

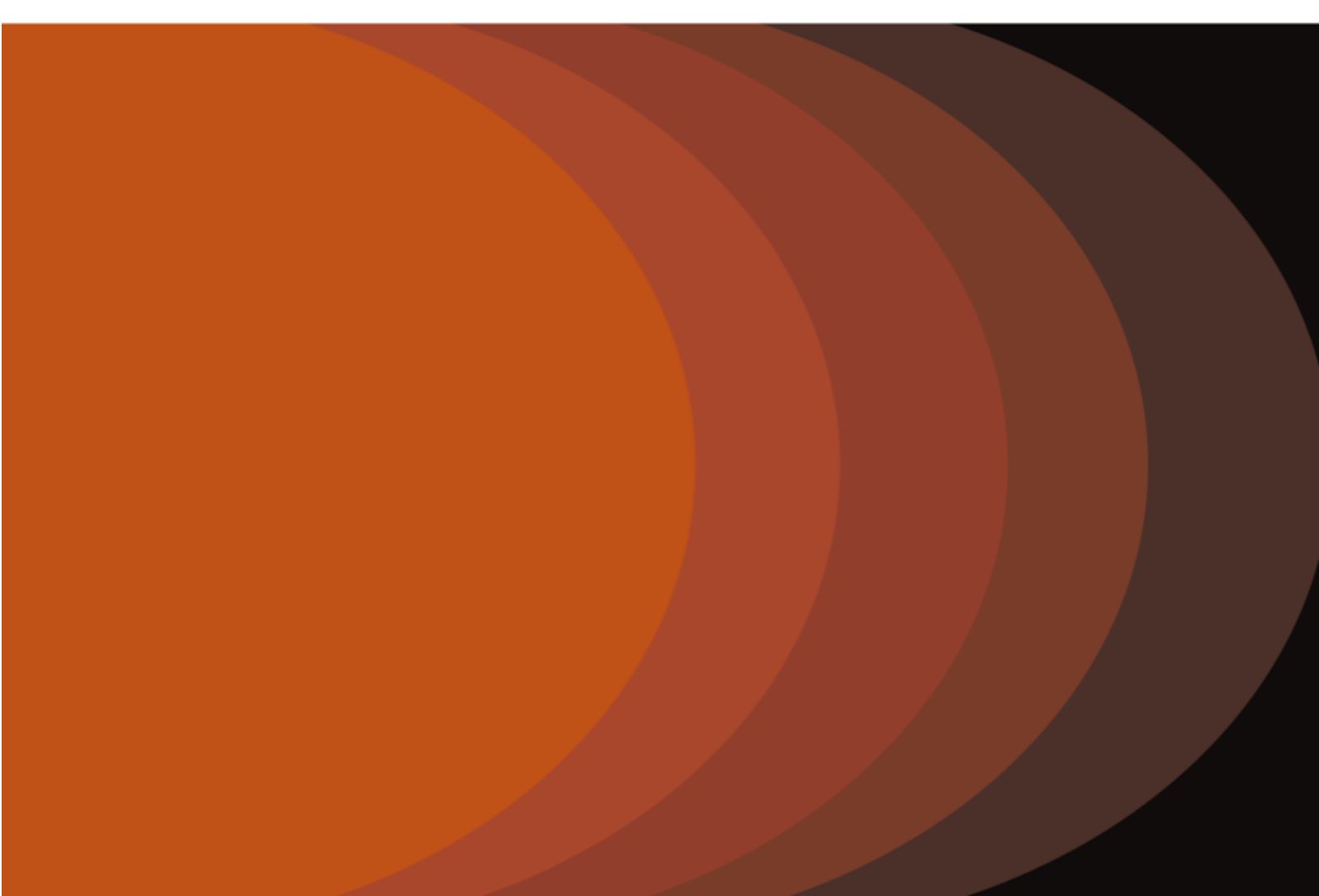


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Blackburn with Darwen

HM Inspectorate of Probation, January 2023



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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Blackburn with Darwen YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Blackburn with Darwen YJS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Good'.

