
Reviewing	39
Contingency planning	40
Victims	40
Recommendations relating to court work	41
Out-of-court disposals	42
The implementation and delivery of community resolutions	46
Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	47
Victims	49

Meeting children’s diverse needs	51
Management oversight	53
Resettlement and remand.....	55
Lessons learnt on this inspection programme and the future of youth inspections:	59
Inspecting in Wales.....	59
Feedback from inspections	59
Development of the new inspection programme	60

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

© Crown copyright 2024

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence or email psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available for download at: <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation>

Published by:

HM Inspectorate of Probation
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre
1 Bridge Street West
Manchester
M3 3FX

Follow us on Twitter [@hmiprobation](https://twitter.com/hmiprobation)

ISBN: 978-1-916621-45-9

Chief Inspector's overview



Over the year covered by this annual report we have continued to see impressive and mostly positive inspection results for youth justice services (YJS). Since 2018, the number of YJSs that have received an overall rating of 'Outstanding' or 'Good' has increased, and I am pleased to report that we have not given an overall rating of 'Inadequate' since 2020. These results are in stark contrast to what we are finding in our inspections of adult probation services, and there are a number of notable differences that we can see through our YJS inspections when compared with probation. For our staffing standard, 90 per cent of YJSs were rated either 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. In most YJSs, we have found a stable workforce, manageable workloads, sufficient training, and reports of good-quality staff supervision. These are all having a positive impact on the quality of work that we are seeing.

It is clear to me that what is key for the successful delivery of YJSs is not just localisation; it is also having the right structures and partnerships in place, with stability in the service and a high standard of interventions and delivery. Through our inspections, we have seen the impact that high-quality work in this area can have, and 75 per cent of YJSs have been rated as either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' against our partnerships and services standard. It is great to be able to publish such positive inspection reports for YJSs and mark the progress made. But to maintain this high standard of work, it is essential that YJSs continue to receive adequate funding and that money is not withdrawn in the future (despite the current good performance of YJSs). We have, unfortunately, seen some YJSs with cuts to funding and partnership services – I call for this to be urgently reviewed. The human and financial costs of young people unnecessarily entering the justice system outweigh the investment needed to maintain good delivery.

An area of concern that I would like to highlight is the issue that we raised in last year's report about the statutory requirement for probation secondees to YJSs. While there is a statutory obligation for these posts to be filled, wider pressures on the Probation Service have meant that they are often vacant – with only nine of the 20 YJSs covered by this annual report having a seconded Probation Officer in post. Despite seeing 'workaround' arrangements, these gaps inevitably have significant implications, including for effective transitions from youth to adult services, effective information-sharing, and the sharing of knowledge and expertise on key areas, such as multi-agency public protection arrangements, child protection and a full understanding of the diverse needs of children and the young adults who transition into probation. Such 'workaround' arrangements do not effectively address the issues and risks that arise when these statutory posts are not filled. We recognise that the Probation Service has been experiencing its own staffing pressures and see this every day in our adult inspection programme. But recruitment to probation services has now increased; yet this recruitment drive has not resulted in the statutory probation secondee posts being filled sufficiently.

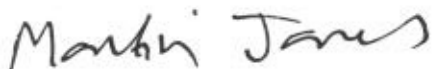
Additionally, we are still finding some gaps in relation to addressing disproportionality, with a lack of cohesive strategies and approaches to addressing the disproportionate representation of some groups of children in the youth justice system. We continue to see

certain groups being overrepresented – specifically, children in care and children from Black and minority ethnic groups, as well as children with speech, language or communication needs. Addressing disproportionality remains a key area for national policy and local strategic planning.

In our inspections, we are also seeing a wide variation in the use of deferred prosecution schemes, including Outcome 22 (deferred prosecution involving diversionary, educational or intervention activity), and we often provide recommendations around this. We hope that this variation will start to be addressed through the publication of the updated child gravity matrix, and that we will see Outcome 22 or other deferred prosecution schemes being applied more consistently in future inspections.

We have found that work related to victims could be stronger, and we have seen a slight decline in the quality of work around safety and wellbeing. Work against all areas of our standards for statutory court work still does not consistently pay attention to victims' needs and wishes. We know how critical work related to victims is. We hope to drive improvement in the quality of services for victims in our next inspection programme through our new youth inspection standard. We will use this to assess whether work with victims is high-quality, individualised and responsive in improving outcomes and safety for victims.

With this being my first annual report as Chief Inspector, I am pleased to be able to report on the positive practice and achievements that we have seen in YJSs. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of practitioners across the sector and thank them for their effort and commitment. As we work towards the conclusion of our current inspection programme of YJSs, I am excited to launch our new programme at the start of 2025. We have been carrying out extensive development work for the new programme, which has included consultation events with key external stakeholders, including children and young people themselves, across the youth justice sector and wider. I hope that we will continue to see good results through to the end of our current programme and into our future inspections.



Martin Jones CBE

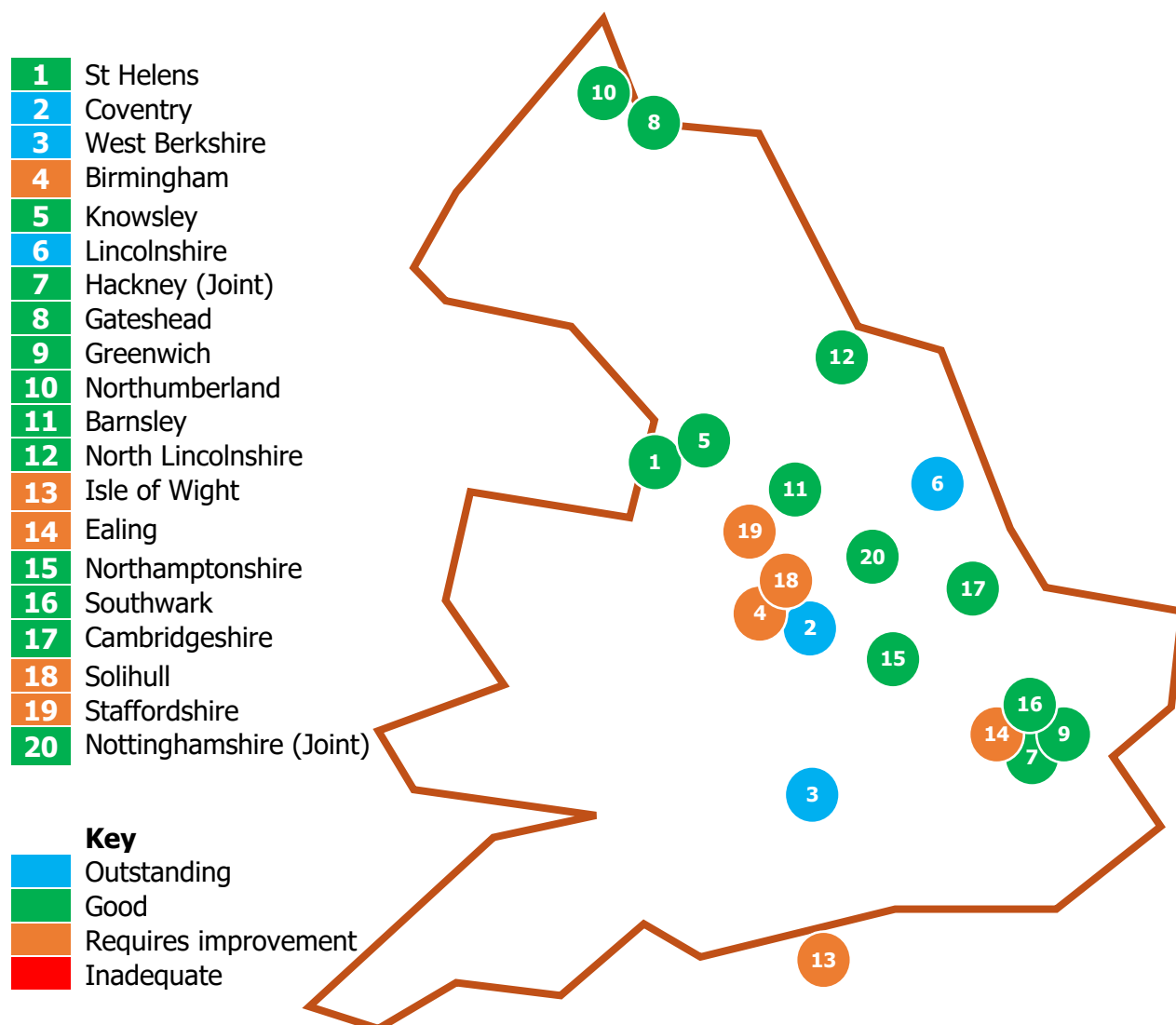
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Our youth inspections 2022/2023

Single and joint youth inspections

Single inspections involved inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Probation only. Joint inspections were led by HM Inspectorate of Probation along with colleagues from health, police, education and social care inspectorates.

The following 20 services were inspected between October 2022 and October 2023:



Inspection ratings table, October 2022 to October 2023

Each YJS is given an overall rating on a four-point scale: 'Outstanding' ☆, 'Good' ●, 'Requires improvement' ○ and 'Inadequate' ●. The scores from the individual standards are aggregated to produce the overall rating. Adding these scores produces a composite score ranging from 0–36, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows: 0–6 = 'Inadequate', 7–18 = 'Requires improvement', 19–30 = 'Good', 31–36 = 'Outstanding'.

Resettlement is rated in inspections from July 2021 onwards. This standard is not rated in YJSs where there have been no resettlement cases in the inspection sample period. In those circumstances, the inspection report provides a narrative explanation of policy and provision.

Service inspected	Published	Composite score	Overall rating	Organisational delivery				Court disposals				Out-of-court disposals				Resettlement	
				1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	4.1	
St Helens	21/02/2023	29	●	○	○	●	○	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	●
Coventry	21/02/2023	32	☆	☆	☆	●	☆	☆	●	●	●	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	●
West Berkshire	28/03/2023	21 out of 24	☆	●	☆	●	☆	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	☆	☆	☆	●	Not rated	
Birmingham	21/03/2023	11	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	●	○	○	○	○
Knowsley	11/05/2023	29	●	●	☆	●	●	☆	☆	☆	●	☆	●	●	●	Not rated	
Lincolnshire	04/04/2023	31	☆	☆	●	●	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	●	●	●	☆	●	

Hackney (Joint)	10/05/2023	25	●	● ☆ ● ●	● ● ● ●	☆ ● ☆ ●	●
Gateshead	23/05/2023	26	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ☆ ☆	● ● ☆ ●	●
Greenwich	20/06/2023	23	●	● ☆ ● ☆	● ● ● ●	● ● ☆ ●	●
Northumberland	19/07/2023	26	●	● ☆ ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ☆ ☆ ●	Not rated
Barnsley	19/07/2023	19	●	● ● ● ●	☆ ● ● ☆	● ● ● ●	☆
North Lincolnshire	05/09/2023	21	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	☆ ● ● ●	Not rated
Isle of Wight	14/11/2023	15	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ☆	● ● ● ●	●
Ealing	26/09/2023	17	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	●
Northamptonshire	13/10/2023	24	●	● ● ● ☆	● ● ☆ ●	● ● ● ●	☆
Southwark	17/10/2023	29	●	● ☆ ☆ ●	● ● ☆ ☆	● ☆ ☆ ●	●

Cambridgeshire	31/10/2023	19	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Solihull	19/12/2023	17	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	Not rated
Staffordshire	19/12/2023	9	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Nottinghamshire (Joint) YOS	23/01/2024	19	●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●

The youth justice landscape in 2023

We have seen significant changes and developments in the youth justice landscape across England and Wales during the period of this youth annual report (October 2022 to October 2023) and the period of publication (up to July 2024). The sector has continued to focus on prevention and diversion, and we welcomed the updated National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) child gravity matrix,¹ published in September 2023. We also welcomed the introduction of the Youth Justice Board (YJB)'s prevention and diversion assessment tool in April 2024, and the publication of updated guidance on case management. We hope these will support greater consistency and quality in practice and delivery, particularly as we continue to see some significant differences in the way out-of-court disposals are applied and used across England and Wales.

We still see wide variation in the use of deferred prosecution schemes, particularly Outcome 22,² throughout our inspections. Some police forces proactively implement these schemes for children, while others have yet to use the opportunities that deferred prosecution affords. We are hopeful that consistent application of, and reference to, the child gravity matrix will help police forces and YJSs to use the full range of options available to them when working with children who have committed offences.

In January 2024, the YJB published its annual statistics,³ looking at data from April 2022 to March 2023. These showed a small increase in the number of children who were first-time entrants (one per cent compared with the previous year), the first increase seen in the last 10 years. There was also an increase in the number of stop and searches (13 per cent compared with the previous year). Sentencing of children at court increased for the first time in 10 years, and the reoffending rate also saw a small increase. However, the average number of children held in custody at any one time fell (an average of 440 children at any one time and a fall of three per cent compared with the previous year). This was the lowest number on record. The publication highlighted that Black children continue to be overrepresented across most stages of the youth justice system, and this is something we have continued to see throughout the inspections we completed during this period. Gaps in data and analysis on the use of out-of-court disposals and diversion remain and this is an area that would greatly benefit from increased review, monitoring and oversight.

In March 2023, we launched our online evidence resource,⁴ in which we aimed to summarise key research findings and present them as concisely as possible. Looking across the literature, a number of factors consistently emerge as central to improving the life chances and outcomes of children who are involved in offending behaviour, or at risk of becoming involved in it. These include the importance of establishing positive, secure, consistent and trusting relationships between practitioners and children, as well as working collaboratively with children to identify goals, find solutions and build on their strengths, while working to address their needs. We found some excellent examples of this across our inspections during this period.

¹ National Police Chiefs Council (2023). Child Gravity Matrix. Available at: www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/criminal-justice/2023/child-gravity-matrix-v2.2---september-2023.pdf

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

³ Youth Justice Board (2024). Youth Justice Statistics 2022 to 2023 England and Wales. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2022-to-2023>

⁴ HM Inspectorate of Probation. Staff. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/the-evidence-base-youth-offending-services/organisational-delivery/staff/>

Throughout 2023 worked on our proposed new youth inspection programme, engaging with stakeholders across the sector. We worked with the Ministry of Justice's Youth Justice Policy Unit and the YJB, held a series of roadshows across the sector, used knowledge from our expert advisory group, and established a stakeholder working group made up of members from YJSs. We also spoke with children and young people about their views on our proposed programme. Our work on the new programme continues and will culminate in a number of pilot inspections throughout 2024. We plan to 'go live' with the new programme in 2025.

In November 2023, we published a joint thematic inspection of work with children who are subject to remand in youth detention.⁵ We found that many of the children in our sample had not needed to be remanded in custody and the quality of care and support they received while on remand was variable. We also found that the children in care status that children received as a result of being remanded was applied in widely different ways. This had a significant impact on children's experiences, with children often not receiving the support, intervention or access to partnership services that they were entitled to.

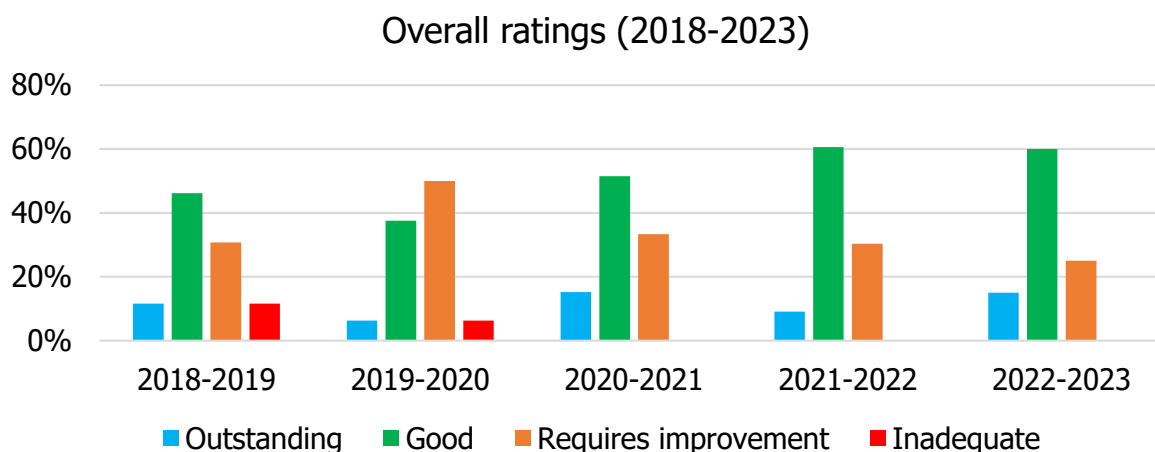
One of the most significant concerns we have in relation to youth justice during this period is the pressure on partnership resourcing and funding. This is critical to the future of YJSs and the youth justice system. We have found YJSs where funding and/or partnership services have been cut or stretched, and many examples where statutory partners are absent, both operationally and strategically. We consider that this requires urgent review and attention, to ensure the future of YJSs and that they continue to do effective work with children who have committed offences.

⁵ HM Inspectorate of Probation, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Ofsted. (2023). A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/thematic-youth-remand-23/>

Overview of inspection performance 2022/2023

Between October 2022 and October 2023, HM Inspectorate of Probation published 20 youth inspection reports, including 18 single inspections and two joint inspections.⁶

Figure 1: Overall ratings 2018-2023



Of the 20 YJSs inspected, three were rated 'Outstanding', 12 'Good' and five 'Requires improvement'. None were rated 'Inadequate'.

These figures are an improvement on the previous year (October 2021 to October 2022), when three YJSs were rated 'Outstanding', 20 'Good' and 10 'Requires improvement'. None were 'Inadequate'.⁷ We have not rated a YJS 'Inadequate' overall since July 2020, and it is pleasing to see that YJSs are consistently achieving ratings above this.

The YJS with the highest overall score in this period was Coventry, which received an overall score of 32 out of 36. It achieved 'Outstanding' ratings across a number of our standards, including leadership and governance, staff, information and facilities and out-of-court disposal policy and provision.

