



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Sunderland

HM Inspectorate of Probation, December 2022



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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

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Foreword

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

Our inspection found a skilled service, with strengths evident in the partnership's strategic approach to prioritising prevention and diversion. The case management of out-of-court disposals was of a high standard, underpinned by clear policy and provision arrangements. YOS staff and senior leaders have a shared commitment to ensuring that children receive the most appropriate services and interventions at the earliest stage. The YOS has evaluated its policy and provision for out-of-court disposals through several themed audits, which have led to further improvements in practice.

However, improvements were also required in some of the specific areas of court disposal work inspected, particularly in case management to manage the risk of harm to others. Management oversight and quality assurance of this element of court disposal work need to be more consistent, as does activity to address issues related to victims.

The YOS Management Board sets a clear vision and strategy, which are communicated well across the partnership and are evidence-based. Strategic partnership arrangements are mature and collaborative. Board members have sufficient seniority to make decisions and commit resources from their own agencies. We saw evidence of this in the wide range of funding obtained for creative and innovative projects and initiatives.

The partnership has an in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges facing YOS children and uses data well. There is a strong mix of targeted, specialist and mainstream services. Partners collaborate closely and share responsibility for addressing children's complex needs.

Sunderland's arrangements for staffing are a strength. We were particularly impressed with the service's approach to staff development and attention to the welfare of the workforce. Senior leaders and managers are intuitive, emotionally intelligent and clearly care for their staff. As a result, staff feel valued, and are highly motivated, experienced and child-centred. They receive regular supervision and have access to beneficial training and a breadth of positive development opportunities.

There is much to commend Sunderland YOS and the partnership for, which is reflected in our overall rating of 'Good'. This is a well-led and well-managed partnership.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Sunderland Youth Offending Service
Fieldwork started September 2022

Score 26/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Outstanding



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Outstanding



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Requires improvement



2.2 Planning

Requires improvement



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Requires improvement



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Outstanding



3.2 Planning

Outstanding



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Outstanding



Recommendations

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

The Sunderland Youth Offending Service should:

1. improve the quality of planning, delivery, and reviewing in court disposal casework, focusing on managing the risk of harm to others
2. improve the quality of assessment of safety and wellbeing in court disposal cases
3. improve management oversight and quality assurance of court disposal casework
4. ensure that court disposal casework is sufficiently scrutinised by the YOS management board.

The Probation Service should:

5. provide a probation officer to the YOS, to support effective transitions and risk management.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Sunderland YOS over a period of a week, beginning on 19 September 2022. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 20 September 2021 and 15 July 2022, and out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 20 September 2021 and 15 July 2022. There were no resettlement cases sentenced within the timeframe highlighted above. We also interviewed 20 case managers.

Sunderland is a city in the north east of England. It covers an area of 53 square miles and has a total population of 277,846. Of this population, 8.8 per cent are aged between 10 and 17 years. Sunderland has low ethnic diversity, with 95.9 per cent of the population being white British. Levels of socio-economic deprivation are high. The unemployment rate is 6.2 per cent, which is above the north east rate of 5.9 per cent and the national rate of 4.1 per cent. Alongside this, 27.3 per cent of children are living in low-income families, compared with 26.8 per cent regionally and 19.1 per cent nationally. Levels of domestic violence and abuse are high. The YOS report that recorded contacts into children's social care are twice as many for domestic violence and abuse as for the next largest category (behaviour). Many children in the YOS cohort have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences. They often have low aspirations in relation to employment, training and education, and face other challenges, such as substance misuse and emerging issues such as exploitation or peer-on-peer abuse.

Sunderland YOS sits within the Early Help Directorate of Together for Children (TfC). TfC is a company wholly owned by the council and was established in 2017. The Management Board is chaired by the Chief Executive of TfC (who is the Director of Children's Services) and oversees the development and operations of the service.

