

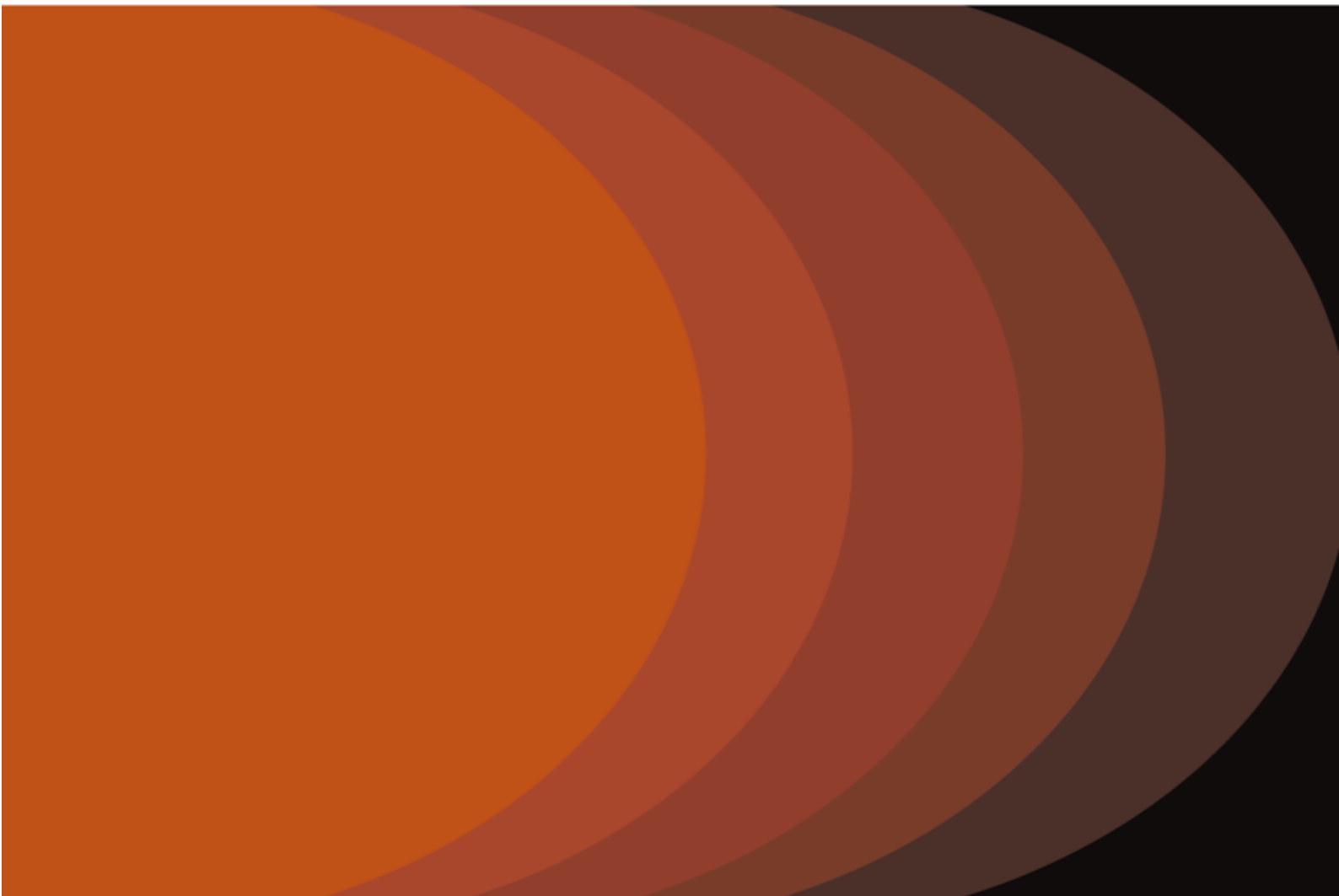


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

West Berkshire

HM Inspectorate of Probation, March 2023



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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.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated West Berkshire Youth Offending Team (YOT) in two broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work. We inspected the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, but, due to the low number of cases, we have not rated this area of the YOT's work.