Case study: Coventry

In Coventry, we found a high-performing YJS. It had a committed and energetic management board, supported by an able and passionate group of managers and staff. Critical to the service was the guiding presence of an experienced and knowledgeable head of service. His role in delivering high-quality services to children in this challenging city environment cannot be underestimated.

There was an excellent workforce development strategy and a genuine commitment to developing and supporting staff. The YJS routinely gathered the views of children and their parents or carers, and these featured extensively in the work delivered for them.

We found substantial evidence of the involvement of key partners from health, children's social care, exploitation prevention, substance misuse, the police and education services. There was a strong, and well-resourced, multi-agency approach to work with children. We were particularly impressed by the work with the voluntary sector to address issues associated

⁶ Nottinghamshire and Hackney.

⁷ It is noted that we have published fewer inspections in the current period than in the same period last year.

with discrimination and disproportionality by matching mentors with the children according to shared lived experience or heritage.

The YJSs approach to out-of-court work was based on a comprehensive analysis of the evidence base, both national and local. Delivery of out-of-court disposal work was consistently of a high quality, achieving a rating of 'Outstanding' for each of the four standards (assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and policy and provision).

Comprehensive assessments were undertaken with children on post-court and out-of-court disposals. We saw these developed into cohesive planning work, which was then translated into high-quality services for children and their families.

Hearing children's, parents' and carers' voices: Our commitment




One of our key priorities is to listen to the voices of children, parents and carers so that we can understand their experiences of youth justice and YJSs. We recognise that this is an area we need to continue to develop. This year, we have undertaken significant work to improve the opportunities for children, parents and carers to speak with us and tell us about their experiences of being involved with YJSs. Our plan is to build on this during our pilot inspections and as we move into the next inspection framework.

We are producing an animated video to explain who we are, what we do, and why it is important to hear feedback from children on their experiences of YJSs. This will be released shortly, and available in both English and Welsh. We are hoping that, through this approach, we can increase the number of children who wish to speak with us. The video has been co-produced with children and young people, who have chosen the visuals and designed the storyboard and script, and are some of the voices featured in the video itself.

This is the first part of our review. We are also now looking at the methods we use to give children the opportunity to engage with us. We are providing more opportunities to join focus groups, have one-to-one conversations, or contact us by text or phone. We are also reviewing what we ask children, developing questions with them that they would like us to ask YJSs on their behalf, and getting their feedback on our proposed standards and new inspection framework. To support this work, we have had our proposed standards developed into a child-friendly version and held a number of workshops with children who are involved with YJSs.

The impact: What children, parents and carers say about their youth justice services

The responses from the children, parents and carers we have spoken with about their experiences of their YJSs are overwhelmingly positive.

Over the period covered by this annual report, we spoke to:	
	87 children
	40 parents or carers
	We have sent 423 text surveys to children, parents and carers, and received 152 complete responses and 52 partial responses (204 in total).

Ninety-six per cent of children, parents and carers felt the aims of the YJS were communicated effectively to them:

‘Help and guide’, ‘keep me/my child out of trouble’, ‘avoid further offending’, ‘to make better choices’.

Ninety-eight per cent believed that their case managers had the right skills to help them. Responses indicated that they appreciated the relational approach we see in many YJSs. This involves practitioners spending time with a child, and their parents or carers, being patient, listening, and treating them with respect. The importance of building trust was a key feature in the feedback we received, and children, parents and carers valued practitioners who invested time in getting to know them. Participants felt that practitioners had advocated for them and been proactive in attending meetings with or for them, addressing issues with schools or supporting them to get access to provision:

‘You get warm vibes with them – you feel that you can talk to them’.

‘I feel confident with my worker, and I trust them. It’s taken some time to build the trust because it is something I struggle with. They got round it by being genuine, and being with them a long time now has helped me to really get to know them’.

Ninety per cent felt that their YJS had supported them and helped them to get access to the services that would support them and help them to stay out of trouble:

‘They pay for me to go to a music studio and use it for free. The people that work there have also helped me to learn how to produce music and beats.’

'When I lost my job because the company went bust, my YJS worker asked me what I wanted to do. When I said I was interested in youth work he put me in touch with a youth worker and I am going to start volunteering.'

'I have had help with anger management and emotions. They have helped me to think about how to deal with things that happen in my area because that can be a lot. They spoke about education, but I don't want that. I want an apprenticeship and now they are helping me to try to find one. They helped me to get a gym membership and I go about 4-5 times a week.'

'My son has ADHD and through the YJS he was able to access speech, language and communication support. They offered him a music intervention and the YJS worker worked well with the school when there were problems.'

'They have helped a great deal. The biggest problem was school. The Worker helped me to share my worries and frustrations, she accompanied me to school meetings and got me in touch with the Education Psychologist. Together we were able to get an EHCP for my son so he can get the right support and then another school was identified.'

Ninety-nine per cent of children felt that the places where YJS practitioners saw them were safe and accessible. It was apparent that practitioners were using a variety of community locations as well as YJS offices or facilities. In many comments, we found that YJS practitioners were seeing children in locations that made it easier for the child to attend, such as at school or at home, or they were picking children up and transporting them to meetings. Feedback indicated that this was helping children to build relationships and integrate into the community. It was positive to hear that children specifically refer to feeling safe and that their safety had been taken into consideration by their practitioners.

'They asked me where it might not be safe to go, for me and for them to make sure I didn't have problems in any areas. I felt safe.'

'They ask where you feel safe when you first meet them. I didn't feel safe where my school was and my YJS worker helped to get me into a new school placement.'

Child participation, collaboration and co-production continued to be priority for many YJSs. Most YJSs have identified this as a priority in their plans and service/local authority principles and values. Some YJSs are still in the early stages of developing and implementing their participation strategy, but we have seen highly impressive work in several. Some areas have developed their own participation strategies. The YJSs where we have seen participation done well have the following features in common:

- They have created a specific child participation/engagement strategy that clearly sets out how a strategy will be put into practice, how the service will make sure children's voices are heard, and how they will use this information to influence their work. Examples include St Helens and West Berkshire YJSs. When services have a clear strategy, including identifying when and how that strategy will be implemented, alongside identifying who will be responsible for leading, overseeing and completing it, there is evidence of progress and impact.
- Processes that ensure the child's, parents' and carers' voices (not case studies) are routinely heard at board level, either directly or indirectly, are in place, and boards can demonstrate the impact this has on their work. Where children have been able to give their views directly to the board, this has helped the board to understand the

- children's experiences and often shaped service delivery. In Ealing we saw some excellent examples of this, including where children's feedback was used in the training of new police officers on stop and search procedures.
- There is a partnership approach and culture that recognises the importance of children's participation.
- Children's views have shaped and informed service delivery. For example, in St Helens, children were consulted on improvements to the YJS office. This included creating a girls' room, and choosing the colour scheme for intervention rooms, the outside railings cover, and equipment for the office (including a punch bag, breakfast bar, and table tennis).
- Routine, active, and genuine involvement of children in strategic and operational service delivery is explicit. In Birmingham, children were actively involved in strategic and operational activity, including recruitment.

Children's participation in Gateshead

Understanding the experiences of children, parents and carers, and victims was a priority for the YJS, and it was proactive in ensuring that their voices were heard at the board and used to influence service delivery. This included consulting with children and their parents or carers in developing the YJS plan and creating a child-friendly version to explain their intentions and priorities.

This ethos was shared by the wider partnership, which also recognised the importance of working and collaborating with children and families. The partnership supported the YJS in prioritising this, and in setting out how it intends to develop it further.

Children and their parents or carers have attended the management board, and work is underway to have standing representation at each meeting.

Partners supported the YJS in creating an animated video documenting children's experiences of working with the service. The piece was co-produced with children and has given them the opportunity to tell their experiences safely. The YJS intends to use the video for wider learning and to support tailoring services to meet children's needs.

It is essential that YJSs hear from children routinely, consistently and to a high standard, and that they then use this to inform service delivery. We have made four recommendations relating to children's participation during this annual report period, including that children's voices should be heard and have an impact at strategic levels.

Children's participation in the Royal Borough of Greenwich

The YJS has increased the use of the creative arts to provide children with a variety of ways to communicate with professionals. It held a multi-arts exhibition, entitled 'Are You Listening', which was attended by parents, family and friends, youth justice officers, personal advisers, social workers, senior leaders in children's social care services, and the assistant director for families, safeguarding and social care.

The YJS learned from the views expressed through this exhibition and developed further work with the children. It used the Theatre of the Oppressed to work with the police, family and adolescent support service, and youth justice services to explore oppression, difference, and the experience of stop and search.

Children's engagement with these initiatives, and the concerns they expressed, have resulted in them being involved in recommissioning appropriate adult services and in discussions with the head of inclusion, including about their experiences at school and experiences of discrimination.

Children have attended whole-service meetings to promote the creative art initiatives and have taken an active role in developing and designing these projects.

Organisational delivery of youth justice services

In our inspections we consider four key aspects of organisational delivery when inspecting youth justice services: governance and leadership, staff, partnerships and services, and information and facilities. Across the 20 services included in this annual report, we gave the following ratings for organisational delivery:

Governance and leadership			
★ Outstanding 2 services	● Good 8 services	● Requires improvement 10 services	● Inadequate 0 service
Staff			
★ Outstanding 7 services	● Good 11 services	● Requires improvement 2 services	● Inadequate 0 services
Partnerships and services			
★ Outstanding 1 service	● Good 14 services	● Requires improvement 5 services	● Inadequate 0 services
Information and facilities			
★ Outstanding 5 services	● Good 11 services	● Requires improvement 4 services	● Inadequate 0 services

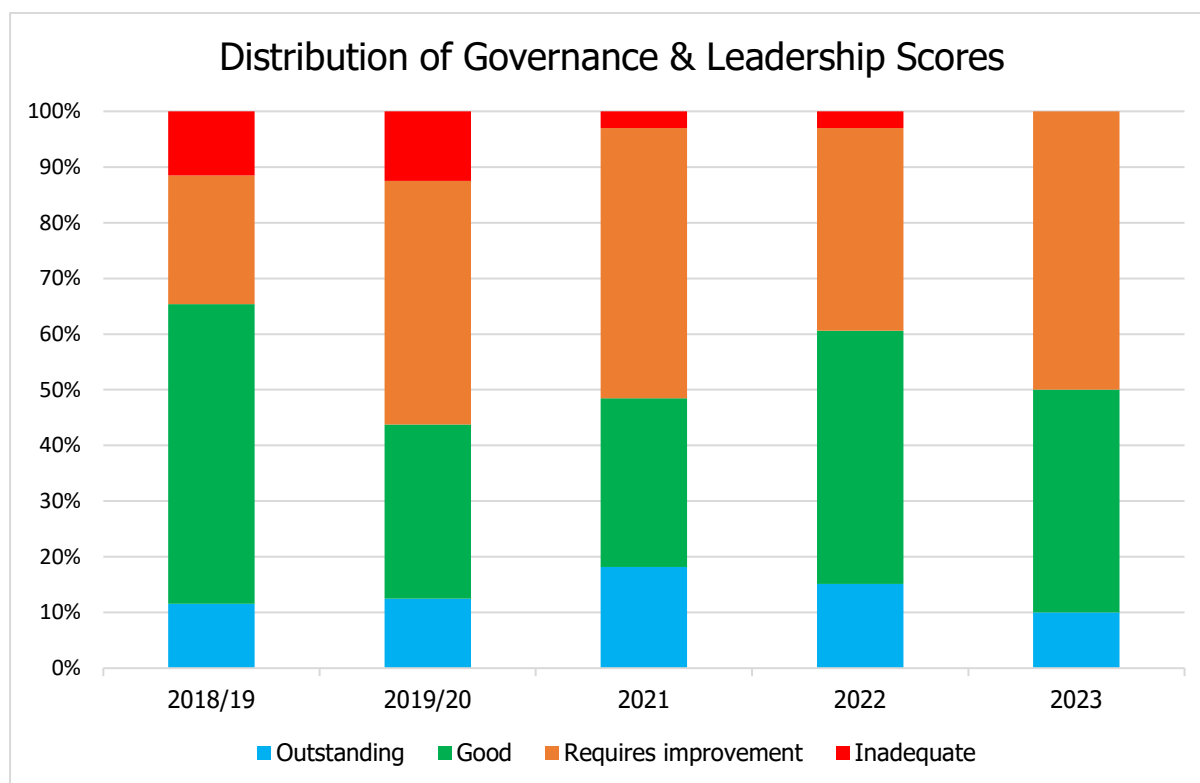
Governance and leadership

When assessing governance and leadership, we consider three key questions, which cover whether:

- there is a clear local vision and strategy for delivering a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children
- the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery
- the leadership of the YJS supports effective service delivery.

These key questions cover the strategic management of the service, through the management board; the role of senior officers; and the operational management of the day-to-day service. There is a clear focus on the importance of an effective management board, made up of all statutory partners (and non-statutory, where they add value), where members are attending consistently, active in their participation, are of the appropriate seniority to make decisions, and recognise the important contributions their own agency makes to the YJS.

Figure 2: Distribution of governance and leadership scores, October 2022 to October 2023



In 2022/23, 50 per cent of YJSs were rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' for governance and leadership, which is a decrease from 61 per cent in 2021/22. However, it is pleasing to see that none of the services inspected in this period had 'Inadequate' ratings for governance and leadership.

In the two services⁸ rated 'Outstanding' for leadership and governance, we found knowledgeable board chairs who understood youth justice well. They held their partners to account effectively to ensure that they took a collaborative approach to delivering local youth justice services. We saw boards that understood and proactively promoted a child-first, trauma-informed approach to working with children and families, and partnerships that invested in the YJS, helping it to become more resilient as an organisation. Board members supported, understood, and proactively reviewed the work of the YJS and there was a cohesiveness between the board and YJS staff, which helped them to become more connected, strategically and operationally.

Governance arrangements were critical to effective leadership. They ensured that board members had the authority to make timely and considered decisions on behalf of their organisations, for the benefit of the YJS. We found that boards were most effective when board members were active participants who understood the distinct and diverse needs of YJS-involved children, could direct resources to meet these needs, and were influential advocates for them. Fundamental to boards' effectiveness was their ability to listen to the experiences of children and their parents or carers, and then use this information, both strategically and operationally, to develop and improve services.

⁸ Lincolnshire and Coventry

Lincolnshire rated 'Outstanding' for governance and leadership

Lincolnshire's leadership and governance arrangements were a significant strength. The YJS management board set a well-communicated vision and strategy, and strategic partnership arrangements were mature and collaborative. Board members had sufficient seniority to make decisions and commit resources from their own agencies. They modelled positive partnership working, which was then reflected in operational work with children.

YJS staff and senior leaders had a shared commitment to ensuring that children received the most appropriate services and interventions. There were strong links and mutual trust between the head of service, operational managers, and the board. Board members were well informed about the quality of practice being delivered by the YJS.

The board was part of a network of partnership arrangements that worked across Lincolnshire. YJS board members provided strategic links to other partnership forums, such as the safeguarding children's partnership, community safety partnership, local criminal justice board, and violence reduction partnership. They made sure YJS children's needs were heard and considered at these forums.

We were particularly impressed by the board's in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges facing YJS children. This was based on data and evaluation from internal and external sources and reports.

The breadth of targeted, specialist, and mainstream services ensured that partners collaborated closely and had a shared responsibility for addressing children's complex needs.

In contrast, in areas rated 'Requires improvement' for governance and leadership, board chairing arrangements frequently changed, attendance was inconsistent or there were regular changes in membership. This led to drift, lack of direction and limited progress. We found examples of a disconnect between the board and operational staff, and board members who did not understand YJS children's needs and were not informed about the quality of service provided by the YJS. Progress on action plans was not driven or monitored effectively, and there were limited processes for collating, analysing and using children's feedback, with minimal evidence that it was used to inform policy, strategy or delivery.

Critically, in some areas, we found that cohesive strategies for recognising and addressing children's diverse needs were either limited or lacking altogether. Boards did not understand the children's protected characteristics, disproportionality and the over-representation of some children within the youth justice system. Sadly, this mirrored findings from previous years, and we urge management boards to prioritise the development of effective strategies that consider and address the diverse needs of children in the youth justice system.

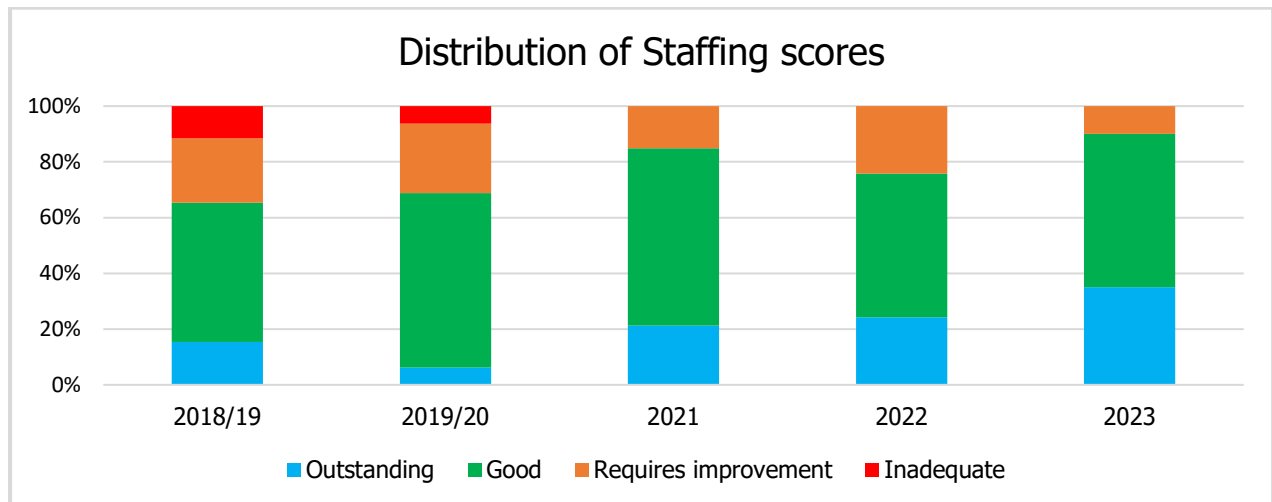
In some instances, we found a correlation between limited commitment or representation from organisations in the strategic partnership at board level and a failure to prioritise providing statutory seconded staff to the YJS. This was particularly apparent in the decline in the number of areas with seconded Probation Officers in post. We also found some partnerships where there had been limited strategic action or apathy by the board in challenging the lack of Probation Officer provision. Additionally, we found examples where funding uncertainties across the partnership resulted in a lack of effective challenge from the partnership, often where challenge was most needed.