The YOS has a strategic focus on prevention and diversion, alongside a trauma-informed approach to working with a small but complex YOS cohort of children. At the point of inspection, Sunderland had 78 children on their caseload, with an approximate split of 22 per cent court disposals (17 children) and 78 per cent out-of-court-disposals (61 children). Performance data for Sunderland YOS shows that its rates of first-time entrants and reoffending (both binary and frequency) are lower than the national averages for England and Wales. The police use of alternatives to charge and prosecution through the 'Outcome 22' process is thoroughly embedded, which is evidenced in the large reductions in first-time entrants. Historically, the YOS has maintained a low use of custody. However, since October 2021, the service has been challenged and stretched on this front as the result of a single incident, during which the YOS had to manage a significant number of remands and subsequent custodial sentences. The case also attracted considerable media attention.

The partnership recognises that the impact of Covid-19 on services and children has been, and continues to be, significant. The service has worked creatively and innovatively to ensure that regular, meaningful engagement and contact with children continued during the pandemic. The YOS partnership believes that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. This is evident from, for example, the reluctance of many children to return to education and an increase in elective home education.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Good

Strengths:

- The YOS has a clear vision and strategy, which are reflected in its strategic plan. The vision is communicated well and evidence-based.
- The board chair is very knowledgeable and holds board members to account for their individual actions.
- Board members regularly attend and actively participate in board meetings. They advocate for YOS children and have sufficient seniority to make decisions and commit resources from their own agencies.
- Strategic partnership arrangements are mature and collaborative. The YOS uses data to inform strategic decisions and to demonstrate the impact of its work on children. All board members are connected with other strategic boards across the wider partnership.
- The YOS Head of Service is well respected across the partnership and has links with a range of local and regional strategic groups and forums.
- The YOS has been successful in obtaining funding from various sources to develop innovative and creative approaches and projects.
- The Management board and the YOS service manager have a good understanding of the services business risks and have appropriate mitigations in place.
- Senior leaders and managers have established a strong learning culture. They have an open and reflective style, empowering staff to make decisions, and providing them with good support and training.
- Staff report that links with the YOS Management Board are good.

Areas for improvement:

- Given that the board has some newer members, and there have been wider developments in the YOS sector, the board should consider holding another development day.
- The seconded probation officer post has been vacant for several months.
- The board needs to ensure that the quality of court disposal casework is sufficiently scrutinised.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- Staffing and workforce development are high priorities for YOS managers, who are genuinely and consistently intuitive about staff's wellbeing. There is a positive learning culture and very strong reward and recognition arrangements.
- There is an emotionally intelligent approach to ensuring that staff have a wide range of development opportunities, with embedded organisational values that promote staff welfare. The YOS actively encourages additional opportunities for staff to complete external qualifications, such as the Youth Justice Degree, leadership courses and parenting educator degree-level qualification.
- The YOS actively manages workloads. In response to increases in caseload, two new case managers have been recruited and are due to take up their posts in October 2022. The staff survey indicated that practitioners felt their workload to be manageable.
- The recent remand and conviction of 10 children for a serious offence had a significant impact on the service. Staff report that managers led by example and supported them practically and emotionally throughout this demanding work.
- The staff survey indicated that 20 out of 21 respondents were highly motivated. Practitioners are skilled, child-centred and build positive relationships with children to engage them.
- Allocation of cases prioritises a consistency of case manager and recognises the individual diverse needs of children.
- Supervision is regular and deemed to be of good quality by all staff.
- Succession planning has been evident throughout the YOS. People progress from volunteer to paid employment, and from practitioner to management roles.
- Induction processes are good, with a broad range of activities and opportunities for new staff and volunteers.
- In the staff survey, 21 out of 23 respondents said that they could often provide ideas and challenge to managers.
- The staff survey indicates that, of the 13 staff with a diversity need, all feel that their needs are met very well. Staff report feeling valued and cared for.
- Management oversight of out-of-court-disposal casework was sufficient in 10 out of 12 cases.