Overall, West Berkshire YOT was rated 'Outstanding'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was not rated, because there were no resettlement cases within the timescale covered by the inspection.

Leaders across the partnership have worked together effectively to design a clear vision to help children achieve their best. The Management Group is led well, and the authority that members are given by the Building Communities Together Partnership is sustaining positive outcomes. Suitable governance arrangements ensure that there is effective integration of services to meet the needs of YOT children across West Berkshire. Partners embrace their responsibilities vigorously and work as one to overcome barriers that children face.

YOT staff are determined to enable every child to thrive. They go the extra mile for children. They support one another admirably, and this has created a culture where everyone feels they belong and have a part to play. Leaders, managers, stakeholders, and operational staff across the partnership reach out to children and their parents and carers to seek their views to improve services.

Covid-19 has posed many challenges for the YOT, but the imaginative and creative way in which it has reacted is praiseworthy. Statutory and non-statutory partners are fervent ambassadors for the children supervised by the YOT.

There is a healthy ambition in the YOT to continually make things better. This is best evidenced by the range of management information it collects, analyses and uses to drive improvement, and the benchmarking it carries out of its work following the publication of thematic and new research reports.

To improve further, the partnership needs to build a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity needs of all its children, especially those with different protected characteristics. Furthermore, the partnership must secure a qualified probation officer in the YOT and, together with its stakeholders, review the out-of-court disposal Thames Valley Police Youth Offending Teams partnership agreement to ensure that it covers issues of disproportionality across all protected characteristics and firmly embeds trauma, risk of harm and safety and wellbeing.

The YOT partnership continues to maintain the high standards it has set for itself. There is a great deal to celebrate and the YOT is to be congratulated for its excellent service delivery. All staff must take credit, as the very positive outcome of this inspection has been a 'one team' effort. We trust that the findings in this report will assist the YOT to improve further.












Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

West Berkshire Youth Offending Team
Fieldwork started December 2022

Score 21/24

Overall rating		Outstanding	
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	Not rated	
2.2	Planning	Not rated	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Not rated	
2.4	Reviewing	Not rated	
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	Good	
4. Resettlement¹			
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Not rated	

¹ The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YOS rating.
Inspection of youth offending services: West Berkshire

Recommendations

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

The Building Communities Together Partnership should:

1. address its statutory responsibility to include a probation officer in the YOT partnership, so that the expertise and specialist knowledge this role brings will enhance public protection.

The YOT Management Group should:

2. ensure that there is a comprehensive review of the Thames Valley Police Youth Offending Teams out-of-court disposal partnership agreement and guidance, that effectively covers issues of disproportionality across all protected characteristics and firmly embeds trauma, risk of harm and safety and wellbeing.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in West Berkshire YOT over week beginning 12 December 2022. We inspected 12 out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 13 December 2021 and 07 October 2022. There were no resettlement cases that fell within the relevant timeframes for inspectors to review. Additionally, inspectors reviewed three court cases that fell within the inspection criteria. This number was too low for court cases to be rated separately. However, we have provided a narrative that summarises our judgements on the quality of the resettlement policy and court work. We also conducted 14 interviews with case managers.

West Berkshire makes up over half of the geographical area of the county of Berkshire, covering an area of 272 square miles. It lies on the western fringe of the South East region, where the South East meets the South West, and the south coast comes up to meet the southern Midlands.

The mid-year population estimate for West Berkshire in 2020 was 158,465. The largest urban areas in the district are Newbury and Thatcham, where around 44 per cent (69,667) of West Berkshire residents live. 20 per cent (31,444) of residents live in the suburban area adjoining Reading borough.

In West Berkshire, 95 per cent of the population are white and five per cent are black, Asian and minority ethnic. The annual school census for secondary schools showed that the proportion of minority ethnic/non-white pupils in the general West Berkshire secondary school population was 12.1 per cent in 2021. 13 children who offended were from a minority ethnic/non-white background. They committed 16 offences, representing 8.2 per cent of the offending population and 6.7 per cent of the offences committed.