Staff

Staff has remained one of the consistently highest rated standards, and this year 90 per cent of YJSs were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for this. This is also an improved picture from previous years (76 percent in 2022, and 85 per cent in 2021). There is no doubt that in many YJSs the staff are the greatest asset. We have consistently found highly motivated,

committed and passionate staff delivering youth justice services. Staff focus on ensuring the very best for the children they are working with, going above and beyond to support those children to achieve, and to help them move away from identifying as children who have committed offences. Many YJSs have a stable workforce and have demonstrated that they are able to balance office and remote working, providing staff and children with flexibility in how services are delivered.

Figure 3: Distribution of staffing scores, October 2022 to October 2023



The areas rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' typically had senior leaders, managers and staff who shared a common vision and sense of purpose and worked together to achieve this. We found that staffing resources were planned well, suitably reviewed, and responsive to changing demands. Workloads were manageable, and allocation of work considered children's needs and practitioners' skills, and built on existing relationships if children were already known by professionals. This meant that relationality was at the core of working in a trauma-informed way. We found partnerships that promoted and valued a culture of learning. There was strong support and challenge, and a clear commitment to developing staff.

We often found that staff took a strong child-first, trauma-informed approach to their work. They understood children's diverse needs and lived experiences, and were confident in discussing these sensitively and appropriately. We found YJSs where the staff groups broadly reflected the diversity of the local population and instances where targeted recruitment had been used to increase the diversity of staff and volunteers. Service managers also helped practitioners to reflect on their knowledge, lived experiences, and understanding, and supported them with regular supervision, clinical supervision, case formulation, and reflective practice opportunities. This enabled them to be the best possible practitioners that they could.

In the areas rated highly, staff were confident in approaching managers for advice and guidance. There was a strong focus on creativity and innovation, evidence of succession planning, and a celebration of good work.

Conversely, in the services rated 'Requires improvement', we often found issues with staff retention and recruitment that resulted in gaps between posts being occupied, insufficient staffing levels and unmanageable workloads. We found some instances of high staff turnover, sickness, a lack of training opportunities or appropriate induction, poor staff morale, and poor supervision and management oversight, which failed to improve practice.

West Berkshire rated 'Outstanding' for staff







In West Berkshire we found strong staffing arrangements. All YJS staff were determined to enable every child to flourish. They were highly ambitious for the children they supported and would go the extra mile for them, time and time again, to ensure that they had the best chance to thrive and succeed.

Managers paid close attention to staff safety and wellbeing, which built confidence and resilience across the service. Staff received regular one-to-one and group supervision, and this enabled them to learn and improve the quality of the services they delivered to children. All staff reported that the quality of supervision was 'very good'. Training and development opportunities were varied, and staff were encouraged to participate in them and progress into other roles.

As a staff group, they supported one another admirably. This created a culture where everyone felt they belonged and had an important part to play.

Staff survey feedback

For each inspection we provide the opportunity for all staff within YJSs to complete a survey that asks about their experiences and views on working in their YJS. Across the 20 YJSs that we inspected in this annual report period, we received a total of 612 responses, with 530 of these fully completed and 83 partially completed.

	These YJS staff were from a wide range of roles: 37 per cent were case managers, 15 per cent managers, 11 per cent seconded staff (from police, probation, education or health), eight per cent administrative or support staff, seven per cent victim or restorative justice workers and the remaining 14 per cent from other categories. ⁹ Forty-one per cent of staff looked after out-of-court cases, nearly a third looked after court cases and 15 per cent looked after resettlement cases.
	Staff were broadly quite experienced: 41 per cent had worked at the YJS for more than five years; 16 per cent for three to five years; 21 per cent for one to two years; and 23 per cent had been working for the YJS for less than a year.
	70 per cent of staff were female, a fifth male and nine per cent chose not to state their gender.
	Staff ranged widely in age: 14 per cent were aged 18 to 30; 25 per cent were 31 to 40; 27 per cent were 41 to 50; 18 per cent were 51 to 60; and four per cent were over 60. Thirteen per cent of staff chose not to tell us their age.
	Staff were overwhelmingly from a white ethnicity (76 per cent), with only small numbers from Black (7 per cent), Asian (3 per cent) and mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds (3 per cent). Eleven per cent of staff preferred not to state their ethnic background.
	Most staff were full time (82 per cent). Part-time staff made up 13 per cent of the respondents and five per cent preferred not to disclose their working pattern.

⁹ Numbers here can add to more than 100% because staff can have more than one role.

Key feedback from the staff survey includes:

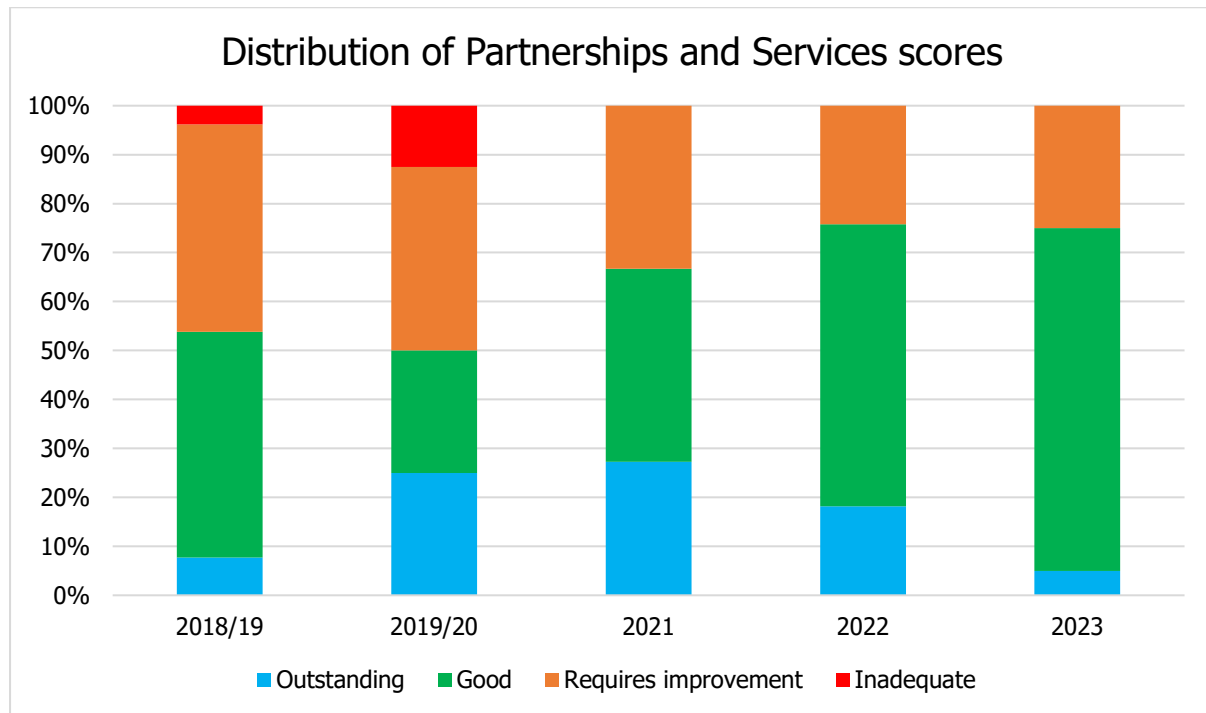
- YJS staff understood their role and responsibilities in the YJS partnership arrangements, with 94 per cent saying they understood these quite or very well.
- Staff's understanding of the management board's activities was variable, with 29 per cent saying they were not very aware or were entirely unaware of these.
- Staff were not always entirely clear about updates to strategic issues like budgets, legislation and staffing, with 30 per cent saying they were only occasionally updated or not at all updated.
- Staff felt that they were able to challenge their managers and provide ideas, with only eight per cent saying that they rarely or never did so. Two-thirds of respondents said that they often did so.
- Staff were well motivated by their YJS to provide a quality service, with 94 per cent saying the YJS motivated them to a great extent or to some extent.
- YJS staff felt that they were sufficiently experienced and qualified to manage their caseload, with 56 per cent saying they were to a great extent, and 30 per cent saying to some extent.
- Ninety-three per cent of respondents reported that the frequency of their supervision was just right, and 95 per cent reported that it was either very good or quite good.
- YJS staff were quite positive about the recognition of exceptional work, with 93 per cent of staff saying that such work was always (54 per cent) or sometimes (39 per cent) recognised.
- Staff felt that their training and development needs were fully met 50 per cent of the time and mostly met a further 42 per cent. Eight per cent felt that their needs were not met often or at all.
- Some staff said that they had excessively high caseloads and often mentioned the reasons for this, such as poor staff retention, high sickness rates and too many vacancies. High caseloads were often the cause of other areas of improvement, such as low staff morale, too much paperwork, and insufficient provision for staff's welfare. However, this feedback was limited to specific YJSs and not universal across the areas inspected during this annual report period.
- Staff also raised the quality of management supervision where the manager did not have a youth justice background and was not able to provide the quality of supervision that staff wanted and needed.
- Staff also raised issues with operational matters, such as a desire for more professional judgement, better working across teams, more focus on child inductions and working directly with the young person, rather than assessments and paperwork, more localised delivery, better case management systems, and more support for working on serious youth violence.

Partnerships and services

The power of the partnership is critical for YJSs. Indeed, their very existence is predicated on partnership commitment and statutory responsibility. For YJSs to run effectively, partners must dedicate time, resources and effort. They need to understand the vital role each partner plays and the unique contribution they make. When partnerships function effectively, they can be transformative. However, when the partnership commitment is lacking or variable, it can make youth justice service delivery precarious, causing instability,

uncertainty and, ultimately, a failure to meet the needs of the children and victims the partnership is designed to support and protect. This year, 75 per cent of YJSs have been rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' for partnerships and services, a very slight decrease on last year (76 per cent).

Figure 4: Distribution of partnership and services scores, October 2022 to October 2023



In the areas that scored well, we typically found strength in the strategic and operational analysis of children’s needs. The partnership focused on identifying and mitigating any disproportionate representation of children within the YJS, and was committed to providing the right resources at the right time for all YJS children. Like last year, the strongest performing areas had embedded a child-first and trauma-informed approach across the partnership. Interventions were delivered to a consistently high standard, which demonstrated the quality of partnership working. Children were able to access a range of services and support, and specific pathways for targeted, specialist and timely provision. We found examples where arrangements to support victims and deliver restorative practice resulted in positive outcomes. We also saw a greater focus on involving local communities in the work of the service, as well as recruitment of local volunteers.

Many YJSs are increasingly prioritising timely and appropriate neurodevelopmental pathways, and recognising the importance of making sure YJS children can access speech, language and communication provision. YJSs are increasingly located in children’s services directorates, and we saw some good examples of joint working with children’s social care; cohesive, effective and robust arrangements to manage children at risk of or experiencing exploitation; and specialist provision for children who display harmful sexualised behaviour. We also saw services where practitioners were prioritising children’s and families’ accommodation needs, and making effective links between the YJS and education, training and employment providers. Substance misuse services worked collaboratively with YJSs (often having a staff member working within the YJS). Children had access to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and health practitioners, which supported them with their emotional, mental and physical health needs. We also found some positive

examples of effective transition arrangements with probation services and good links with courts and sentencers. We saw innovative and creative services for Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, and girls – where services recognised their unique needs and tailored partnership provision to meet these.

However, we also saw services where the profile and needs of YJS children had not been sufficiently identified or analysed, either operationally or strategically. This meant that the partnership was not clear about which resources were needed to deliver well-targeted and effective services. We saw examples where the range, volume and quality of services were not sufficient to meet the diverse needs of YJS children, or where staff did not know how to access the right provision or pathways. We saw resources being cut or diminished, children having to wait for long periods on lengthy waiting lists, and instances where children's needs were not met, and their protected characteristics were not considered.

We also saw many examples of partnership panels, multi-agency risk management or safety and wellbeing panels, which, while commendable in bringing partners together and facilitating collaborative approaches, were not always cohesive or effective at keeping children or others safe.

We found that reparation was often under used, or there were limited options available for children. Services for victims were not being adequately prioritised, and vacancies or gaps in specialist roles had led to significant delays in children receiving the services they required. We also found that a lack of review, monitoring or quality assurance sometimes meant partners were not proactively evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the resource or service they were providing. In some cases, this resulted in it being withdrawn.

Our staff survey asks staff about their views on partnership services:

- 76 per cent of YJS staff reported that they always or mostly had sufficient access to services, interventions and partnership resources that they needed.
- 51 per cent of YJS staff reported that they always knew how to access the services of partners and providers very well and 42 per cent reported they sometimes knew how to access services.

Some staff reported that, in their YJS, they did not have sufficient access to specialist officers for areas like intensive supervision and surveillance (ISS), bail support, court work and CAMHS. Related to this, some said they did not receive enough support from partner agencies such as education, health and the police. Some staff also wanted closer working relationships with children's services and children's social care.

Staff frequently identified gaps in the services and interventions available for young people. Most common was inadequate mental health support, with CAMHS being singled out several times for overly high thresholds and long waiting lists. Staff also mentioned the absence of services that could fill the gap between CAMHS and wellbeing services. Several mentioned the lack of a clinical psychologist who could support their work, whether through specialist services or in-house provision. Gaps in general health provision were also mentioned, such as the lack of an in-house nurse and insufficient or absent resources for neurodivergence assessments. Staff also highlighted the lack of options for alternative educational provision for those children with education, health and care plans (EHCP) or who were not in education, employment or training.

Interventions were often highlighted as a gap in provision for a variety of different reasons. Staff identified particular interventions that they lacked in their YJS, such as addiction support, restorative justice, domestic abuse, young fathers, speech and language therapy and prevention). Some said that the interventions they did have were old, out of date or did not meet current needs, and that there was a lack of innovation in what was available. Staff

also mentioned work that they wanted to provide but did not have the resources for, such as positive activities, resettlement services, better ISS provision, desistance-focused interventions, support for young victims of crime, and support for children from ethnic minorities or over-represented groups.

Several staff mentioned interventions or support outside the YJS that were lacking, and how this made their work harder. These included a lack of accommodation for children who could not return home or for families who had to move home to stay safe; universal provision such as youth groups; support for parents; services for 18- to 25-year-olds, including transitional safeguarding services as children bridged the gap to adulthood; and a lack of services from the local authority to prevent family breakdown.

Some more universal gaps were mentioned several times, such as long waiting lists, a lack of resources generally, no local strategy to tackle serious youth violence, or a lack of engagement and information-sharing from community partners.

Some staff reported that they were unclear about what provision was available locally and that a mapping exercise was required, with clear pathways showing how to access those services.

Staff identified several problems with the workforce. These included understaffing, poor recruitment and high turnover, especially with regard to key specialist workers such as re-engagement in education mentors, mentors more generally, exploitation workers and youth workers. One member of staff mentioned that specialists who had formerly been in-house had been removed to external agencies and become contractors, and that this had created a barrier to close working with them. Several staff mentioned that partners who should be supplying services were themselves understaffed and struggling to deliver the work.

On partnership working, many staff raised issues such as poor links to other partners, including wider youth services; insufficient multi-agency working; over-reliance on the same external providers; and poor links with the police. Staff also identified that there were no probation staff at their YJS.

Probation secondees

In last year's annual report, one of the critical concerns we highlighted was the lack of Probation Officer secondees into YJSs. This concern has continued to grow, and we have seen a high number of vacant Probation Officer roles in the YJSs we have inspected during this period.

The Probation Service is required to provide seconded staff to YJSs, as set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. These arrangements also operate within The National Probation Service National Partnership Framework for England Youth Offending Services (2020)¹⁰ and the Joint National Protocol for Transitions in England (Joint protocol for managing the cases of children moving from Youth Offending Teams to the National Probation Service (2021)).¹¹ There is a specific protocol for the transition of cases in Wales.¹²

¹⁰ HM Prison and Probation Service, Youth Justice Board, Association of YOT Managers, National Probation Service. (2020). National Probation Service: National Partnership Framework for England Youth Offending Services. Available at: <https://aym.org.uk/national-guidance/>

¹¹ HM Prison and Probation Service, National Probation Service, Youth Justice Board. (2021). Joint national protocol for transitions in England. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-national-protocol-for-transitions-in-england>

¹² Youth Justice Board, Probation Service, HM Prison and Probation Service. (2020). Youth to adult transition principles and guidance. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-to-adult-transition-principles-and-guidance-for-wales>

The purpose and importance of these secondment arrangements are varied and critical. Seconded Probation Officers are intended to support YJSs with risk assessment and management knowledge, and to support and manage the transition of children's cases to adult supervision, where this is required and appropriate. However, the importance of the seconded Probation Officer is wider than simply focussing upon transition cases. We know that when secondment arrangements work well, we see many benefits, including effective information-sharing, knowledge transfer (particularly around risk), and a better understanding of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).

During the period covered by this annual report, we found that only nine of the 20 YJSs had a seconded Probation Officer in post. In three further areas the arrangement was for an agency worker (qualified Probation Officer) funded by the Probation Service to work in the YJS.¹³ We expressed concern about the effectiveness of the arrangement in these services, particularly as the workers did not have access to the Probation Service's electronic systems (OASys and n-Delius) or limited links into the Probation Service. While we have seen some other 'workaround' arrangements (such as identified probation staff who lead on transitions, or the secondment of a Probation Services Officer), we do not consider that these effectively mitigate the impact of the absence of this critical statutory resource for YJSs.