Areas for improvement:

- The YOS has identified that specialist SAVRY (Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth) training and further training in risk of harm would be beneficial.
- Appraisal arrangements could be further strengthened.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

Strengths:

- There is a thorough strategic and operational analysis of YOS children's desistance needs.
- The YOS has completed an analysis of disproportionality, which identified no over-representation of cared-for children or over-representation in terms of ethnicity.
- The YOS and the young people's team have jointly secured funding to work with exploited girls. This has enabled them to put in place an approach that takes into account the gender specific needs of this group.
- Children can swiftly access a range of services and support, and there are specific pathways for universal, targeted and specialist provision.
- The YOS has two full-time police officers, a full-time health nurse, a full-time education, training and employment (ETE) officer, and a designated link substance misuse worker who attends panels and discusses referrals and plans.
- There are clear arrangements and strong joint working between the YOS and children's services.
- Pathways and provision for resettlement are well established. The YOS also has specialist resettlement and prevention (RAP) workers, who provide focused interventions with children, particularly those on intensive supervision and surveillance (ISS).
- The YOS works jointly with the criminal justice liaison and diversion team. This ensures that children in police custody receive timely screening, assessment and signposting to relevant services.
- The specialist ETE worker acts as the link between the YOS and schools. He will advocate for children and escalate where required. The partnership has a designated specialist Connexions worker for YOS children.
- Restorative justice workers have delivered interventions and training to children's homes in the area, to embed an approach that reduces the number of cared for children who enter the criminal justice system.
- The YOS has a wide range of preventative and early help provision. Delivery of statutory and prevention casework is enhanced by a range of additional and innovative projects.

Areas for improvement:

- There is no seconded probation officer.
- The waiting list for mainstream child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is currently 26 weeks. The YOS has secured funding for a YOS mental health worker but has not yet recruited to this post.
- The range of reparation projects available to children was reduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, but now needs to be widened.
- Internal risk management arrangements for children assessed as a high risk of harm should be reviewed.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- A comprehensive range of policies are available to staff to support them in delivering high-quality services. Staff understand the policies and know how to access them. Policies and processes are regularly reviewed and updated when necessary.
- Staff say their information technology enables them to access records and record information in a timely way. The YOS and partner agencies have access to each other's systems, which ensures effective and timely information-sharing about children.
- Referral pathways are clear, and staff are confident and knowledgeable about how to access services. There are service-level agreements and working protocols between the YOS and key statutory and voluntary partners.
- There is strong evidence that performance and quality systems drive improvement and children's needs are understood. The YOS has implemented several thematic audits (undertaken with partners) to review practice and identify areas for improvement. Processes for learning lessons are in place.
- The YOS used data to help it secure funding for additional bespoke projects.
- The YOS is co-located in an office with other services, close to the city centre. This helps staff to build professional relationships and a better understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities. The office is accessible to children and families. The building is child-friendly and is a safe space for staff from all the different agencies. Work mainly takes place in community hubs and venues, alongside home visits to children.
- The YOS is part of the regular 'practice weeks', in which all children's services are audited by managers from other services, focusing on a thematic area.
- The YOS has reviewed planning documents and procedures to develop plans that are more 'child-friendly'.
- TfC have introduced a peer mentor post (employing a care-experienced and ex-YOS young adult). This role works across early help and YOS.

Areas for improvement:

- The YOS has a quality assurance framework and policy in place. However, it needs to ensure that these are applied more consistently across court disposal cases.
- The YOS captures feedback from children and families in various ways, but this could be further developed and coordinated.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YOS captures feedback from children and families in various ways but could further develop and coordinate this. It has used questionnaires and verbal feedback at key review points and panels. Some of this feedback has been used to create plans and documents that are more child-friendly, to support children's engagement and understanding. Despite proactively seeking feedback, the YOS has found that many parents are often unwilling to engage. As a result, it has changed its process, and now aims to obtain feedback directly from the children it works with.

The YOS is developing additional ways of getting feedback from children and parents. For example, it has introduced a Signs of Safety approach, in which scaling questions are asked at start of the YOS intervention and again at the end. Currently the data on the YOS's work is included in the wider data on early help, but the partnership recognises that it would be helpful to extract this so that it can further evidence the impact of the YOS's work.

The YOS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 15 children who consented, and nine children replied.