Since the removal of the Covid-19 restrictions, the YOT has seen an increase in the proportion of children with complex needs that it is supervising. When comparing the needs of the 2020-2021 cohort with the current one, truancy/poor attendance rose from 36 per cent to 47 per cent; exclusion rose from 52 per cent to 72 per cent; needs related to speech and language rose from 24 per cent to 44 per cent; bullying rose from 17 per cent to 33 per cent; anxiety rose from 21 per cent to 37 per cent; parental substance misuse rose from 14 per cent to 26 per cent; and separation/divorce rose from 52 per cent to 65 per cent.

There has been a 10.5 per cent increase in the number of children receiving either an informal or substantive outcome², from 143 in 2020 to 158 in 2021. The number of children receiving a community resolution has continued to rise, from 110 in 2020 to 130 in 2021. Conversely, the number of children receiving a substantive outcome has continued to fall, although at a lower rate, from 40 in 2020 to 37 in 2021³.

² A substantive outcome is a statutory out-of-court or court disposal.

³ Information above supplied by West Berkshire YOT.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YOT 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:

- Partners, stakeholders and the Management Group ('the Board') have worked effectively with the YOT to set a clear vision. Governance arrangements ensure that Management Group members have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their organisations without unnecessary delays.
- Links to the Building Communities Together Partnership are effective. The partnership connects leaders to key strategic boards that support health and wellbeing, safeguarding and public protection.
- Partners are active in their participation and influential advocates for YOT children. The Management Group is led well, with a knowledgeable chair. Partners are appropriately held to account.
- Effective induction arrangements (with the Management Group chair and YOT staff) for group members ensure that partners understand their duties.
- The voices of children and their parents and carers are assimilated impressively, and have led to service improvements.
- Local strategic partnerships (community safety, reducing reoffending, serious youth violence) understand the specific needs of YOT children and appropriately direct resources to meet their needs.
- The service manager effectively partners with service providers to achieve positive outcomes for YOT children that will help them to flourish.
- The YOT leadership team promotes transparency and constructive challenge, creating a safe space for all to contribute.
- Business risks to the YOT are understood well by leaders and there are appropriate controls in place to mitigate risk.

Areas for improvement:

- The partnership needs to develop and enhance its work across all protected characteristics. It needs to articulate this explicitly in its Youth Justice Plan.
- The Management Group and YOT workforce need to be more diverse to better reflect the breakdown of the local youth population.
- Volunteers should be given opportunities to contribute to the Youth Justice Plan and other key documents.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The YOT has provided excellent pastoral support and management supervision to staff during Covid-19.
- Staffing resources are used very well, planned, and suitably reviewed to respond to the changing demands and profile of children who are supervised by the YOT.
- The workloads of practitioners and managers are realistic, and managers ensure that staff are not overextended.
- There is an effective strategy that ensures the quality of work during planned and unplanned absences remains of a high standard.
- Cases are correctly allocated to practitioners with suitable skills and qualifications. Co-working of cases supports additional accountability, learning and development.
- Staff are provided with development opportunities and progression into other roles.
- Staff receive regular one-to-one and group supervision, and this enables them to learn and improve the quality of the services they deliver to children. All nine staff who responded to the HMIP survey reported that the quality of supervision is very good.
- All staff have access to in-service learning opportunities. This training helps them to deliver interventions well to children and improve their partnership working. Training completed by staff in the past 12 months has included Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) experiences, equality and diversity, effective practice, parenting, AIM 3, child first, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)/Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), working with girls, motivational interviewing techniques, risk and decision-making, Prevent, child protection and other mandatory training.
- The partnership promotes and values a culture of learning and continuous improvement. This has created a sense of belonging in the team.
- Employment opportunities are openly advertised.
- Staff are highly ambitious for the children they supervise. Staff go the extra mile time and time again to ensure that children have the best chances to thrive and succeed.
- Attention to staff safety and wellbeing is robust. This builds confidence and resilience.

Area for improvement:

- Staff within the YOT are mostly white and female, and more work is needed to ensure a diverse workforce.