During the period covered by this annual report, we highlighted examples of the issue in our inspection reports, such as: 'appropriate referrals to and requests for further information from other services were not routinely completed. This included checks with the police and the probation service to explore and verify potential risks from adults'.

Conversely, when a seconded Probation Officer was in post, we could see the benefits that they brought to YJSs and the children they supported. For example, one inspector wrote: 'A seconded Probation Officer leads on transitions, and there is a thorough process in place that educates professionals and supports young people. When young people aged over 18 come to the attention of the Probation Service, contact is made with the YJS to check whether the young person has previously been known to them.'

The level of Probation Service secondments to YJSs has been a recurring concern in inspections during this period. We noted the variability of the arrangements in 2021, and in our last annual report (2022), the Chief Inspector observed that, 'we continue to see vacant probation posts in the local services we visit – an issue I raised concerns about in my last annual report. While I recognise the strain the Probation Service is under to meet its own staffing requirements, it has a statutory obligation to fill these roles, which are essential to the effective transition of children from YJS to adult probation services and to the assessment and management of risk. As the staffing situation in the Probation Service improves over the coming year, I expect these posts to be filled as an important priority'. However, our inspections during 2022/2023 would suggest that the expectation has not been met.

In the HM Inspectorate of Probation annual report of probation services (2022/2023), we outlined why the effect of increased recruitment to the Probation Service has not translated into better capacity to provide people to the required seconded posts in YJSs: 'the substantial increase in trainee Probation Officers has had a limited impact on overall staffing levels. One reason for this is that the number of staff leaving the service has also increased considerably'. Our youth inspections in this period lead us to believe that the situation regarding the extent to which probation services can provide seconded staff to YJSs is worsening, rather than improving, and remains an area of critical concern.

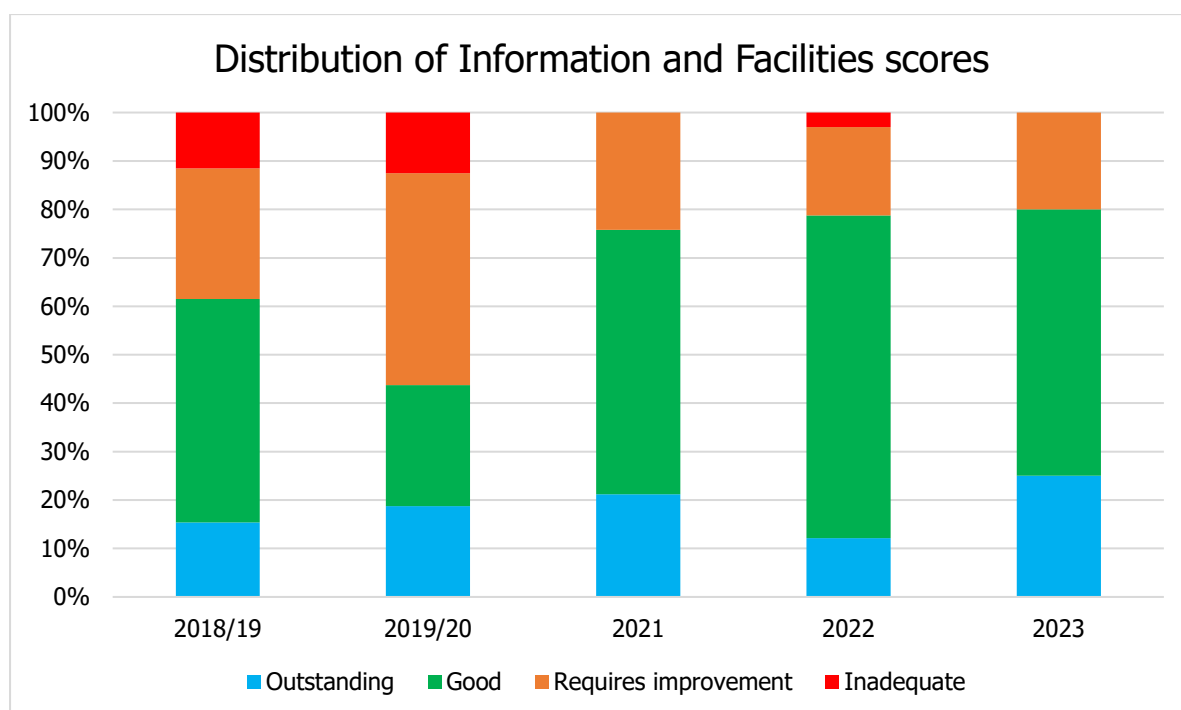
¹³ Hackney, Greenwich and Northamptonshire.

Information and facilities

When inspecting information and facilities, we expect timely and relevant information to be available and appropriate facilities to be in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children. We explore whether appropriate policies and guidance are in place and whether the YJS environment meets the needs of all children and enables staff to deliver a high-quality service. We also consider whether appropriate information and communication technology systems enable and support staff to deliver services, and explore whether the YJS uses analysis, evidence and learning effectively to drive improvement.

It is pleasing to see that in this period 80 per cent of YJSs inspected were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' on this standard, and we have seen a year-on-year increase in this since our inspection programme began.

Figure 5: Distribution of information and facilities scores, October 2022 to October 2023



In the areas we rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good', we found YJS environments that were welcoming, safe and child-friendly. Staff were able to work effectively across a range of locations, including office and remote locations. These areas had detailed policies, procedures and guidance documents, where diversity was considered throughout, and which were evidenced-based and regularly reviewed and evaluated. We found strong evidence that quality assurance drove performance and led to high-quality services. We also saw evidence that YJSs had systematic approaches to benchmarking their work against findings from new research and thematic inspections. The views of children and their parents or carers were gathered, analysed and used proactively to influence and inform service delivery.











Information and the facilities available were an area that staff frequently commented on in our survey. They reported that the environment where they delivered services was suitable for children to a great extent in 41 per cent of cases and to some extent in 45 per cent. However, the most commonly cited area for improvement was the physical space that YJS teams inhabit. Staff often relayed how they either did not have a space where they could work collaboratively together or did not have a dedicated and appropriate space to meet children.

Several staff mentioned the various issues around the geography of their area, saying that services available in one part of their area were not available in another, creating a postcode lottery for the children. Geographical distance also caused some poor communication between teams within YJSs that were separated geographically, and large geographical areas required children to travel for considerable distances, if there were no local YJS offices. This situation sometimes seemed to be a side effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, where the change to working arrangements meant that services or facilities that were once available had been lost during the lockdowns and had not returned afterwards.

Along with premises, poor IT was also raised many times, with staff either not able to swiftly get the equipment they needed to undertake their work, being issued with inadequate equipment (such as remote working devices with poor internet access), or, where they did have appropriate equipment, insufficient support when it did not work.

Supervision of court orders

In our inspection of the work with children subject to court disposals, we inspected 255 cases. Key demographics relating to these children include:

	<p>The majority of children were aged 17 or older (40 per cent), followed by children aged 15 to 17 (34 per cent).</p>
	<p>The majority were male (91 per cent, an increase from 86 per cent the previous year).</p>
	<p>The majority were of white heritage (61 per cent), a decrease from last year (75 per cent); 36 per cent were of Black and minority ethnic heritage, an increase from last year (23 per cent). Two per cent were recorded as 'other groups' and two per cent were not clearly recorded.</p>
	<p>In 50 per cent of the cases we inspected, the children had identified disabilities. Of those, the majority had learning difficulties (75 children), followed by a cognitive disability (39 children) and then mental illness (24 children).</p>
	<p>The majority of children subject to court orders had received referral orders (77 per cent), followed by youth rehabilitation orders (23 per cent).</p>
	<p>Violent offences accounted for 55 per cent of the cases inspected, followed by robbery (nine per cent) and drugs and motoring offences (five per cent). Sexual offences (contact and non-contact) accounted for five per cent and burglary for three per cent of the cases inspected.</p>
	<p>In 76 cases a knife was feature in the current/inspected offence. In 59 cases a knife had been a feature in previous offences.</p>
	<p>In 24 per cent of the inspected cases, children had been cared for by the local authority within the inspected period: 14 per cent of these children lived in the area covered by the YJS and 10 were living out of the YJS area.</p>
	<p>In 32 per cent of cases, the children did not have their religion recorded.</p>
	<p>In 72 per cent of cases, the children did not have their sexual identity recorded.</p>

Our inspection standards for court cases are based on the ASPIRE model for case supervision. We consider quality in relation to (i) supporting desistance; (ii) keeping the child safe; and (iii) keeping other people safe, across assessment, planning, intervention and delivery, and reviewing.

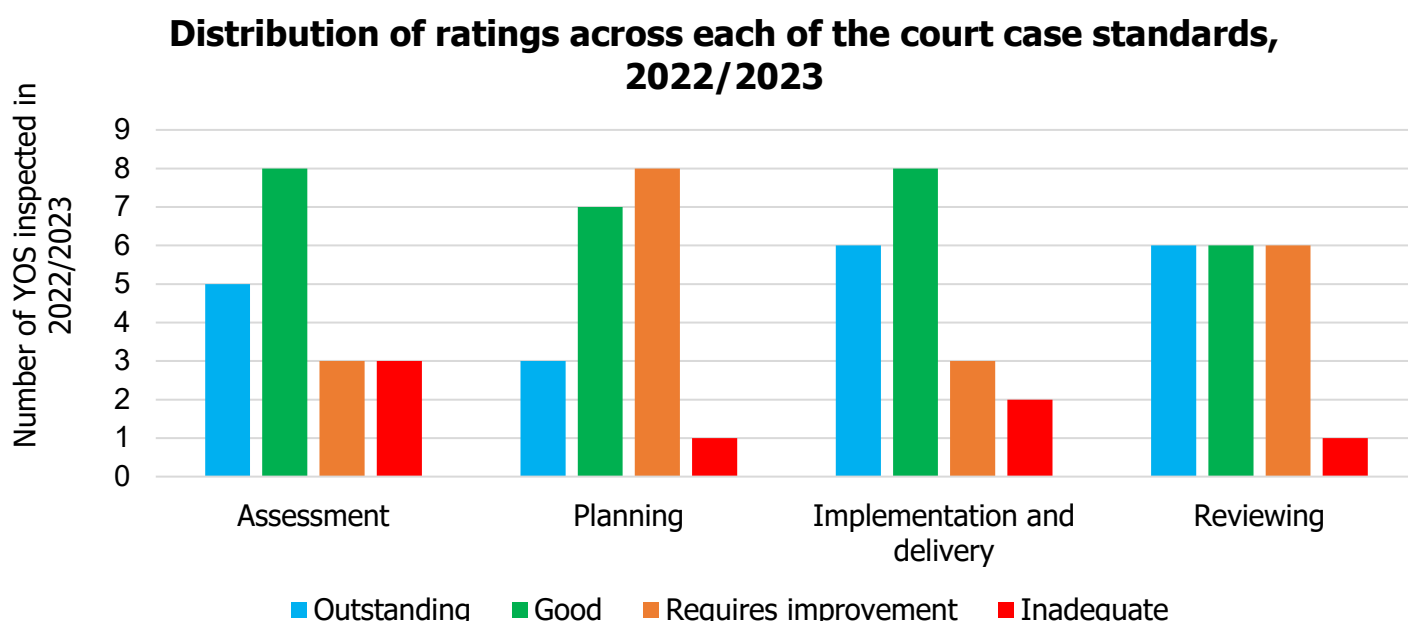
For each standard, the rating we assign is aligned to the key quality question that receives the lowest score in terms of the percentage of inspected cases rated as sufficient in relation to supporting desistance, keeping the child safe, and keeping other people safe. This recognises that each element plays an equally important role in working with children involved in youth justice.



Each case is assessed according to its sufficiency across these key elements and case data is aggregated to achieve an overall rating for each standard:

Lowest banding	Rating
Minority < 50% cases	Inadequate
Too few: 50–64%	Requires improvement
Reasonable majority: 65–79%	Good
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding ☆

Figure 6: Ratings distribution across court orders, October 2022 to October 2023¹⁴



¹⁴ Please note: only 19 services were rated, as West Berkshire had less than six cases within the inspection sample period.

received a 'Good' rating (42 per cent) and three 'Requires improvement' (16 per cent). Three were rated 'Inadequate' (16 per cent).

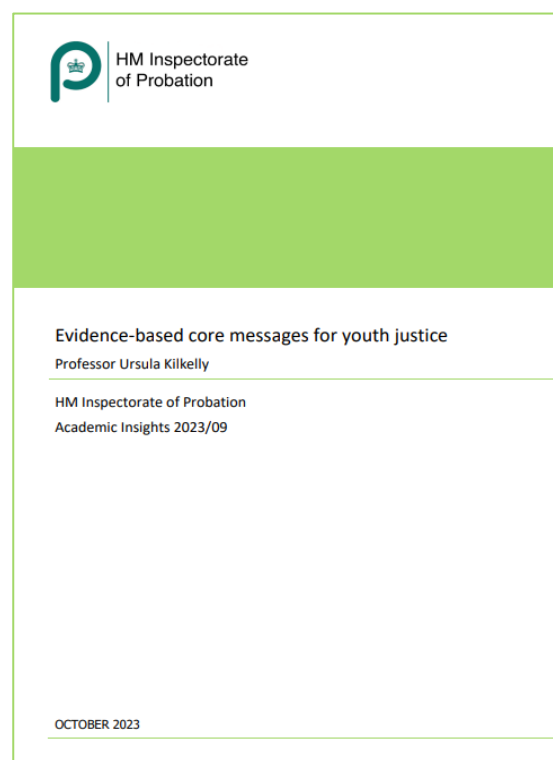
Compared to last year, we have seen a slight decrease in the number of services rated as 'Outstanding' for assessment (down from 28 per cent), an increase in services rated as 'Good' (up from 34 per cent), a decrease in services rated as 'Requires improvement' (down from 31 per cent) and an increase in services rated as 'Inadequate' (up from six per cent).

Of the services rated for their planning activity, only three (16 per cent) achieved an 'Outstanding' rating (Lincolnshire, Knowsley, and St Helens). Seven achieved a 'Good' rating (37 per cent) and eight (42 per cent) received a rating of 'Requires improvement'. Only one YJS (five per cent) received an 'Inadequate' rating for planning.

Of the services we rated, six (32 per cent) were rated 'Outstanding' for implementation and delivery. Eight services were rated 'Good' (42 per cent), three 'Requires improvement' (15 per cent) and two (11 per cent) 'Inadequate'.

Of the services we rated for reviewing, six achieved a rating of 'Outstanding' (32 per cent), six achieved a rating of 'Good' (32 per cent), six were rated 'Requires improvement' (32 per cent) and one was rated 'Inadequate' (five per cent). Lincolnshire and St Helens were the only services in all 19 YJS inspections that achieved 'Outstanding' ratings across all four elements of our domain two inspections.

In our [October 2023 Academic Insights paper](#), Ursula Kilkelly set out key messages from the research literature for an evidence-based approach to youth justice policy and practice. It highlighted that young people who come into conflict with the law tend to have multiple needs, with adversities at the individual, family and community levels. It outlined that it is clear that one-size-fits-all approaches do not work, and that an individualised, rights-based and child-centred approach is required, treating each young person in line with their age, development and specific needs. The paper outlined that attention needs to be given to establishing positive, supportive, respectful and trusting relationships – with a focus on the voice of the child – and to both the immediate and longer-term support that is required to facilitate positive pro-social development and social inclusion. The paper also recognised the need for the evidence base to continually evolve and to bridge the gap between research, policy and practice.



Across the paper, the following 10 key messages were set out:

1. Adversity

Young people who come into conflict with the law have experienced adversity on an individual, family, and community basis, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds experience disproportionate contact with the justice system.

2. Adolescent development

Offending behaviour by young people should be viewed as part of adolescent development and considered in the context of the young person's social and psychological environment.

3. Universal services

Providing access to universal services – especially those focused on education and health – can prevent young people coming into conflict with the law.

4. Individualisation

An individualised, rights-based and child-centred approach is key to preventing young people from getting into further conflict with the law.

5. Diversion

When seeking to divert young people who have come into conflict with the law, it is important to take care with how and when to intervene, always ensuring to support positive outcomes.

6. Positive relationships

The development of positive relationships between young people and adults can help to prevent offending/engaging in further offending.

7. Detention

The use of detention must be avoided, and where used, it must be adapted to children's needs, with a focus on equipping children with the health, education and life skills that ensure their safe return to their communities.

8. Continuing support

Education and employment opportunities are vital to ensuring young people avoid further offending and attention needs to be paid to managing the end of any intervention, providing continuity in support to the greatest extent possible.

9. Involving young people

Young people's lived experiences are invaluable for policymakers seeking to understand the nature of youth offending, and their views are indispensable for developing effective and child-centred responses to offending behaviour.

10. Developing the evidence base

There is a continued need for consistent data collection, increased funded research, and improved relationships between policymakers and the academic community in order to promote progressive approaches to youth justice.