When asked how they rated the service they had received from the YOS, eight responded with a score of 10 out of 10, and one child a score of nine out of 10. All of the children provided positive responses, which included:

"My worker does everything he can to help me. He's flexible with us, has a great relationship with us as a family and is understanding".

"They've explained everything clearly with the situation I am in and they are approachable".

Five people responded with a score of 10 out of 10 for how much the YOS had helped either themselves or (if they were a parent) their child stay out of trouble. One child said:

"I haven't got into any more trouble since they've started helping".

One parent said:

"My son's worker talks to him and explains stuff to him, which makes him think differently about stuff. He's now been no bother and choosing the right choices".

All of the children and parents who responded to our interview survey were complimentary about the service received. Inspectors spoke to one child and one parent. They all felt that their YOS workers have the right skills to do the work and said that they have been able to access the right services and support to help them stay out of trouble.

One child, talking about their case manager, said:

"Yeah, he's very good, he knows how to engage with me, helped me with court stuff and getting in the gym".

When asked what they liked most about the YOS, one parent said:

"Just that YOS was good with all the family. The worker helped my child to open up – he would never normally, but the worker got him talking about things".

Diversity

- The YOS management board has demonstrated evidence of work to address diversity and disproportionality. Overall, this has been consistent and is explicitly highlighted as a strategic priority in the current YOS strategic plan.
- TfC has a wider people strategy that sets out its approach to diversity and gives a breakdown of the protected characteristics of the wider organisation, including YOS staff.
- The YOS has a diversity and inclusiveness policy, which sets out explicit terms of reference for a range of groups with protected characteristics. YOS staff were aware of these groups and how to access them.
- The board is presented with performance data at every quarterly meeting. This enables it to scrutinise levels of diversity and disproportionality in the YOS caseload.
- The partnership has identified that black and mixed-race children are not over-represented in the overall number of children sentenced or cautioned, or in the current caseload data, including other out-of-court-disposals or prevention.
- Cared-for children are not over-represented in the YOS. Offending by this group of children has fallen, from 6.2 per cent in 2018 to 1.5 per cent in 2022. This is lower than the regional and national average of 2.2 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively.
- The partnership has carried out a number of themed audits to analyse diversity issues. It has used the findings and recommendations from these audits to shape and develop practice.
- The YOS and TfC performance teams have started scoping how they use data from the YOS and partners to give them a better understanding of systemic disproportionality. This has been delayed, as the YOS is planning to change to a new case management system by March 2023. Senior leaders have identified this as a priority once the new system is in place.
- Ethnic minority groups among the service staff are not fully representative of the general population (which is 94 per cent white British) and this is an area where recruitment could be improved. Organisational data indicates that 3 per cent of staff are from an ethnic minority group, and that 74 per cent of staff are female.
- The staff survey indicates that, of the 13 staff with a diversity need, all feel their need is met very well.
- Although females are not over-represented among the children cautioned or sentenced (just 2 per cent as opposed to 13 per cent nationally), YOS organisational data indicates that 21 per cent of the overall caseload, including prevention and out-of-court disposals, are female.
- The YOS has two funding streams from VRU. One is to deliver Safer Streets initiative (which is a detached youth provision) and the other is to pilot a multi-agency approach to serious violence the Focused Deterrence model.
- We judged that case managers in the inspected out-of-court disposal cases were effective in taking account of the children's diversity needs in their assessments, planning and the way that they delivered and implemented services. However, the quality of work to address diversity in the court disposal cases was more variable.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating¹ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

| | % 'Yes' |
|---|------------|
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance? | 75% |
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe? | 63% |
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe? | 75% |

Assessment of desistance factors was satisfactory in a majority of cases. There was some inconsistency in case managers' understanding of children's diversity needs, but they considered children's wider familial and social context in every case. They achieved this by liaising effectively with partner agencies to access information and previous assessments, and by ensuring that children, and their parents/carers, were central to the assessment process in every case. Assessment of victims' needs and wishes was more variable, which limited opportunities for restorative justice. In the majority of the inspected cases, we saw a strengths-based approach and sufficient levels of attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and the likelihood of engaging with the court disposal.