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 comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the YOT children's desistance needs. The analysis considers factors related to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm, as well as diversity needs across some protected characteristics.
- Children and their parents and carers are actively invited to provide feedback, and this is used well to influence service delivery.
- Access to mainstream and specialist services that help children desist from offending, and keep them and others safe, is notable. These include the speech and language service, where the worker has produced some excellent child-friendly resources; the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), where there are no waiting lists; a weapons programme that is tailored to the needs of a child; The Edge, a substance misuse service; and education, training and employment initiatives to reduce school exclusions.
- The YOT has engaged with local supermarkets to obtain food vouchers to support vulnerable families.
- The YOT uses AQA certifications to provide children with opportunities to achieve qualifications and feel more positive about themselves.
- There are well-established, embedded, and effective links and relationships with a range of statutory partners, providers and agencies that provide desistance, safeguarding through the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), Thames Valley Partnership Safeguarding Team and public protection interventions (risk management panels). Oversight is provided effectively through memorandums of understanding, service level agreements, and terms of reference for different service providers.
- The YOT uses its noticeboard at Marchant House creatively. It is refreshed every month to cover topics, such as the impact of vaping and e-scooters and provides advice and guidance on a range of challenges faced by children.
- The parenting programme 'Who's in charge' (child to parent violence) provides a safe space for parents and carers to develop strategies to help them and their children.
- The YOT has excellent links with local sentencers, and this ensures that courts are aware of the services available to support sentencing. The 'magistrates retiring folder', produced by the YOT, contains relevant and current information that gives sentencers confidence about the YOT's work.

Areas for improvement:

- Gather and analyse diversity information across all protected characteristics, as identified in the Equality Act 2010.
- The statutory requirement of a probation officer in the YOT is absent and has been for a considerable period.
- The YOT could do more to identify interventions specifically for girls and set up projects that would benefit broader community groups.
- The pan-Thames-Valley out-of-court policy needs to be reviewed and enhanced (please also refer to the section on out-of-court policy and provision).

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:

- The YOT has a number of policies, procedures and guidance documents in place that enable staff to carry out their responsibilities. Almost all staff who responded to the HM Inspectorate of Probation staff survey reported that they understood 'quite well', or 'very well' the policies and procedures that applied to their roles.
- Policies are reviewed regularly. Inspectors found an extensive list of current policies (internal and external) that apply to the YOT's work, their status and when subsequent reviews were scheduled.
- Services for children are delivered in accessible places and safe environments. The Marchant House office is inclusive and welcoming, and space is used creatively. This has enabled staff to engage effectively with children.
- ICT access works well, enabling staff to carry out planning, service delivery and reviewing.
- Staff can carry out their work effectively from both office and remote locations.
- There are a range of quality assurance and management monitoring processes, including scheduled auditing, deep dives and thematics.
- Reviews of casework enable the YOT to learn from what has worked well and less well.
- The YOT regularly benchmarks its work against findings from new research and thematic inspection findings.
- There are effective processes in place to ensure that the YOT learns from things that go wrong. This includes critical learning reviews and audits. Learning is disseminated very well across the partnership. This has created a sense of togetherness. Information-sharing, memorandums of understanding and governance arrangements are robust.
- The YOT seeks the views of children and their parents or carers formally, at key stages of the supervisory process and on completion of interventions. Learning is systematically reported to the Management Group.

Area for improvement:

- The YOT has yet to comprehensively embed and integrate the range of protected characteristics that children present in its collection and analysis of management information.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

West Berkshire YOT has an effective engagement and participation strategy, which it uses to good effect to gather the views of children and their parents and carers. There is evidence of active listening and change resulting from feedback. The YOT and its partners are committed to finding ways for children to become genuine partners in reviewing and contributing to improving services. These have included bespoke events with senior leaders and children, direct feedback about the quality of services received and suggestion boxes. This has resulted in a culture that recognises and values the voices of children and their parents and carers. The YOT has developed formal and dynamic opportunities for children and their parents and carers to contribute their experiences and ideas. These include away days with children, end of intervention questionnaires and suggestions for improvements.

The YOT 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 nine children who consented, and three children and one parent/carer replied. We also spoke to two parents and two children.