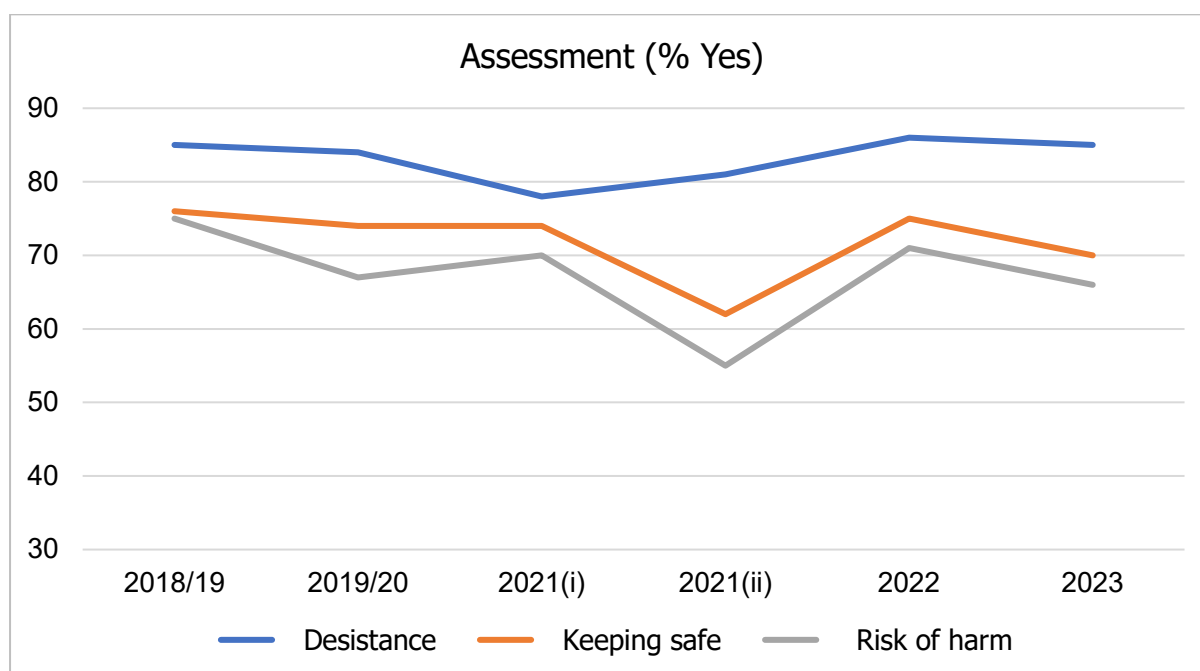
Assessment

When assessing each case against our standards, our inspectors are making judgements across three key questions:

- Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child’s desistance?
- Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?
- Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

When considering assessment in our inspections, we expect assessment activity to be well informed, analytical and personalised, and to actively involve the child as well as their parents or carers. Assessment includes all assessment activity, not just the preparation of a written report. We expect to see assessment activity where the practitioner has sufficiently analysed how to support the child’s desistance, and how to keep the child and other people safe. We consider whether the practitioner has sufficiently analysed the child’s diversity and identity, used information from other agencies effectively, and focused on the child’s strengths and protective factors, as well as assessed any key structural barriers facing the child. We also expect to see practitioners considering victims’ needs and wishes and exploring opportunities for restorative justice.

Figure 7: Supervision of court orders – percentage of cases rated as sufficient against key questions for assessment, 2018 to October 2023¹⁵



Data from the past four years shows that work to analyse and understand children’s desistance has been undertaken consistently well and in this annual report period, over 80 per cent of cases were consistently satisfactory for desistance practice. Work related to the assessment of risk of harm to others has been the weakest area, and we have seen a decrease in both that and assessment activity to analyse and understand the risks to children’s safety and wellbeing this year.

The areas that scored highly for assessment activity related to desistance had common themes, which included practitioners being skilled at recognising children’s diverse needs,

¹⁵ Please note, our methodology changed in July 2021; therefore, there are two sets of data for 2021: one for before the methodology changed, and one for after.

and focusing on exploring and considering a child's identity. Assessment was balanced and strengths-based, and children, parents and carers were central to assessments. Positively, we found the wishes and needs of victims being considered consistently in assessments and opportunities for restorative justice being explored.

In the areas that were rated 'Outstanding' for assessment of desistance and analysis of how to keep a child safe and others safe, we found practitioners skilled at identifying and analysing complex issues such as trauma, neglect and exploitation. They explored the potential impact of these on the child's future behaviour and on risks to and from the child, and analysed both the internal and external controls that would promote the safety of the child and others. We also found that practitioners had a better understanding of risk classifications and provided clear evidence and rationales to support their judgements about risk. Assessment activity was enhanced through other assessment processes, such as case formulation (Lincolnshire) or all children receiving a health assessment (Knowsley).

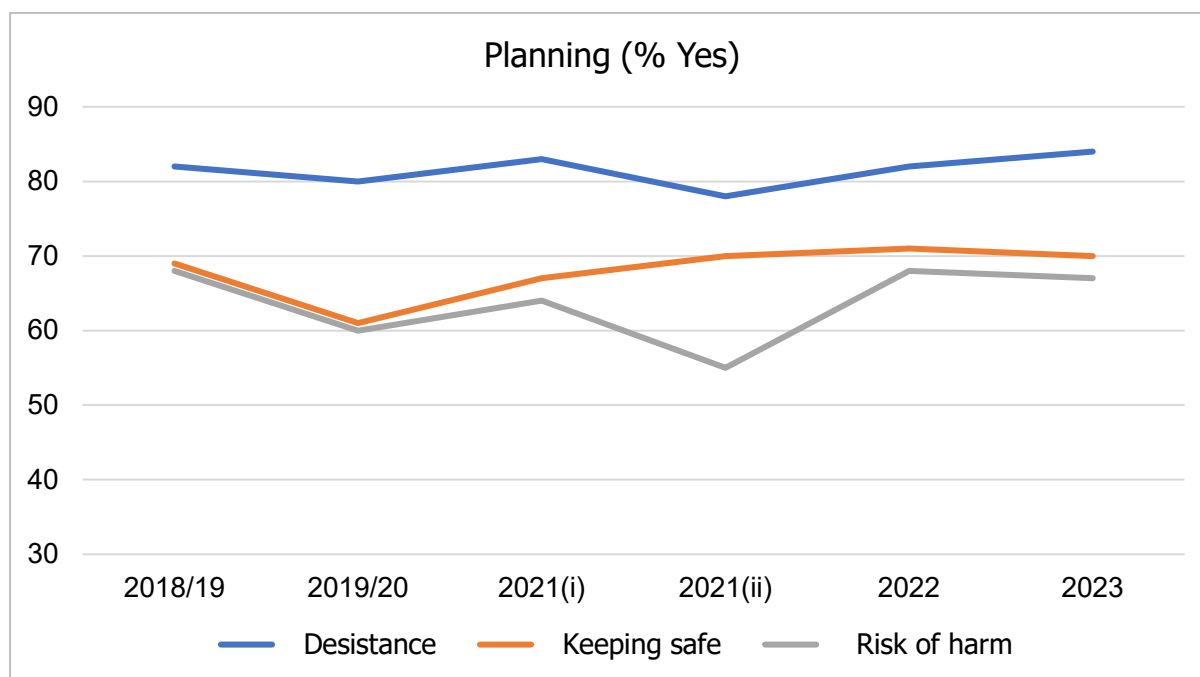
In areas where we considered assessment activity was consistently insufficient, there were several common themes. These included ineffective use of information held by other services, or not gathering information held by other services. In some instances, poor relationships with partners had made it difficult to obtain information. This meant that risk assessments and risk classifications were often made in isolation. We have also found more assessments where the practitioner has focused on the index offence and not analysed or considered previous behaviour, police intelligence, or new incidents. We are concerned that, in efforts to avoid labelling a child or to take a 'less is more' approach to assessment, practitioners are failing to consider or overlooking previous concerning behaviour or activities. In these instances, we found the nature, context and imminency of risks was not adequately explored or analysed. Concerns that children might present to others were not adequately considered and assessment activity tended to be brief, lacked detail, and did not adequately evidence the rationale for risk assessments. This also meant that risks were underestimated and not all potential risks to and from the child were identified. We also found some instances of an overreliance on the child self-reporting and a lack of professional curiosity in analysing both information from the child and other agencies for a sound understanding of the concerns. We also saw a high number of cases where the child's religion or sexual identity had not been recorded. This leads us to question how effectively YJSs are responding to children's diverse needs if information such as this is neither recorded nor explored.

Planning

When considering planning, we expect planning activities to be well-informed, holistic and personalised, while actively involving the child and their parents or carers. We inspect against the key questions:

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

Figure 8: Supervision of court orders – percentage of cases rated as sufficient against key questions for planning, 2018 to October 2023¹⁶



The YJSs that achieved 'Outstanding' ratings for planning had several features in common. These included effective assessment activity being translated into strong planning activity, with plans that were sequenced, proportionate and targeted. Practitioners effectively balanced areas of concern with strengths, considered victims' needs and wishes, and addressed the safety needs of potential and actual victims, while ensuring that the child's needs were central. This year, we also found more instances of processes or controls being put into place to mitigate and address concerns and monitor risks. Additionally, this year we found strong examples of planning being coordinated with other services to manage risk and safety, and more emphasis on shared responsibility and accountability for managing concerns to and from children.

Where we found shortcomings in assessment activity, these often had an impact on planning, particularly planning for the child's safety and wellbeing and to keep other people safe. Some YJSs underestimated risk, and we found instances where critical interventions and controls to promote safety had not been identified and addressed in planning, such as referrals to specialist services (CAMHS, substance misuse, exploitation teams). We also found examples of poor engagement and coordination with key partners, such as not seeking information from partners or involving them in planning, partners not recognising their role in supporting the YJS to promote safety (and therefore not attending risk managements meetings) and plans not aligning with other services. We also found that some areas had difficulties in obtaining information from key partners such as the police, children's social care and education. In some areas, planning required more input from public protection partners to support the work being carried out. In the YJSs that scored poorly, we also typically found that contingency planning for risks both to and from the child was weak, not tailored to the child or the presenting risks, and failed to identify the appropriate responses or actions should risks change.

¹⁶ Please note, our methodology changed in July 2021; therefore, there are two sets of data for 2021: one for before the methodology changed, and one for after.

Commendably, St Helens YJS achieved 'Outstanding' ratings in assessment and planning across desistance, safety of the child and keeping other people safe.

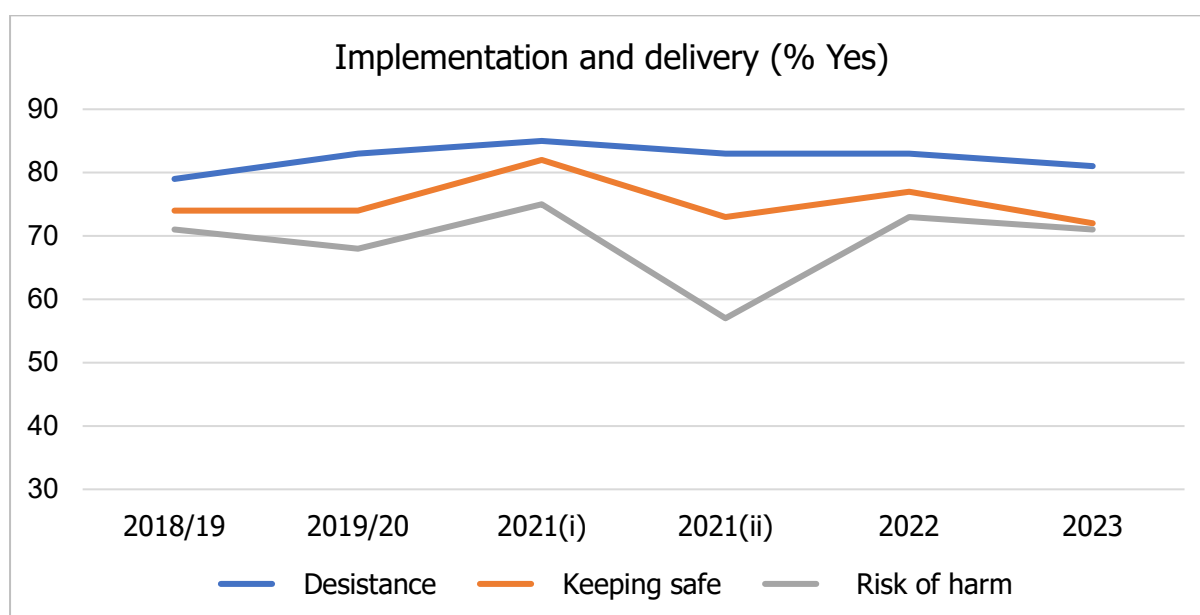
Implementation and delivery

When considering implementation and delivery, we expect YJSs to deliver high-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services that engage and assist children. We expect to see services build on children's strengths and protective factors, promote opportunities for community integration, and consider access to services for the child once the court order has ended. We expect to see the partnership working together to deliver the services a child needs most, in a timely and effective manner.

We inspect against the key questions:

- Does the implementation and delivery of service effectively support the child's desistance?
- Does the implementation and delivery of service effectively support the safety of the child?
- Does the implementation and delivery of service effectively support the safety of other people?

Figure 9: Supervision of court orders – percentage of cases rated as sufficient against key questions for implementation and delivery, 2018 to October 2023.¹⁷



This year we have seen a slight decline in our ratings for implementation and delivery across desistance, children's safety and wellbeing, and keeping others safe, although all three remain above 70 per cent sufficient.

The YJSs that achieved 'Outstanding' ratings recognised the importance of having practitioners who are skilled at developing and maintaining positive working relationships with children. This led to high levels of engagement with children, parents and carers, and the children being meaningfully involved in delivery. We found timely access to a wide range of specialist services, either in-house or through clear pathways. These included speech, language and

¹⁷ Please note, our methodology changed in July 2021; therefore, there are two sets of data for 2021: one for before the methodology changed, and one for after.

communication, psychologists, and health practitioners. We found examples of impressive, coordinated work with specialist staff, such as clinical psychologists and speech and language therapists, and effective work with and by substance misuse workers. The key component of effective implementation was a strengths-based approach that recognised and targeted areas of concern but also focused on building the child's desistance and the positives in their lives. This included access to appropriate education, employment and training provision, integration with mainstream services, opportunities to participate in constructive activities, and access to mentors. Children were able to undertake reparation work that developed their skills and strengths as well as being restorative to the community, something which we saw evidenced in Southwark. We also found some excellent examples of children being able to obtain qualifications through work delivered by YJSs or their partners.

In the YJSs that scored highly, we found strong cohesion and coordination with key partners, including effective and routine information-sharing. This included information sharing when incidents happened, but also through effective multi-agency forums. In Knowsley, inspectors noted positive work with parents from the families and victim engagement officers, who engaged with parents and carers and made sure they were receiving appropriate provision as a family. We also found some impressive work to meet the diverse needs of children. For example, practitioners adapted their work to consider children's learning needs and focused on the child's identity and lived experiences when working with them. However, even for those most strongly performing YJSs, meeting the diversity needs of children was not always a consistent strength.

Where work required strengthening, we typically found examples of plans not being followed in delivery, or critical work being identified but not delivered. Similar to last year, we found some examples of ineffective risk and safety practice, such as poor information-sharing; risk and safety not being seen as the partnership's responsibility; and partners not being committed to or consistently engaging with multi-agency forums or panels designed to manage concerns.

Our [June 2023 Research & Analysis Bulletin](#) explored the importance of effective information-sharing within the partnership, and how transformative it can be when agencies work together effectively for children at risk of extra-familial harm (EFH). Produced by Professor Carlene Firmin and colleagues from Durham University, the bulletin presented the findings from research that explored the use of contextual safeguarding within youth justice services. The study found much support and interest in adopting a contextual safeguarding approach.

However, at the time of publication it found that there had yet to be a service-wide adoption of contextual safeguarding in any YJS and that understanding of what this entailed remained limited. It also identified that information-sharing activities were often undertaken to facilitate community safety disruption work, rather than to support child welfare assessment and intervention of extra-familial contexts.

To help services move forward, the researchers recommended that:

- All YJSs needed a clear safeguarding route for referring contexts where EFH was a concern and needed to identify pathways for making safeguarding referrals related to contexts associated with EFH
- use supervision and formulation meetings to identify contexts in which young people they are supporting are at risk of EFH and the extent to which risk in these contexts is changing (and any associated impact on young people's behaviour)
- encourage practitioners to build safety mapping and peer assessment activities into direct work with children and young people, as a means of identifying what makes young people feel safe/unsafe in contexts where they spend their time.

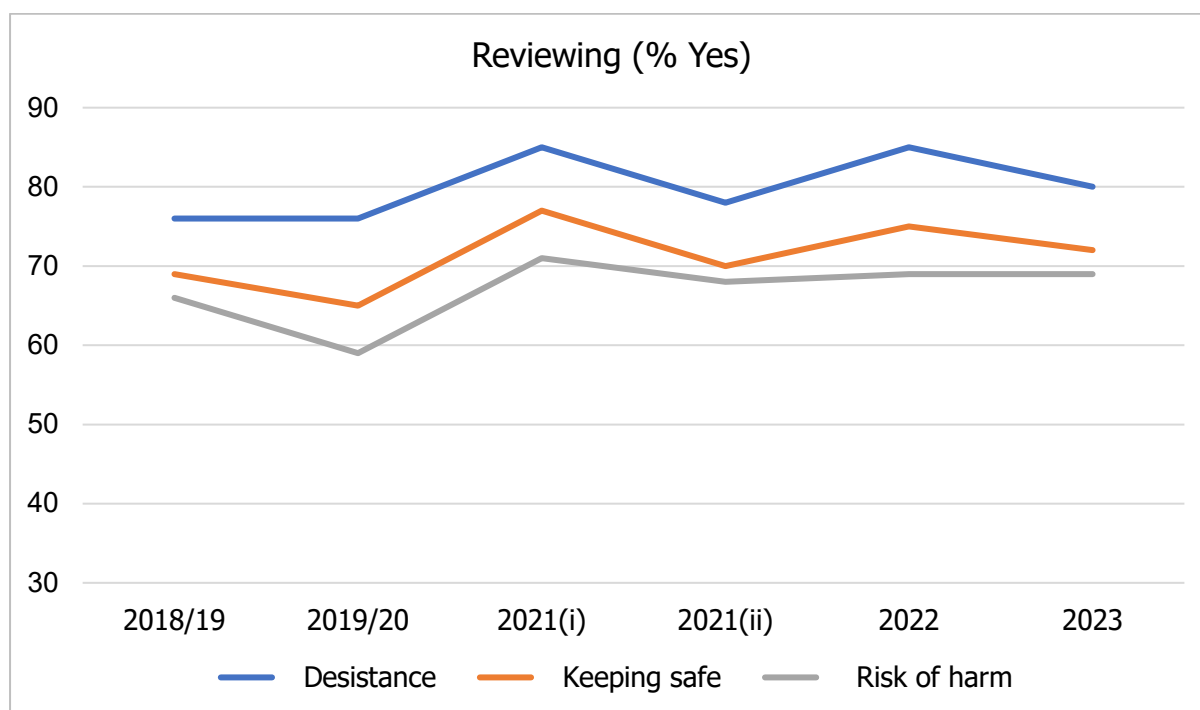
Reviewing

When we inspect reviewing, we expect to see well-informed, analytical and personalised reviews of progress that actively involve the child and their parents or carers. Reviewing is an ongoing process, and we expect to see work that recognises and responds to any changes in the child's circumstances, including changes to the child's safety and wellbeing, and any harm they may present to other people. Written reviews may form part of the reviewing process, but we expect reviewing activity to be dynamic and responsive. Ongoing reviewing should be carried out to check that the services being delivered are having the intended impact, identify what has been effective and what has been achieved, and consider what is outstanding and what needs to be amended or redesigned. Review requires practitioners and managers to have an enquiring mind and consider information from a range of sources, including the child, parents or carers, other professionals, and the police.