Although inspectors agreed with the level of classification of safety and wellbeing in all but one case, there was a lack of reasoned analysis and drawing together of information to inform judgements or the rationale for the classification. Consequently, not all assessments sufficiently reflected the impact of those complex issues that increase the level of risk to the child. Case managers did not always systematically consider previous and current behaviour or events, which meant that their analysis of controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child was inconsistent. Management oversight was variable and did not always address or remedy these shortfalls in assessment practice.

Assessment work should provide an analysis of how other people will be kept safe when there are signs that the child could present a risk of harm to others. We saw sufficient evidence of this in a majority of court disposal cases. Case managers reflected on current and historical issues or behaviours, from a range of agencies and sources, which in turn resulted in balanced and evidenced assessments.

¹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

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

| | % 'Yes' |
|--|------------|
| Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance? | 63% |
| Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe? | 88% |
| Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe? | 63% |

Planning to support the child's desistance was strengths-based and built on the factors identified in the assessment but lacked consistency in some cases. Children were fully involved in planning, as were parents and carers, in a majority of cases. Inspectors noted that the YOS had created child-friendly planning documents, which incorporated the child's perspective. However, there was variability in setting out the services to address desistance, as well as the sequencing of such services. Planning to address the child's diversity needs was sufficient in just under two-thirds of the inspected cases. Overall, planning took sufficient account of the child's personal circumstances, including their wider familial and social context, in all but one case. Education, training, substance misuse, and emotional and mental health were common areas for intervention. Inspectors found that case managers had taken sufficient account of victims' needs and wishes in only 3 out of 8 cases.

Planning to promote the child's safety and wellbeing was strong and clearly informed by other agencies, such as social care, F-CAMHS and the substance misuse service. In all of the inspected cases, this led to the necessary controls and interventions being put in place to address the issues identified. Planning to keep the child safe was supported in some cases by joint supervision arrangements with children's social care and other key individuals. These arrangements set out each agency's responsibilities for specific actions. Within the complex YOS cohort, circumstances in a child's life can change quickly. Case managers need to consider the potential for change in each case, so that, should concerns escalate, they are prepared and more likely to respond effectively. Inspectors found that contingency planning to keep the child safe was sufficient in all but one case.

We were disappointed to see that planning to manage the risk of harm to others involved other agencies in only half of the cases inspected. While there were examples of planning to address the safety of specific victims, some cases did not sufficiently plan for the necessary controls and interventions to effectively manage the risk of harm that some children pose to others. We were encouraged to find that, in most cases, contingency planning in relation to public protection was sufficient and clear about specific actions to keep others safe.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

Our rating³ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

| | % 'Yes' |
|--|------------|
| Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance? | 75% |
| Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child? | 88% |
| Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people? | 63% |

It was clear that the case managers take a strengths-based approach to their work. The YOS has access to a wide range of specialist staff and other resources to deliver suitable and innovative work with YOS children. However, the interventions identified in plans to support the child's desistance were not delivered consistently. Service delivery to address the child's diversity was variable and evident in just under two-thirds of cases. Case managers recognised the child's wider familial and social context well, and their work promoted opportunities for community integration, including access to services post-supervision. This resulted in positive outcomes for many children in relation to education and employment, and positive activities beyond their period of involvement with the YOS. It was evident in all but one case that staff focused on developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers.

The delivery of services and interventions to address safety and wellbeing was a stronger area of practice. Case managers kept a sufficient focus on safety and wellbeing and promoted these in all but one case. The YOS worked consistently with a range of agencies and organisations to deliver well-coordinated packages of support. We also found clear arrangements and a trauma-informed approach to support cared-for children, and those who were open to early help or social care, criminally exploited or with emotional wellbeing or substance misuse issues.

Work to address the risk of harm some children pose to others was lacking in relation to service delivery. Inspectors found that other agencies were sufficiently involved in managing risk of harm in only half of those inspected cases. There were gaps in the services delivered to address identified risks, particularly in relation to harmful sexual behaviour. In some cases, interventions had not been delivered and management oversight was insufficient. Victim work was not consistent, was not always directed at the original offence and, in some cases, did not give the child a proper understanding of the impact of their behaviour.