All four respondents to our text survey gave a score of either 9/10 or 10/10 for the help they felt they had received from the YOT.

One child commented:

"I haven't had been in trouble since [coming to the YOT]. They have helped me with many things like keeping my mind distracted and looking at future options. They have managed to help me get my timetable for school longer times which I was struggling to get, and they have done so much more."

In our telephone interviews, both children reported that they understood what the YOT is trying to achieve. When asked if they thought the staff had the right skills, they all responded 'yes'. One parent said:

"Definitely – Karl and Ronnie connected really quickly – he opened up more as sessions went on".

When a parent was asked about whether their child had been able to access the right services to stay out of trouble, the response was:

"Ellie helped him to look at safe strategies when trying to help his friends. Talking to him is helpful because it was not just from me. He has pulled himself away from certain groups and he understands now that some who were acting as friends were not real friends".

When asked 'what do you most like about the YOT', one parent replied:

"They keep me up to date about any changes. They work with me and recognise the importance of taking both the child's and the parents' perspective. I can share any 'horrible gut feelings' with Leroy and I feel ok to do that – it's a group effort".

The quality of relationships that had been established was a clear strength, as evidenced by the following quote:

"Karen has spent so much time getting to know Anand to see what he thinks about why he started getting into trouble. She does this in such a gentle but assertive way. She praises him and I am sure this helps because he doesn't get much appreciation at school. Anand never feels judged and knows that Karen is trying to help him. They have a safe relationship where it's ok to say and get things wrong. I can't think more highly of Karen. Thank you".

Diversity

Of the staff working in the YOT, 81.8 per cent are female, and none are black, Asian or minority ethnic. Of the children on the current caseload, 42.1 per cent are female; 50 per cent have a learning disability or learning difficulty or are subject to an education, health and care plan (EHCP); and 13.2 per cent are black, Asian or minority ethnic.⁴

There is a notable commitment to addressing diversity and disproportionate outcomes for children. Services are personalised, and this theme was evidenced in the casework that inspectors reviewed. We found some excellent examples where children's learning needs (ADHD/ASD) were managed sensitively and effectively. Our case findings showed that, in the domain three cases reviewed, diversity issues had been assessed well, appropriate plans produced, and services delivered with a focus on meeting diverse needs in almost all cases (between 92 per cent and 83 per cent). The YOT has assigned the role of a Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) champion to a member of the team whose work is directly helping to improve knowledge and understanding about this community of children. Equality and diversity forms part of the standard/routine YOT meeting agenda, and we found evidence of regular healthy engagement on a range of issues.

The Youth Justice Service 2022-2023 plan needs to be more explicit about diversity and embed all protected characteristics, as identified in the Equality Act 2010. The Local Criminal Justice Board's Thames Valley Disproportionality Group has a comprehensive set of aims, purpose, values and governance, with a commitment to improving workforce diversity. As stated above, it could be enhanced by including disproportionality across all those with protected characteristics.

The out-of-court disposal Thames Valley Police Youth Offending Teams partnership agreement does not adequately cover diversity and disproportionality. The YOT1 form⁵ does not provide clear direction/instruction on how to ensure that comprehensive information on diversity is included. Where an AssetPlus assessment is completed, diversity issues are covered very well.

It is not clear whether the out-of-court policy has undergone an equality impact screening or assessment. There is a 'written' gap in the policy about how diversity needs will be addressed. However, practice evidence shows that diversity needs are addressed extremely well. The out-of-court disposal policy and guidance have been reviewed regularly, but aspects relating to diversity remain unchanged.

The diversity of the Management Group and its representation could be further improved through hearing the perspectives of people with different lived experiences.

Information on diversity is collected and analysed well, including on the overrepresentation of girls and GRT children in the YOT cohort.

⁴ Information supplied by YOT.

⁵ A document used by the police to record information following the commission of a crime.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at three community cases (referral orders) managed by the YOT. Given that there were insufficient cases that met the HM Inspectorate of Probation criteria carried out within the timescale covered by the inspection, this work has not been rated. We have, however, included the summative data judgments and provided a narrative about the quality of the work.