When assessing each case against our standards, our inspectors are making judgments across three key questions:

- Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?
- Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?
- Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Figure 10: Supervision of court orders – percentage of cases rated as sufficient against key questions for reviewing, 2018 to October 2023¹⁸



This year, the percentage of cases judged sufficient in reviewing activity for desistance and safety and wellbeing has fallen compared with last year, whereas sufficiency in relation to the reviewing of harm to others has maintained last year's score of 69 per cent. All are higher than when the inspection programme began in 2018.

¹⁸ Please note, our methodology changed in July 2021; therefore, there are two sets of data for 2021: one for before the methodology changed, and one for after.

Where reviewing activity was undertaken well, we found that it was done in a dynamic, considered, deliberate and proactive manner. Practitioners had considered the child's progress and strengths, as well as exploring areas of concern. They adjusted the planned work and interventions to respond to changes, and in many YJSs this had encouraged and supported effective engagement with children and families. Children and families were meaningfully involved, and their perspectives on progress and changes in circumstances were valued and seen as integral to reviewing activity. There were structured and frequent multi-agency forums/meetings, which enabled practitioners to share information effectively and frequently. Partners contributed to and actively supported risk and safety management. Where responses were needed when circumstances changed, they were timely and effective.

In contrast, when reviewing activity was not undertaken sufficiently, practitioners did not consistently identify, analyse or respond to critical changes in circumstances to keep children and others safe. We saw examples of poor communication between services and professional networks, including difficulties in accessing and sharing critical information, and slow responses to change, which resulted in instances of children and other people not being safe. We found examples where plans and delivery to keep the child and others safe were not adjusted to reflect changes.

Contingency planning

Contingency planning is an area we have drawn attention to in a number of previous annual reports. There have been some improvements in the quality of contingency planning this year compared with last. However, this area still requires strengthening, particularly in cases where the risks to and from the child are assessed as medium or low. In contingency planning for risks both to and from the child, we found examples where YJSs are not consistently creating bespoke contingency plans that identify appropriate responses should risks or circumstances change.

St Helens, consistently strong contingency planning

'Inspectors found strength in the quality of contingency plans for safety and wellbeing in all inspected cases. This is important, as there should be a clear plan of action if the risk to a child were to either increase or decrease. Contingency plans clearly set out adequate actions or responses to be taken if, or when, circumstances changed. In all relevant cases, inspectors found that contingency planning in relation to public protection was clear and detailed about specific actions to keep others safe.'

Victims

Work with and for victims remains an area for improvement in statutory court work. We found that, in assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery, practitioners were still not consistently paying attention to the needs and wishes of victims.

- In 57 out of 189 cases where there were identified victims, the wishes and needs of the victims had not been adequately considered.
- In 85 out of 225 cases where there were identifiable/potential victims, planning to address specific concerns relating to actual and potential victims was not adequate.

Our plans for our new youth inspection framework include a greater focus on work to support and promote victims' safety. We hope that this will drive improvement in the quality of services for victims.

Recommendations relating to court work

In nearly all of the recommendations we made in relation to court work, our focus was on improving the quality of work undertaken to keep children and others safe and to promote safety. We recommended further training, guidance and effective management oversight to ensure a consistent quality of work across assessment, planning, implementation and review. Recommendations also focused on the importance of ensuring that contingency plans clearly specified what actions needed to be taken in situations where the child's circumstances had changed, and who needed to take them. We also recommended that partnerships should take a coordinated response to keeping children and others safe. We identified a number of areas where it was important for practitioners and managers to improve their skills in identifying and analysing risks to and from children, and the role of quality assurance processes in improving practice.

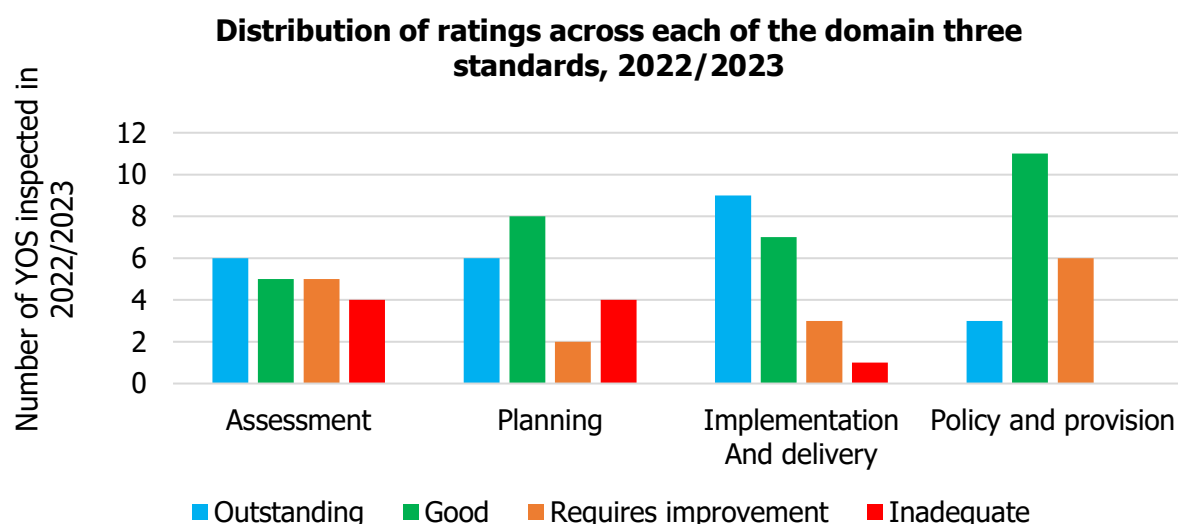
Out-of-court disposals

We know the number of children receiving out-of-court disposals continues to rise, and much of the data and analysis in relation to these children is still not routinely collected, collated or sufficiently analysed.

Key demographics from the children’s cases inspected under our domain three, out-of-court disposals:

- 25 per cent of children are aged between 17 and 18.
- 73 per cent of children are aged between 12 and 16.
- 76 per cent are boys.
- 24 per cent are black and minority ethnic.
- 47 per cent of children do not have their religion recorded.
- 73 per cent of children do not have their sexual identity recorded.
- Practitioners assessed that 42 per cent of children they were supervising had a disability. One per cent had a disability that was not recognised by the case manager.
- Violent offences accounted for 57 per cent of the cases inspected, followed by drug offences (10 per cent), criminal damage (excluding arson) (eight per cent) and theft (six per cent). Sexual offences (contact and non-contact) counted for three per cent of the cases inspected.
- 13 per cent had been a child cared for by the local authority during the time of their disposal being inspected, and 11 per cent were living within the YJS area being inspected, with two per cent living outside the YJS area.

Figure 11: distribution of ratings across domain three out-of-court disposals for assessment, planning, implementation and delivery and policy and provision



It is pleasing to note that no YJS was rated ‘Inadequate’ for out-of-court disposal policy and provision during this period. However, we have had ‘Inadequate’ ratings for assessment, planning, and implementation and delivery, and it is clear there are some areas where practice needs to consistently improve.

Of the 20 YJSs we inspected, all were rated for domain three.¹⁹ Six were rated 'Outstanding' for assessment (St Helens, Coventry, West Berkshire, Knowsley, Hackney and North Lincolnshire). Five services of the 20 (25 per cent) were rated 'Good' for assessment, down from 36 per cent last year. Five services (25 per cent) were rated 'Requires improvement', and four (20 per cent) were rated 'Inadequate', compared with nine per cent last year (three out of 33 inspected).

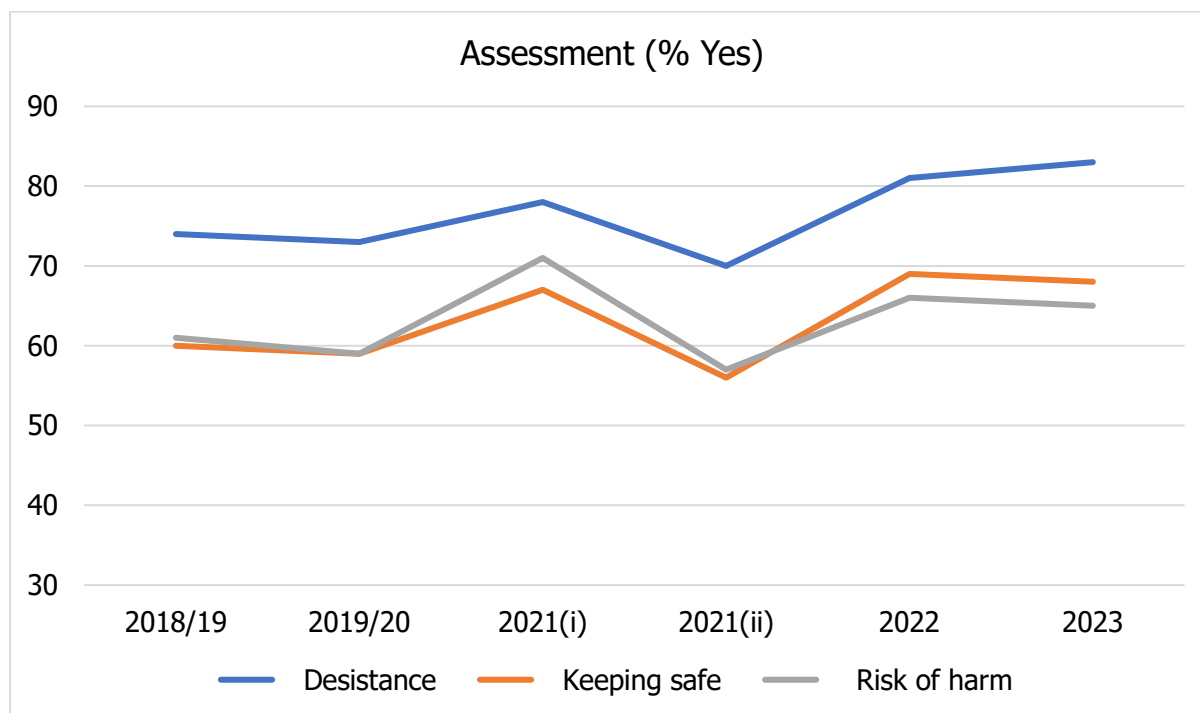
In planning, six services received an 'Outstanding' rating (Coventry, West Berkshire, St Helens, Southwark, Northumberland, and Nottinghamshire) and eight a 'Good' rating. Two were rated 'Requires improvement' and four were rated 'Inadequate'.

It is very pleasing to see that in implementation and delivery, nine services received an 'Outstanding' rating, the highest rating awarded for implementation and delivery in out-of-court disposals (Coventry, West Berkshire, St Helens, Southwark, Gateshead, Northumberland, Hackney, Royal Borough of Greenwich, and Cambridgeshire).

In this annual report period, three areas were rated as 'Outstanding' for policy and provision, 11 were 'Good', six were 'Requires improvement' and none were 'Inadequate'.

This represents an improving trend when compared with last year. Indeed, the percentage distribution of ratings show that a higher proportion of services were rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' (70 per cent in this report period, compared with 58 per cent in 2021/2022).

Figure 12: Out-of-court disposals – percentage of cases rated sufficient against key questions for assessment, 2018 to October 2023



Work in relation to assessing, analysing and understanding children's desistance has been consistently strong in this period, with over 80 per cent of cases rated as consistently sufficient (83 per cent). This is now similar to proportion rated sufficient for assessment activity in court work (85 per cent). We have seen slight decreases in the sufficiency of assessment activity for both understanding and analysing the risk of harm to others (65 per cent) and children's safety and wellbeing (68 per cent) in out-of-court disposals this year.

¹⁹ Having six or more cases within the sample period

However, this is very similar to work undertaken on statutory orders (66 and 70 per cent respectively).

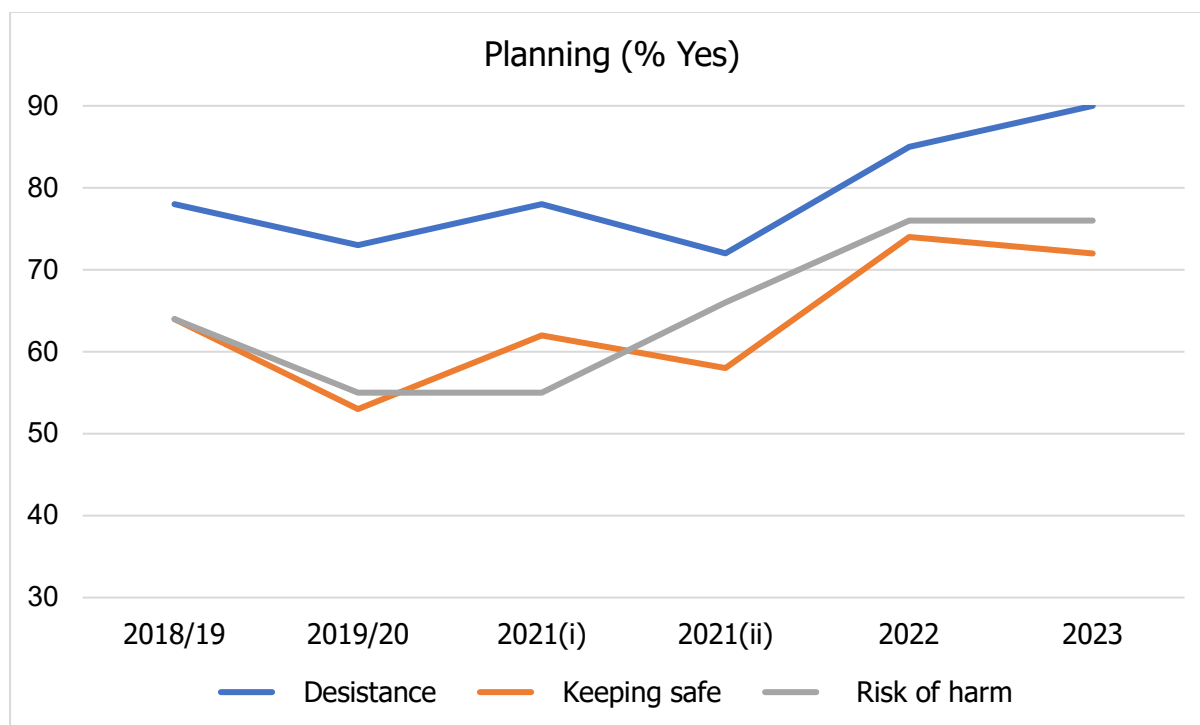
The areas that scored highly for assessment of desistance had several features in common. Practitioners were skilled at recognising children’s diverse needs, and focused on exploring and considering the child’s identity. Assessment activity was balanced and strengths-based, and children, parents, and carers were highly involved in assessment activity and contributed to it.

Practitioners explored the child’s familial and social circumstances thoroughly, and understood the impact of early traumatic experiences on children’s behaviours. Assessment was enriched by case formulations and consultations from specialist service providers, for example health and speech and language services.

Practitioners appropriately assessed whether there were any structural barriers to the child’s progress and suitably accessed a broad range of information from other agencies to support their assessments of the child’s safety and wellbeing. They were skilled at recognising issues around rejection, separation, exploitation and the impact of poor emotional wellbeing on children’s mental health.

In areas such as Coventry, we saw clear evidence of how the joint decision-making panel was guided by the assessment of risk of causing harm to others when it determined the best disposal for the child.

Figure 13: Out-of-court disposals – percentage of cases rated sufficient against key questions for planning, 2018 to October 2023



Planning activity in relation to children’s desistance needs was particularly strong during this period, rising to an all-time high of 90 per cent, which is fantastic to see. This was not mirrored by planning activity in relation to children’s safety and wellbeing, or planning to keep others safe, although we note that both have achieved above 70 per cent in terms of sufficiency.

West Berkshire YJS achieved 100 per cent across desistance, safety and wellbeing and keeping other people safe in its planning of out-of-court disposal work

Planning to address desistance took a whole-family approach. It was appropriately tailored to the children, and co-produced the plan with them. Planning was aligned with the disposal imposed, and the targets agreed with the child were realistic and achievable within the timeframes.