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

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

| | % 'Yes' |
|---|------------|
| Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance? | 88% |
| Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe? | 100% |
| Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe? | 63% |

In most cases, formal written reviews were completed at key points in the order, such as referral order review panels or further court appearances. Reviewing continued to focus sufficiently on building on the child's strengths in all but one of the inspected cases, although the quality of reviewing of the child's diversity was much more mixed. In all relevant cases, inspectors found that case managers' reviewing practice enhanced the child's protective factors and assessed motivation and engagement levels. In all cases, reviewing involved the children and their parents or carers, although there was inconsistency in reviewing then leading to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to support desistance.

A written review of safety and wellbeing was completed in every case. Where relevant, reviewing identified and responded to changes in factors relating to safety and wellbeing, and we saw examples where multi-agency meetings were arranged to ensure a coordinated partnership approach to addressing the issues to keep the child safe. Inspectors found that reviews completed by case managers led to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work in a majority of cases. Many of the children supervised by the YOS had complex lives, and their circumstances could change rapidly. There were evident links to MSET (missing, sexually exploited, trafficked) arenas, alongside the use of joint review between the child, parent/carer and social care or specialist professionals in many of the inspected cases.

Overall, reviewing of progress to keep others safe was not as strong as for desistance or safety and wellbeing. Inspectors found that, in some cases, reviews were not sufficiently informed by input from other agencies and therefore did not consistently lead to the necessary changes in the interventions being delivered. As a result, in some cases, work to manage the risk of harm to others remained ineffectively addressed or managed. The better reviews of this element of work resulted in changes to reporting, increased structure and positive activities, or allocation of additional police resources, as determined by the needs of the case.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 12 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions, two youth cautions, six community resolutions and two other disposals. We interviewed the case managers in 12 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

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

| | % 'Yes' |
|---|------------|
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance? | 100% |
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe? | 92% |
| Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe? | 92% |

Assessments routinely drew on information from multiple sources to get the best understanding of a child's circumstances and history. Full and detailed assessments are completed before the joint decision-making panel meets, which assists in decision-making and determining the support and intervention required. Inspectors found that assessments were balanced, in that victim issues and opportunities for restorative justice were seen in most cases. The involvement of the child and their parents or carers was evident in all cases. The case manager had considered the child's diversity and wider social and familial context in a majority of inspected cases.

Assessment of a child's safety and wellbeing consistently included information from other agencies. The YOS had access to the children's social care case management system and could complete checks on past and present contact. YOS case managers were effective in helping children to engage and fostering positive relationships with them. This allowed them to consider relevant social, emotional and physical factors, such as attachments, mental health, substance misuse and risks from others. In all cases, we agreed with the safety and wellbeing classification and there was a clear written record of how to keep the child safe.

Assessments drew on relevant information and, in a large majority of cases, considered who was likely to be at risk from the child's behaviour, internal and external controls, and the nature and imminence of any risk occurring. In all but one inspected case, the YOS case manager had used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

| | % 'Yes' |
|--|------------|
| Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance? | 100% |
| Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe? | 92% |
| Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe? | 92% |

Planning in relation to desistance was strengths-based, well sequenced and involved other agencies. Case managers considered victim wishes and, as with assessment planning was responsive to the child's diversity needs, and social and familial context. Case managers took an inclusive approach. Their involvement of children and their parent or carers in plans was excellent. They took full account of the family's needs as well as the child's aspirations and interests. The work planned was proportionate in every case inspected and could be achieved within the timescale of the out-of-court disposal. In all but one case, planning for the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change was evident. The main desistance factors identified included substance misuse; education, training and employment; and mental health. Case managers struck a good balance between interventions to support desistance and the need to complete specific work on offending behaviour. In all cases, planning focused on supporting access to universal services to promote community integration. We saw instances where children continued to be supported by the wider early help service and other mainstream, targeted and specialist services after their out-of-court disposal ended.