2.1. Assessment

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

Assessment activity to help children avoid reoffending is a strength and is supported by a range of tools. Practitioners take an investigative approach to understanding a child's offending and make appropriate use of past and current information. They understand diversity needs well. We found that practitioners had made good use of information held by other agencies in their assessment enquiries. Additionally, they invested time to understand the child's level of maturity. This is critical in maximising engagement. Assessment consistently concentrated on the child's strengths. The needs of victims were discussed well with children at the beginning of the assessment process.

Practitioners consistently gathered and included the voices of children and their parents and carers. This helped them to better understand the wider causes of the child's offending behaviour.

Assessment work identified risks to the child's safety and wellbeing in most cases, but not all. Practitioners appropriately assembled and integrated relevant information from other agencies and used it well to improve their understanding of the risks to the child's safety.

Assessments to identify all important factors linked to keeping other people safe were completed well. We found that practitioners had appropriately identified the individuals who were at risk from the child, as well as the nature of that risk. They fully considered historical information about previous offending. Information about past and present behaviours held by other agencies was used well. This included information about incidents where the child had gone missing, episodes of violence in the home, peer associations and family relationships. The influence of potential controls and interventions to mitigate risk of harm to others was also considered well.

2.2. Planning

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	67%

Planning activity to address desistance was personalised and undertaken jointly with the children and their parents and carers. In every inspected case, planning was proportionate to the disposal and the targets agreed were achievable within the timeframes. Plans were linked with those held by other agencies. This holistic approach was helping to shape activity to prevent children from reoffending. Practitioners' attention was suitably balanced between strengths and areas of concern, and they explored the child's motivation and maturity well. Diversity needs were considered well, for example, where appropriate, children were given 'fidget toys' to maximise engagement. Additionally, practitioners liaised with the speech and language worker and education worker for advice on enhancing plans that met the child's needs.

Planning to address children's safety and wellbeing was done well in the cases reviewed. Where required, there was meaningful engagement with other agencies to ensure that plans were aligned and that the role of each service was clear, including attendance at the Exploitation Missing Risk Assessment Conference multi-agency panel. Inspectors found that practitioners' analysis of family dynamics, including the impact of separation and any histories of self-harm, was completed well. This helped them to make referrals to specialist services (parenting programmes, for example) and identify suitable interventions to mitigate risk.

Planning to keep other people safe was variable and requires development. On occasions, planning failed to focus comprehensively on the needs and concerns of all victims and did not include the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people. The weakest area was contingency planning. Here, practitioners did not always make referrals to other agencies, and their actions did not align with the nature of the risk.

2.3. Implementation and delivery

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	100%

Practitioners are experienced in developing and maintaining strong relationships with children and families to support desistance. Children accessed various services that addressed areas of concern, including engagement in constructive activities (for example, a photography project), and initiatives related to drugs and alcohol and emotional wellbeing. They were also signposted to various opportunities to build on strengths and encouraged to access mainstream services. Sequencing of interventions was proportionate and achievable within the timescales of supervision. Practitioners tailored their work effectively to the individual children. We found examples where sessions were short, flexible and focused, and used language that children understood. Breaks were taken when appropriate, and children were given the opportunity to stand up and walk around before re-engaging with the session.

Delivery of work to keep children safe was robust in every case reviewed by inspectors. Planned work was delivered effectively, and interventions focused on keeping the child safe. This included exploring the impact of childhood trauma, illegal use of e-scooters, exploitation, and self-harm. Practitioners have used specialist services such as The Edge, the YOT nurse, CAMHS and speech and language therapy inputs well. Interventions involved a whole-family approach, with partners working together to support the child and family. This was evidenced by direct feedback that inspectors received from parents and carers.

Work to keep other people safe was done well in the inspected cases. Practitioners had paid sufficient attention to the safety and protection of actual and potential victims. Here, victim awareness work was carried out well, in a timely way, and information from risk management meetings was informing actions. Inspectors found that case planning forums made a difference in shaping the clear work that was needed to keep others safe. Encouragingly, contact with other workers and agencies involved with the child was regular, purposeful and well timed.