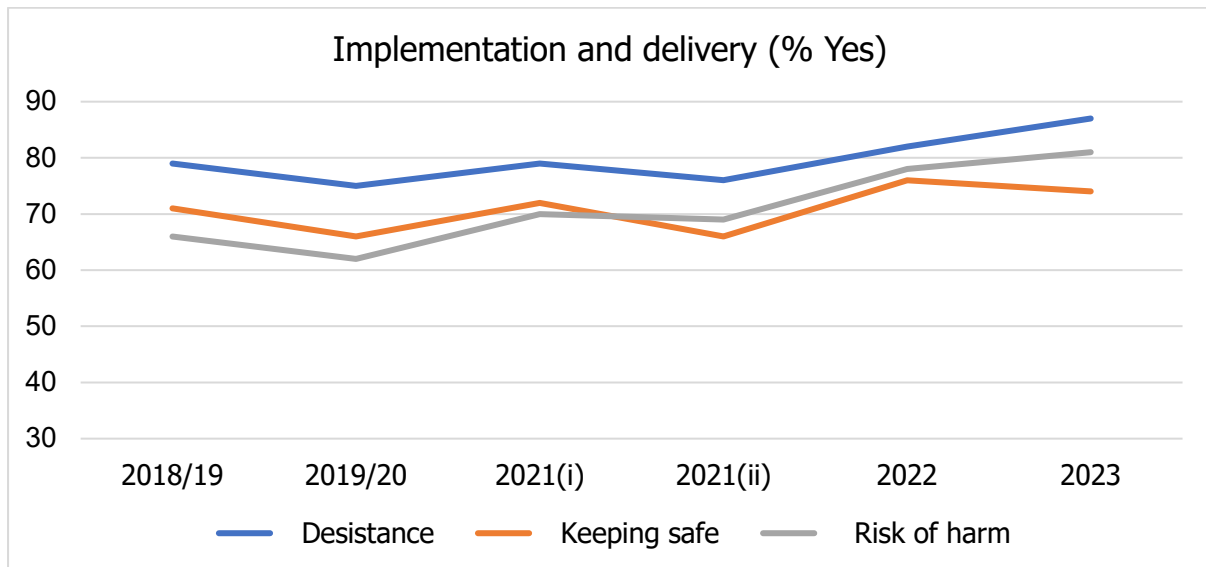
The strengths in partnership working ensured that plans were closely linked with those produced by other service providers. There was a proportionate spotlight on strengths, protective factors, and areas of concern. Practitioners considered the child’s motivation and maturity well. The latter was critical in maximising positive outcomes, which enabled children to flourish.

Planning had included consideration for access to mainstream services. In almost all cases, practitioners had considered diversity needs well. For example, they asked the education worker, nurse, and speech and language worker for advice on designing a plan that fully met the child’s needs.

Planning to address children’s safety and wellbeing was done well. Practitioners liaised purposefully with other agencies to make sure their plans knitted together well. Each service practitioner understood their role, including attendance at strategy meetings when required. Inspectors observed effective planning work with CAMHS, The Edge substance misuse service and the police.

Planning to keep others safe was done well. Practitioners appropriately considered the needs of actual and potential victims. They involved and used intelligence from partner agencies effectively to inform plans to keep others safe from harm. They identified controls and agreed them with children and their parents and carers. They also identified relevant organisations in planning to keep others safe. Risk management was a shared responsibility among public protection agencies working in the partnership. Planning included information-sharing arrangements and a collective commitment to future meetings to review risks.

Figure 14: Out-of-court disposals – percentage of cases rated as sufficient against key questions for implementation and delivery, 2018 to October 2023



Although we have seen a slight decrease in the sufficiency rating for implementation and delivery in ensuring children's safety and wellbeing (74 per cent, down from 76 per cent last year), these scores are consistently strong.

Gateshead YJS achieved a rating of 'Outstanding' for implementation and delivery of out-of-court disposals across desistance, safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others

Practitioners were skilled at developing and maintaining effective relationships with children and families. We found a genuine care and commitment, with practitioners clearly advocating for the children and families they work with. They were flexible about when and how they saw children, which encouraged children to engage with the work.

Plans were well executed, with interventions sequenced and delivered at an appropriate pace for the child.

As well as addressing areas of concern, practitioners built on children's existing strengths and promoted integration with community and mainstream provision. There was strong communication between different workers in the professional network, and a shared responsibility for keeping the child and other people safe. Partnership responses to risks were coordinated and tailored to the child. In the cases we reviewed, practitioners worked jointly with other services, synchronising appointments and interventions so that the children and parents or carers were not overwhelmed.

Practitioners understood the impact of trauma and had factored this into their approach to working with the children. They were confident in knowing how and when to start intervention work and whether they were best placed to do this. They completed appropriate bespoke interventions to address concerns, including conflict resolution, victim-focused work, lifestyles, and healthy relationships. This helped children to understand their own behaviour and its impact on others.

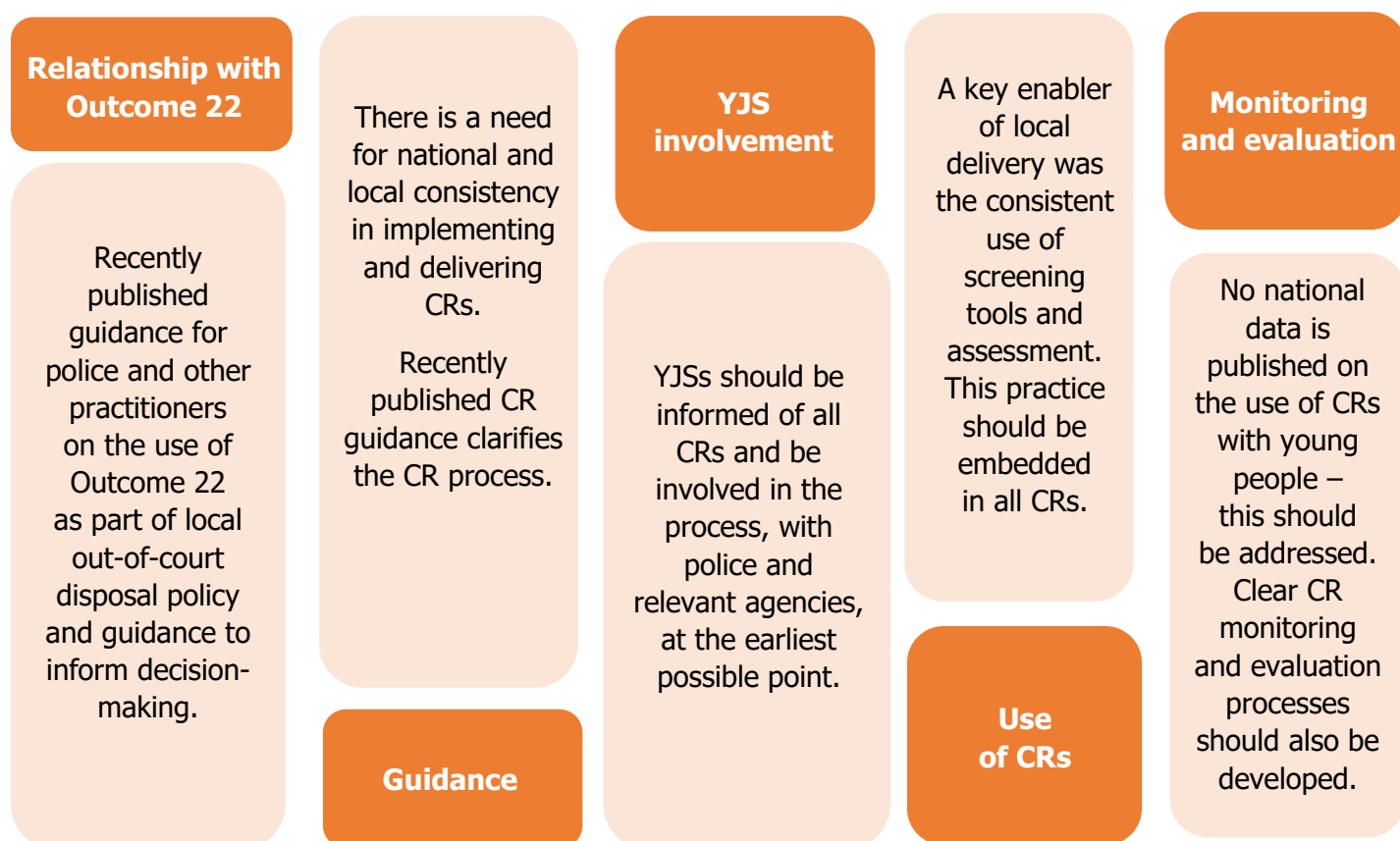
The implementation and delivery of community resolutions

Our [March 2023 Research & Analysis Bulletin](#) was produced by Dr Daniel Marshall, Andrea Nisbet, and Dr Paul Gray of the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University. It presents the findings from research that explored how youth justice services implement and deliver community resolutions (CRs) in England and Wales, documenting working practices as well as key enablers and barriers to effective practice. Participants were mostly positive about CRs and their aim to keep young people away from the more formal justice system as much as possible. Nevertheless, it also highlighted key barriers to implementing and delivering CRs. The CR process is complex, with youth justice teams, alongside other agencies, working in somewhat ambiguous arrangements and challenging circumstances.

"I think community resolution works best when we can incorporate a restorative justice element into it. Where the victim is happy to be involved in that process, and the young person is, ... I think you get a really fuller community resolution. Where both the victim and the young person feel like they've got something out of it, and the wrong has been made right ... and there's some closure." (youth justice police officer)

"Some think we can't do child first and talk about risk in the same sentence but my view is that we can and we should because actually the best way to respond to risk, risk to children, risk in communities is by putting the child at the centre, is by hearing their voice, is by taking a strength-based approach to supporting them and to increasing their participation because if we can then plug them into communities, back into society, back into education, back into the structures and systems that they've not been able to be in, that's when desistance is much more likely. So, for me they're not mutually exclusive." (senior youth justice practitioner)

Building on the findings in the report, the bulletin set out the following recommendations:



Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Our standards expect that, for all out-of-court disposal policies and provision, there will be a high-quality, evidence-based, out-of-court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance. We expect to see clear joint protocols with the police in place, which set out locally agreed policy and practice, including joint and defensible decision-making. We expect YJSs and the police to ensure that criteria for eligibility are clearly defined and appropriately broad. This allows for discretion, while avoiding inadvertently bringing more children into contact with the youth justice system. We also expect to see policy and practice that consider children’s diverse needs, keep children safe, and ensure the safety of other people, and practice that is regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that it maintains alignment with the evidence base.

Characteristics of areas rated as ‘Outstanding’ for policy and provision included:

- a clear vision and strategy for out-of-court disposal work that appraised and used a broad research and evidence base
- a clear out-of-court disposal policy that set out regional and local arrangements for decision-making, provision, and delivery
- timely referrals to a multi-agency out-of-court-disposal decision-making panel
- multi-agency panels that included representatives from children’s social care and (where available) early help services; this ensured that all options for addressing the children’s safety and wellbeing are considered

- consideration and application of a full range of disposals, enabling a graduated response, so that children could be diverted from prosecution where appropriate
- decisions on out-of-court-disposals being informed and supported by good-quality assessments that contributed to clear planning and subsequent delivery of work
- full consideration of a child's diversity and a strong analytical approach to investigating actual or potential disproportionality
- clear partnership arrangements for escalating and resolving differences when these occur
- the interventions and services available to children on court orders being available to those who had received an out-of-court disposal, and the child's strengths being built on to support desistance, while maintaining a focus on safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others
- out-of-court disposal cases that were assessed as either high risk of harm or with safety and wellbeing concerns receiving the same risk management meeting process as court cases
- children being provided with opportunities for community integration and access to partnership services once they had completed the out-of-court disposal work
- arrangements in place to capture and collate the views of children completing an out-of-court-disposal, as well as the views of their parents and carers
- internal and external scrutiny of panel arrangements
- board members and other stakeholders taking opportunities to observe the out-of-court disposal joint decision-making panel to understand how it works
- the use of internal and external evaluation to demonstrate the impact of the out-of-court disposal policy and provision, through pilots and subsequent themed audits, which had led to changes and improvements in practice.

Coventry YJS rated 'Outstanding' across all domain three standards, including policy and provision

In Coventry we found practitioners who understood children's lived experiences. They had taken into account the child's barriers to accessing education, had involved children's social care, and considered factors such as peers, family dynamics and the child's heritage. Assessment work linked well with other agencies concerned with the child's safety and wellbeing and drew sufficiently on information from these agencies in almost all cases inspected.

There was clear evidence that the joint decision-making panel was guided by the assessment of the child's risk of causing harm to others in determining the best disposal for the child's circumstances. It consistently applied a 5Ps approach to assessment, a well-grounded, research-based approach to case formulation.

It was evident that children were involved in every step of the planning process. Where necessary, the plan for the child included extended engagement with services beyond the period of the disposal, and practitioners had considered how to be flexible about what was right for each individual child. It was clear that the entire range of interventions at the YJS's disposal were made available to children entering the service through the out-of-court disposal route.

Many other agencies were involved in the planned interventions, which included emotional health work, substance misuse intervention, education and training intervention, and access to mentoring suited to the child's heritage.

There was a positive multi-agency approach to keeping children safe, with strong and effective links to children's social care. Actions such as responding to incidents where a child had gone missing were incorporated into the YJS's plan. When it was identified that children were at risk of exploitation, the joint working arrangements with Horizon (the team focused on child criminal exploitation) meant that clear responsibility – who does what – was in place for the child's safety plan.

The multi-agency approach extended to keeping other people safe. In all of the children's cases, we found that the plans promoted the safety of other people, where this was required. Where there were specific concerns about actual and potential victims, these were addressed well in the plans. In most cases, we found that contingency arrangements – for when circumstances changed to increase the risk that the child presented to others – were of detailed quality.

Services to children were delivered well in every case. We found consistent, high-quality work, involving a range of agencies and specialist providers. In many cases, a great deal was being done within a short timescale. Support for children was flexible, adjusted to take account of children's neurodivergent or learning needs, and responsive to changes in the child's circumstances. In almost all cases, we considered that service delivery accounted for the child's diversity issues.

The strategy appraised the research and evidence base and set out a child-first approach, with the aim of reducing the stigma of involvement in the criminal justice system. Having identified that children from an ethnic minority background were overrepresented among the children receiving court disposals, the YJS developed a diversion project, both to reduce the disproportionate use of court disposals and to make sure that interventions were made available to these children to support their desistance. Furthermore, in adopting a 'whole family' approach, the YJS offered voluntary parenting support to all children and families working with the service.

The assistant court officer checked every case appearing before court to make sure all out-of-court pathways had been explored before a child progressed to court.

The YJS had, as part of a review of the strategy, consulted with parents and families, children, and victims of crime. There was a multi-agency joint decision panel, which reflected all elements of the partnership. The offer of support to children and their parents or carers – including for community resolutions – was broad. It aimed to build on strengths to support desistance, while maintaining a focus on wellbeing and risk of harm to others. There was also external scrutiny of the process by the Coventry out-of-court disposal panel.

One of our most frequent recommendations in relation to out-of-court disposals is the variation in use and application of Outcome 22. The updated child gravity matrix was published in September 2023 and promoted across England and Wales in the Youth Justice Board's special prevention and diversion edition of their bulletin. We are hopeful that some of this variation will now be addressed, with much more consistent application of out-of-court disposal options for children.

Victims

The assessment work carried out in relation to victims was of slightly better quality in out-of-court-disposals than in statutory court work. Nevertheless, we found that, overall, work

with and for victims remains an area for improvement in out-of-court-disposals. We found that practitioners were still not consistently paying attention to the needs and wishes of victims in assessment, planning and implementation and delivery.

- In 52 out of 259 cases where there were identified victims, assessment activity had not adequately considered the wishes and needs of victims.
- In 72 out of 261 cases where there were identifiable/potential victims, planning did not sufficiently address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims.
- In 68 out of 262 cases where there were identifiable/potential victims, insufficient work was carried out to protect actual and potential victims.

Meeting children’s diverse needs

In our standards we ask whether assessment, planning and service delivery sufficiently assess, plan for and take into consideration children’s diversity issues.

Statutory orders	% ‘Yes’	% ‘No’
Does assessment sufficiently address diversity issues?	75%	25%
Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?	73%	27%
Does service delivery take account of the diversity needs of the child?	77%	23%

Out-of-court disposals	% ‘Yes’	% ‘No’
Does assessment sufficiently address diversity issues?	76%	24%
Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?	79%	20% ²⁰
Does service delivery take account of the diversity needs of the child?	82%	18%

Although we saw some excellent examples of work being undertaken to ensure that children’s diverse needs were met, including planning for and tailoring work, these figures do suggest that around one in four children working with YJS are not having their diverse needs assessed, planned for, or fully considered when work is being delivered. This needs to improve.

Case study: recognising children’s diverse needs

The practitioner had explored the child’s diverse needs and lived experiences in detail, as well as his perspective on his ethnicity, race, heritage, culture, religion and his name. The practitioner also explored what all these elements meant to him and what effect they had had on his life to date.

Practitioner also provided time and space for the child to talk about his experiences of discrimination and the impact of this. There have also been discussions about the impact of his dad’s absence from his life. The child clearly felt heard, listened to and safe in these conversations with the practitioner.

Overall, inspection findings from the past 12 months show an encouraging commitment to diversity from senior leaders, together with some excellent examples of operational delivery where practitioners have personalised their interventions as a result of understanding the lived experiences of children. However, a fuller understanding of the wide range of protected characteristics, as identified in the Equality Act 2010, is now needed, and supporting guidance documents need to be developed to ensure that practice is consistent.

Most YJSs include the need to address diversity and disproportionality in their Youth Justice Plans, but not all plans explicitly cover how this work is to be carried out. While most YJSs collect data on diversity, it is often narrow and there is not always the attention to detail that is needed to analyse what the data is telling them. We found evidence of some YJSs

²⁰ One per cent was not applicable

using diversity data well to commission services, for example the Ether project (London) and Iprovefit (mentoring service in West Berkshire).

We also found evidence of YJSs using children's fora or focus groups to get feedback on the services that are available. This resulted in changes to service delivery and the development of new interventions, such as Swindon's knife crime programme. Coventry YJS incorporated the regional girls' mission statement into its standards for gender-informed work. We have also seen practitioners having access to and completing a range of training opportunities, including cultural awareness, autism, neurodiversity, LGBTQ+, the Equality Act 2010 and girls. Some YJSs also spoke about delivering 'let's talk about disproportionality' events and identified such events to ensure they kept the range of diversity issues at the forefront of practitioners' minds.

A number of YJSs explained how they use a 'communication passport' effectively to meet the individual needs of children across partnership providers. Many spoke of the positive impact that having speech, language and communication resources within a team had.