In all but one case, there was sufficient planning to keep children safe. Inspectors found strong multi-agency working, and the YOS plan was aligned with other plans, such as social care and early help. We recognise the need for proportionate planning in out-of-court disposals, where interventions may be brief, but were pleased to see sufficiently detailed contingency planning in a large majority of the cases we inspected.

Planning to keep others safe was a strength. In all but one case, planning focused sufficiently on keeping people safe, and case managers involved other agencies in their planning processes in a large majority of relevant cases. Similarly, in a large majority of cases, planning addressed specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims. As with safety and wellbeing, contingency planning to manage public protection is important, and there should be a clear plan of action in the event of the child's risk of harm to others either increasing or decreasing. Inspectors found contingency planning for risk of harm to others to be sufficient in nine of the 10 relevant cases.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁷ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

| | % 'Yes' |
|---|------------|
| Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance? | 92% |
| Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child? | 83% |
| Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people? | 92% |

The involvement of other agencies across the wider early help directorate was evident and well-coordinated. Delivery of services to support children's desistance was strong, and built on the assessments and plans made. There was a high level of engagement and compliance with interventions, which were mainly voluntary. Case managers were persistent in gaining the trust of children and their parents or carers. We saw consistent evidence of work undertaken by a broad range of staff from mainstream, targeted and specialist services, which had led to positive outcomes for many YOS children. Practitioners matched interventions to children's needs and learning styles and took account of their diversity and other commitments in every inspected case.

Where there were issues concerning safety and wellbeing, we found clear multi-agency arrangements to support children who were looked after, open to social care, or criminally exploited, or who had emotional wellbeing or substance misuse issues. The YOS consistently worked with a range of agencies and organisations to deliver well-coordinated packages of support. We saw good work by the case managers and other specialist workers in the YOS. Case managers advocated on behalf of children and made timely referrals to specialist and mainstream services such as social care, substance misuse, and mental health liaison and diversion. The use of RAP (resettlement and prevention) workers, sessional youth workers and advocates enhanced the quality of intervention work delivered.

Services were sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm in a large majority of cases. Managing risk of harm often involved developing a better understanding of the victim's perspective, using a number of restorative justice techniques, as well as using intelligence from police and other community projects and professionals. There were also good examples of interventions to improve understanding of the dangers and consequences of knife crime, and work to reduce conflict within the family. Inspectors judged that the case manager paid attention to the protection of actual and potential victims in all but one of the relevant cases.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Outstanding

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

Strengths:

- There is a clear out-of-court disposal policy, which sets out regional and local arrangements for decision-making, provision and delivery.
- A full range of disposals was considered; there was a graduated response, which meant that children could be diverted from prosecution where appropriate.
- Referrals to the joint decision-making panel are timely.
- The panel includes representatives from children's social care and early help services; this ensures that all options for addressing the children's safety and wellbeing are considered.
- There are clear arrangements for escalating and resolving differences when these occurred.
- There is a strong and varied prevention offer. The YOS is proactive in engaging children and families before they receive an out-of-court disposal.
- All interventions and services available to children on statutory orders are available to those who receive an out-of-court disposal.
- There is a Northumbria-wide out-of-court disposal scrutiny panel that the YOS Head of Service attends.
- Management oversight of out-of-court disposals consistently promoted high-quality casework practice.
- YOS staff consistently provided children with opportunities for community integration and access to partnership services once they had completed the out-of-court disposal work.
- Policy and provision have been evaluated through several themed audits, which has led to changes and improvements in practice.
- There is a bespoke assessment tool, which has been developed and refined to include a Signs of Safety approach to assessment, but still addresses risk of harm issues.
- The use of Outcome 22 (deferred prosecution) has led to a 73 per cent reduction in first-time entrants since its introduction in December 2019.

Areas for improvement:

- The policy does not explicitly refer to diversity.
- The YOS has identified a benefit in adding the in-house mental health worker to the joint decision-making panel when they are in post.
- Arrangements are in place to capture and collate the views of children completing an out-of-court-disposal, but these could be strengthened.
- Further analysis of Outcome 22 data would enable the YOS to demonstrate any additional impact.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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