2.4. Reviewing

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

The reviewing of work to evaluate the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending is strong. Practitioners complete formal, informal and dynamic reviews, as personal circumstances change. Examination of a child's protective factors as well as an analysis of personal and familial circumstances, are noticeable consistently in casework.

Practitioners consistently appraised children's motivation and appropriately considered any barriers to engagement that they identified. Recurring discussions with children and their parents and carers were evidenced well in the inspected cases. This helped practitioners to achieve a richer understanding of the children's bigger day-to-day lived experiences, and empowered parents and carers to become fully involved in helping their children to make better choices.

The quality of reviewing activity to keep children safe was done well in all the cases inspected. Where required, reviewing reacted appropriately to fluctuations in the child's safety and wellbeing, in particular external threats to the child and frequent changes in accommodation. Information was gathered effectively from other agencies that were involved, and plans were amended to support ongoing work. This systematic approach was enabling children to better understand how their wellbeing needs were changing and what they needed to do to keep themselves safe from harm.

Practitioners respond effectively to changes in factors related to risk of harm to others. This meant that plans to keep other people safe were amended punctually. Intelligence from risk management meetings informed what work needed to change. Where applicable for example, a change in approach and/or change in intervention as evidenced by a focus on potential and not just actual victims. Written reviews were completed in a timely manner in all inspected cases, as required. This made sure that other practitioners involved in delivering risk of harm work had access to the most current information.

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 12 cases, including three youth conditional cautions, three youth cautions, and six community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 11 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁶ 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?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	92%

In all inspected cases, the practitioner had carried out detailed enquiries to understand the responsibility the child took for their behaviour, and their attitude towards their offending. This methodical approach enabled practitioners to probe deeper into the child's lived experience and how adverse childhood experiences may have contributed to their offending.

Diversity issues were analysed well, and inspectors found a comprehensive analysis of strengths and areas of concern. The exploration of the child's familial and social circumstances was strong, and practitioners understood the impact of early traumatic experiences on the child's behaviours. Assessments were enriched by case formulations and consultations from specialist service providers, for example health and speech and language. Practitioners appropriately assessed if there were any structural barriers getting in the way of the child's progress.

Practitioners had suitably accessed a broad range of information from other agencies to support their assessments of children's safety and wellbeing. In all cases reviewed, there was a clear written assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing. Practitioners recognised issues around rejection, separation and the impact of poor emotional wellbeing. While they generally understood the risks to others, in two out of the seven relevant cases the analysis of risks to others was not detailed enough and practitioners had not fully used information from all available sources.

Inspectors found that, in several cases, practitioners had used their professional judgement well. This ensured that the needs of victims were understood more comprehensively. Additionally, there was an impressive focus on potential internal thoughts and behaviours that could lead to harm being caused to others.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁷ 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?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

Planning to address desistance took a whole-family approach, and was appropriately tailored to the children, and co-produced with them. In almost all the inspected cases, 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, enabling children to flourish. In many cases, plans had included access to mainstream services. In almost all cases, practitioners had considered diversity needs well. For example, involving 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. There was purposeful liaison with other agencies to ensure that 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. Practitioners had identified referrals to specialist services, but robust contingency planning was variable and needs further attention.

Overall, planning to keep others safe was done well, and practitioners appropriately considered the needs of actual and potential victims. Practitioners 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. Relevant organisations were identified in planning to keep others safe. Risk management is 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. Contingency planning to keep others safe was sufficient in most of the inspected 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 on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

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

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

The quality of services delivered to help children avoid committing further offences was impressive. We found numerous examples of work to support desistance, including support for emotional wellbeing, the dissemination of information on sexually harmful behaviour provided by the nurse and meetings with headteachers at school, and speech and language interventions.

Restorative activities were tailored to the child and were helping them to learn from the harm they had caused. Many of the letters of apology reviewed by inspectors were suitable, with good reflection and insight from children. Practitioners had regular contact with children and their parents and carers, with excellent levels of engagement. We found strong advocacy from practitioners to support positive education outcomes for both school-age children and those over 16. Additionally, practitioners maximised the opportunities available in the community to support positive and constructive use of leisure time.