Management oversight

The number of judgements of sufficiency in relation to the quality of management oversight has increased very slightly in this year's annual report period, from 58 per cent of inspected cases involving court orders and 62 per cent of cases involving out-of-court disposals in 2021/2022 to 62 per cent of court orders, 63 per cent of out-of-court disposals, and 62 per cent of resettlement cases in 2022/2023.

However, across court orders, out-of-court disposals, and resettlement cases, there were ongoing disparities between practitioners' and inspectors' views on effective management oversight. Case managers reported that they considered they had received effective management oversight in 82 per cent of court cases, 79 per cent of out-of-court disposal cases, and 80 per cent of resettlement cases. This was significantly higher than inspectors' assessment of sufficiency.

Inspections carried out in this annual report period found very similar themes to previous years in relation to the quality and effectiveness of management oversight, indicating that further improvement is required, and from the 20 inspections carried out during this review period, 12 resulted in specific recommendations to improve the quality of management oversight.

Case managers often report that they have daily discussions and support; however, our inspections found that these are not always captured on the case records or do not result in actions being taken that are then monitored and reviewed. We found instances of drift in the work being delivered. We also saw examples where the practitioner did not have sufficient knowledge or skills in relation to understanding children's safety and wellbeing concerns or risks to the safety of others, and this had not been picked up by the managers overseeing their work. There is a need for management oversight to be both supportive and effective.

Things to consider in relation to effective management oversight include:

- Management oversight received a positive score when there was clear and regular evidence of this in the case records, particularly at times of significant change in the child's life.
- Consistency is key. Effective management oversight occurred when the same manager quality assured documents, carried out reflective supervision, and led the risk management forums.
- Inspectors found positive examples of escalation that resulted in children accessing appropriate education, accommodation, health, and social care services.
- Insufficient management oversight was often linked to inconsistency. Concerns included frequent changes to management structures and absences not being covered. Lack of management capacity (particularly managers with large spans of control) to cover the breadth of responsibilities had a significant impact on the quality of management oversight.
- Inspectors identified that pertinent information was not always included in assessments. As a result, risks to the child's safety and the safety of others were sometimes underestimated, and this was not subsequently identified as part of management oversight or quality assurance processes. Inspectors found that concerns arise when assessments are quality assured and countersigned in isolation from other information available on the case management system.

- Delays with countersigning initial assessments often resulted in insufficient planning and implementation to keep the child and others safe. Inspectors also identified that processes should be developed to ensure that actions are followed up.
- Within the resettlement cases, inspectors found that only 19 of the 37 practitioners interviewed had received specific training to assess, plan and respond to children's resettlement needs. In view of this, services need managers to focus more on supporting practitioners to oversee the custody and resettlement cohort.

Effective management oversight needs to be holistic, moving beyond countersigning assessments in isolation and taking into consideration the wider information available (from the partnership and within case management systems). Inspectors found positive examples of management oversight when it was frequent and consistent, robust, with discussions clearly recorded, and relevant actions reviewed by managers and practitioners.

The national out-of-court disposal tool will include a training programme; however, as practitioners adapt to using a new assessment, effective management oversight will be crucial in driving forward quality.

Resettlement and remand

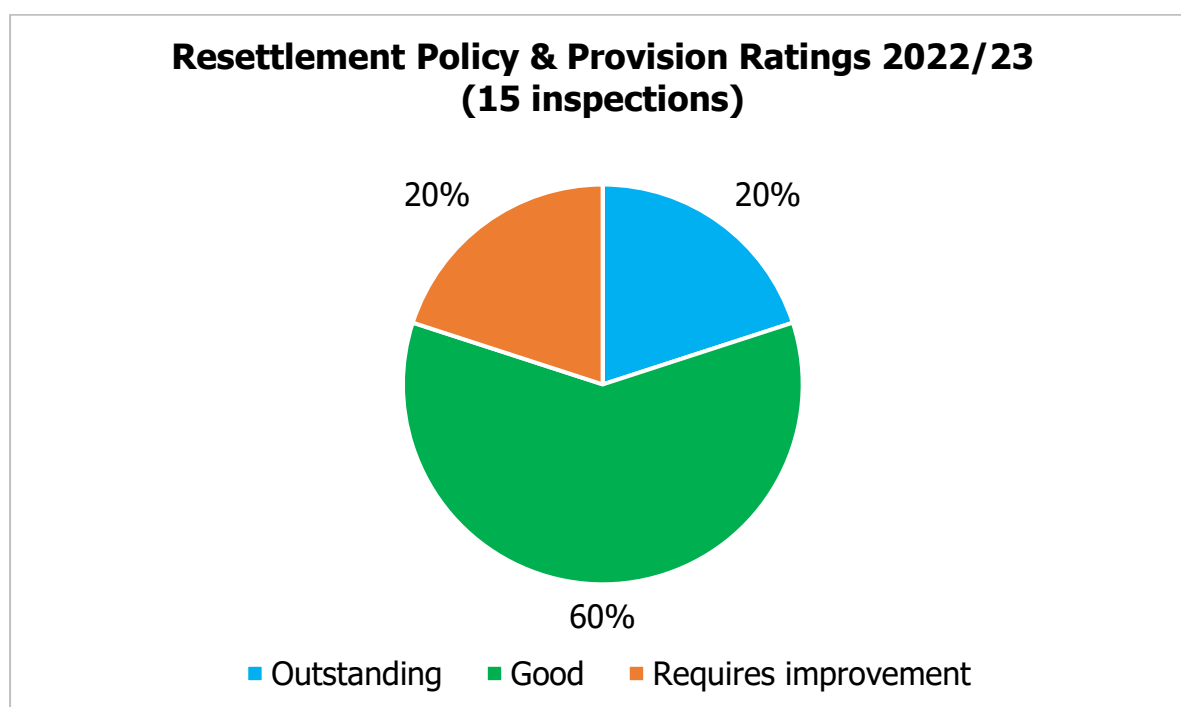
Resettlement is the support a child receives as they return to the community following a custodial sentence. The purpose of resettlement is to help the child shape a pro-social identity following a period in custody, and to build on their individual strengths, social capital and resources to help them remain safe and live a life away from offending. Children sentenced to custody are some of the most complex in the youth justice system. They are often highly vulnerable, and many have additional needs. In addition to concerns about their safety and wellbeing, many of these children also present a risk to others.

A resettlement standard was introduced into our inspection methodology in 2021. This enabled us to rate YJSs on their arrangements for effective resettlement provision on a consistent basis.

When inspecting resettlement, we consider policy and provision and, where there are relevant cases, we also examine service delivery. If there have been no resettlement cases in the 12 months before the inspection, we review the resettlement policy and provision but do not give the standard a rating. The resettlement standard is rated separately and does not count towards the overall YJS rating. However, a limiting judgement is applied, which means that any YJS that receives an 'Inadequate' rating for the resettlement standard is unable to achieve an overall 'Outstanding' rating.

We expect there to be a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody. We expect to see constructive, suitable, timely and personalised resettlement pathway services for all children, which include accommodation, education, training and employment, and healthcare. We want to ensure that children's diverse needs are met, and that YJSs take an approach to resettlement that addresses the needs of victims and protects those at risk, as well as ensuring the safety of the child.

Figure 15: Resettlement policy and provision ratings, 2022/2023



We have continued to see positive ratings for the resettlement standard in 2022/2023, with 12 of the 15 YJSs receiving an 'Outstanding' or 'Good' rating,²¹ and no services receiving an 'Inadequate' rating. The services rated 'Outstanding' include Barnsley, Northamptonshire, and Nottinghamshire.

In our inspections of resettlement, we found:

Forty-five cases were inspected across the 15 YJSs.

Ninety-five per cent of the children were male and all were over 15 years of age, with 79 per cent being 17 or older.

Children with protected characteristics or from vulnerable groups continue to be overrepresented: 56 per cent were children from Black and minority ethnic communities, an increase from 36 per cent in 2021/2022.

Fifty-three per cent were children in care, and 56 per cent were identified as having a disability.

Strengthening the response to diversity in resettlement policies was an area for improvement in seven out of the 15 services inspected, with three of these specifically referencing girls. This raises a question about whether girls' resettlement needs are being met effectively.

Detention and training orders made up 67 per cent of, the cases inspected and 45 per cent of all custodial sentences were 12 months or more in length.

The most common offence type was violence (57 per cent) followed by robbery (16 per cent). Fifty-six per cent of children had used a knife in the offence for which they received the current custodial sentence, and a further 24 per cent of children had engaged in previous knife-related offending.

Sixty-two per cent of the cases inspected attracted MAPPA status.

Thirty-six per cent of children had received no previous sanctions or one before receiving a custodial sentence. This was reflected in the recent remand thematic, as 69 per cent of children had either no previous sanctions or one before their remand.

We found sufficient planning and provision for suitable accommodation in 79 per cent of cases, and 23 of the 24 children had timely and appropriate accommodation when they were released into the community.

In respect of ETE, there was sufficient planning for 69 per cent of the children, with 18 out of 23 in appropriate ETE provision on release.

There was sufficient evidence of planning for healthcare provision in 66 per cent of cases and appropriate healthcare provision when the child was released from custody in 21 out of 25 cases.

In 61 per cent of the cases inspected, children were placed over 50 miles away from home.

In 82 per cent of cases, resettlement provision was assessed as being sufficient to keep the child safe, and there was effective information-sharing in 89 per cent of cases.

Resettlement provision was seen as sufficient in keeping others safe in 87 per cent of cases.

YJSs were alert and responsive to the needs and safety of victims in 70 per cent of resettlement cases.

Twenty-five per cent of children did not have their religion recorded.

Sixty-one per cent of children did not have their sexual identity recorded.

²¹ Five YJSs did not have any relevant resettlement cases within the inspection case sample and were not rated for resettlement.

It was positive to see that almost all YJSs inspected had a dedicated resettlement policy to guide processes and practice and ensure that supervision and support were effective for children in the secure estate. A key strength of these policies and guidance documents was that they were grounded in current research and effective practice, linked mainly to constructive resettlement, identity theory, child-first principles and multi-agency working. Where resettlement practice was strong and effective, this was linked to collaborative partnership working and oversight, both strategically and operationally. This ensured that children were helped to engage with appropriate interventions and services. We found consistent evidence of staff from YJSs forming constructive relationships with children, parents, and carers. Good relationships between YJS practitioners, children, parents, and carers were integral to maintaining significant relationships to support the child's reintegration into their family and community on release.

Keeping children and others safe was consistently seen as an area of strength in the practice we inspected. It is reassuring to see strong practice in these areas, given that children sentenced to custody often have the most complex needs and present the greatest risk to communities. We found evidence that services were mindful of and responsive to victims' needs and safety in the work we inspected.

A sizeable proportion of the children in the resettlement cases we reviewed turned 18 and were eligible for transfer to the adult system. This is why we emphasise the importance of effective transition practice. We found evidence of good planning and provision of accommodation, ETE and healthcare for children on release.

Of concern in the cases reviewed was the number of children with little or no previous involvement in the youth justice system being made subject to custodial sentences. While these children may not be known to YJSs, they are often known or previously known to other statutory agencies. This indicates that strategic partnerships need to do further work to identify, divert, and prevent these children from being catapulted into the custodial estate, often having committed very serious, mostly violent offences. Interventions for children should not start with the offence, as the indicators and behavioural communication often will be present long before this. The skill and task is in getting professionals from outside the youth justice system (often education and professionals within children's social care) to recognise and respond appropriately to the cues and communication from children that might precipitate their involvement in a serious offence.

Addressing disproportionality of children in custody also needs to remain a critical focus of national policy and local strategic planning. Disproportionality remains evident for children subject to custodial sentences, and our inspection data continues to show that children in care, children from Black and minority ethnic groups and children with a disability are overrepresented within the custodial estate. While YJSs are good at meeting individual children's diverse needs, the sector needs to make greater efforts to ensure national and strategic plans focus on addressing the overrepresentation of children from vulnerable and minority groups.

Resettlement case example

Jason was a 16-year-old white British male sentenced to a significant period of custody following offences of robbery. Jason was known by professionals within children's social care and had been subject to a child protection plan from an early age. There were concerns about his childhood experiences, including physical assaults by his mother and domestic abuse within the family home perpetrated by his father. He experienced instability, lack of boundaries and rejection. Jason had five previous sanctions for a variety of offences, including three out-of-court disposals and two referral orders.

Resettlement work with Jason started from the outset of his custodial sentence. An extensive assessment was carried out and all agencies liaised together to inform and manage his case before and after release. Jason's level of motivation was variable in custody, and he generally refused to engage in interventions. However, the practitioner persisted with trying to engage him and maintained contact with him throughout his period in custody, ensuring he was aware of every step or change as part of his sentence, including the reasons for his moves between custodial estates (young offender institutions). Their persistence continued despite facing negative behaviours from Jason.

Appropriate responses were made to concerns that arose about his behaviour in custody, and there was extensive liaison as a result.

The practitioner communicated with Jason's family, and notified the social worker of Jason's ex-partner about his planned release.

The practitioner ensured there was sufficient oversight through MAPPA, child looked after reviews and multi-agency child exploitation meetings. This helped with coordinating information, risk management, accountability and progress in finding a suitable placement. A forensic CAMHS worker provided support with Jason's case and formed a basis for addressing unresolved trauma. The use of MAPPA helped with getting difficulties in finding a suitable placement resolved and supported this to be progressed.

The licence conditions were proportionate and ensured that Jason received appropriate support, external controls and interventions.

Lessons learned on this inspection programme and the future of youth inspections

Inspecting in Wales

We have completed a wholesale review of how we deliver inspections in Wales. For the period covered by this annual report, we suspended inspecting in Wales, which is why no Welsh YJSs appear in this annual report. We have fully reviewed our processes to ensure we can deliver on our commitment that, in carrying out our inspections in Wales, we will treat the Welsh and English languages on the basis of equality. We want to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language in inspection where this is preferred.

As part of this we have completed an internal review and undertaken a number of activities. These include:

- Work with the Ministry of Justice to procure interpretation services outside of The Big Word framework. This is to ensure we can use locally based translation services, and ensure they have local knowledge and understand local dialect. This has now been confirmed and we are able to use locally based services.
- Advertise for and recruit Welsh-speaking inspectors. We have successfully recruited three Welsh-speaking inspectors (one assistant inspector, one youth HM inspector and a fee paid inspector)
- Recruit Welsh-speaking local assessors. Training has been undertaken and we have a small number of Welsh-speaking local assessors trained and ready for deployment.
- Continue to seek to increase the recruitment of Welsh-speaking inspectors and target our adverts within services in Wales. We are also extending our shadowing scheme to Welsh speakers.
- Auditing and reviewing our compliance with our Welsh language scheme. The audit has been completed and we are drawing lessons from this and applying them into our inspections moving forward.
- Work with the Welsh Language Commissioner's office to review and update our Welsh language scheme. Our revised scheme has been approved.

Feedback from inspections

As part of our approach to youth inspections, there are established arrangements for inspected organisations to provide feedback on their experience of the whole inspection process. YJS heads of service, board chairs and other senior leaders have the opportunity to meet with the head of the youth inspection programme and discuss how the inspection was delivered (from point of announcement through to final publication of the inspection report).

As an independent inspectorate and a reflective organisation, such opportunities allow those from the organisations we inspect to have an open discussion with us. This reassures them that we are following our inspection methodology and that we inspect against our five key principles. It also informs any learning or adaptations to our approach, to ensure we maximise the positive impact of inspection activity.

As a result of the feedback we have received from inspected organisations and key stakeholders, we have implemented changes to improve the inspection experience. These include:

- * the introduction of keep-in-touch meetings during the inspection fieldwork week to give inspectors an opportunity to share and explore initial themes and lines of enquiry
- * the introduction of an out-of-court-disposal 'pre-fieldwork' meeting, to allow the inspection team to fully understand the local approach to delivering out-of-court-disposal work before beginning fieldwork on site
- * changes in our case sampling approach for out-of-court-disposals. This includes extending the timeframe from which cases can be selected, to allow greater flexibility in selecting a breadth of case type, case manager and work undertaken
- * more clarity about which cases are 'in scope' for inspection, based on such cases requiring a linked offence and delivery of interventions
- * the introduction of shorter inspection reports, which are more accessible to a greater range of stakeholders and audience
- * the introduction of a formal feedback meeting between lead inspectors and YJS senior leaders after the inspected organisation receives the initial ratings panel summary report and before publication of the full inspection report.

Development of the new inspection programme

Feedback has been used to inform the development of future new inspection programme and framework. This includes shaping our thinking about the following:

- taking a more agile and proportionate approach to inspection activity
- inspecting how well the YJS meets the needs of the child (all cases in one domain two) rather than how well it manages disposals in terms of a court/out-of-court-disposal split
- including bail and remand cases in our inspection activity
- inspecting reviewing across assessment, planning and implementation and delivery, rather than as a separate standard, in recognition of the dynamic nature of reviewing activity
- changing the language of inspection to achieving positive change, achieving safety for the child and achieving safety for others
- removing the information and facilities standard
- moving away from joint core inspections, and renewing our commitment to work collaboratively with partner inspectorates through the formation of our thematic team (including by contributing to relevant thematic joint targeted area inspections)
- developing an MoU with the YJB and being clearer about the interface and responsibilities of each of our organisations
- improving our offer for children to engage with us during inspection of their YJSs and providing a greater range of opportunities and methods
- reducing the request for evidence in advance and the period of time between announcing an inspection and beginning fieldwork
- introducing a victim standard
- carrying out two types of inspection: inspection of work with children and victims and inspection of youth justice services

Throughout this annual report period we have been working on our plans for the new youth inspection programme. This has included holding a number of roadshows (in-person and online events), launching our online consultation, establishing a stakeholder worker group, and engaging with our academic advisory group. We have also consulted with children and worked closely with the Youth Justice Board and Youth Justice Policy Unit within the Ministry of Justice. We are piloting our proposals throughout 2024 and look forward to launching the new programme in 2025.