Service delivery to keep children safe was undertaken consistently well in every inspected case. There were no notable delays in responses from partners working with the child, and services were coordinated well. Furthermore, referrals to the MASH, when needed, were completed in a timely manner and this ensured that risks to the child's safety and wellbeing were managed promptly. The communication passport, completed with children, was used well across the partnership, and helped practitioners to achieve positive engagement.

Work with schools to reduce exclusions was developing well, and counselling for children was supporting them to attend school. A number of children had been given space in supervision to learn to control their behaviours, and this was helping them to be more open about their vulnerabilities. Most impressive was the time, empathy and sensitivity practitioners gave to children with additional complex learning needs. In every inspected case, sufficient services were delivered to keep other people safe. Practitioners paid close attention to the needs of potential and actual victims. Where required, Exploitation Missing Risk Assessment Conferences were completed in a timely manner, and this was contributing to keeping other people safe. Victim awareness work was consistently completed well, using an individualised approach.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Good

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 Thames Valley Police Youth Offending Teams out-of-court disposal partnership agreement, which covers the nine YOTs in the region.
- The out-of-court policy covers pre-panel, panel and post-panel information-gathering, eligibility criteria, enforcement, escalation arrangements, decision-making in cases where children have previous offending histories, and liaison arrangements with partners to support diversion.
- The voice of victims is included in the decision-making process.
- The YOT has an out-of-court joint decision-making process, where the decision-maker can readily access information from a range of agencies, including the police, YOT workers, the restorative justice/victim liaison practitioner and the children's social care (early help services) social worker.
- Internal and external scrutiny arrangements of the joint decision-making process work well and are supported by effective auditing and quality assurance practice.
- Children receiving an out-of-court disposal have access to the same range of interventions that are available for post-court cases. Interventions are delivered using a strengths-based approach.

Areas for improvement:

- The out-of-court disposal policy needs to include more information on diversity, trauma, risk of harm and safety and wellbeing, and how these should be considered in the decision-making process.
- The YOT1 form does not provide clear direction/instruction on how to record a range of core issues, including diversity, safety and wellbeing, risk of harm to others and trauma.
- The out-of-court policy has not undergone an equality impact screening or assessment – not all protected characteristics are referenced.
- Areas relating to the safety and wellbeing of children, while mentioned in the policy, are not explicitly covered in the screening process. There is also limited coverage of community safety, wellbeing needs, vulnerability, and the perception of the child about her/his safety concerns.
- Children and their parents and carers have not been directly involved in any evaluation of the out-of-court disposal policy.
- For community resolutions and youth cautions, there is no contact from the YOT to the child and their parents or carers until after the disposal has been decided.

4.1. Resettlement

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. This standard has not been rated because there were no resettlement cases that fell within the inspection timeframes.

Strengths:

- West Berkshire YOT has a throughcare and resettlement policy and practice document dated January 2022. It includes comprehensive advice on what practitioners should and should not do. Pathways, including suitable accommodation, health, and education, training and employment, all feature well in the policy. The five principles of constructive resettlement are embedded well.
- The policy highlights the significance of the principles of constructive resettlement, including well-coordinated services with partners. The need for effective communication and information exchange with service providers and other key stakeholders is explicit in the document.
- The importance of developing a pro-social identity and providing personalised services is emphasised well into documents.
- The YOT approach to public protection is clear. There is guidance on the need for effective discussions on the three domains of risk and management, and for referrals to the risk, safety and wellbeing panels, including screening for multi-agency public protection arrangements.
- Meeting the needs of victims is a priority of supervision.
- The resettlement policy has been reviewed regularly. Procedures and processes encompassing resettlement have been revised to reflect the underpinning principles of constructive resettlement as an evidence-based approach to intervention.
- Staff maintain their knowledge and understanding of resettlement work by attending relevant learning opportunities, such as briefings at relevant custodial institutions.

Areas for improvement:

- The policy needs to be more explicit about how the needs of minority ethnic children and, specifically, girls will be addressed.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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