There is a high level of care and dedication from partners, managers, and staff to achieving the best outcomes for their children, families, and victims. The child-first ethos is well established, and partners work effectively together to divert and prevent children from entering the criminal justice system. The views of children, families, and victims are highly valued. The YJS is proactive in continually seeking these and using them to inform service delivery. The staff are passionate, capable, and knowledgeable. It was evident that they are motivated and committed. There is a robust training offer and effective support to ensure that all staff are adequately skilled to deliver a high-quality service.

There are strong arrangements with partners, which provide the YJS with seconded staff from police, probation, and New Directions (a careers service). In addition, YJS children have access to an impressive health offer, whereby their physical, mental, and dental health and substance needs can be supported in one location.

Access to speech, language, and communication therapy requires further development. School-aged children and, more recently, children over 16 years of age can access this provision. However, practitioners need more training to support the recognition of children's needs and in how to access these therapeutic pathways.

In the cases we reviewed, assessment was of a consistently high quality. Practitioners had a strong understanding of trauma and how early life experiences can impact on presenting behaviour. Reviewing activity requires further development to ensure that changes in risks to and from the child are sufficiently explored and analysed, and that, where required, adjustments are made to the ongoing plan of work.

The YJS is committed to addressing the diversity needs of those accessing the service. There are numerous examples of a tailored response, including its work to reduce the numbers of cared for children. However, a clear strategic position on how the service intends to meet all protected characteristics is needed. This will support clarity, consistency, and accountability.














The YJS is achieving impressive outcomes – for instance, low first-time entry figures. However, evaluation needs to be more in-depth to understand how it is achieving these results to provide an evidence base to inform future service delivery. We have seen a commitment to learning and effective responses to improve service delivery and are confident the service will continue to build upon the strong offer it has in place.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service Fieldwork started October 2022		Score	29/36
Overall rating		Good	
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Outstanding	
1.2	Staff	Outstanding	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Good	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Outstanding	
2.2	Planning	Good	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
2.4	Reviewing	Requires improvement	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Outstanding	
3.2	Planning	Outstanding	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Good	
4. Resettlement¹			

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



Recommendations

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

The Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service should:

1. provide routine support and training for practitioners who are required to identify speech, language, and communication needs. This includes increasing understanding of the pathways for school-aged and post-16 provision
2. support practitioners and managers in recognising and knowing how to escalate concerns when education packages are unsatisfactory
3. systematically evaluate service delivery and internal processes to develop an evidence base and understanding of the results being achieved
4. improve reviewing activity to ensure that changes in risks to and from the child are effectively explored, analysed, and captured in formal reviews.

The Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service Management Board should:

5. ensure that the post-16 access to speech, language, and communication therapy pathway is expedited and embedded
6. ensure that data analysis of YJS children provides detailed scrutiny of education provision for school-aged children and positively impacts upon improving YJS access to their full educational entitlement
7. work with the YJS to clarify their diversity strategy and support embedding this strategically and operationally across the partnership.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Blackburn with Darwen YJS over a period of a week, beginning 10 October 2022. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence, out-of-court disposals and resettlement cases were delivered between Monday 11 October 2021 and 05 August 2022. We also conducted 15 interviews with case managers and one interview with a manager.

Blackburn with Darwen is a semi-rural unitary borough located in East Lancashire in the North West of England. Blackburn borders Bury and Bolton in the south, Chorley in the west, Hyndburn and Rossendale in the east, and Ribble Valley in the north. It is the largest local authority in the wider pan-Lancashire area; the resident population has increased by five per cent since the 2011 Census and now sits at 154,800. There are 43,900 children and young people aged 0–19 years in the borough, of which 17,304 are aged 10–17 years. The borough has some of the most deprived areas in England, with around 37 per cent of the borough's children living in low-income households. The borough is ethnically diverse; children from black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage aged 10–17 years make up 41 per cent of the local population. However, in the current caseload, this figure sits at 24 per cent, meaning that children from white heritage are overrepresented.

The YJS forms part of the children's services and education department. It sits alongside the adolescent service, Engage (exploitation provision), young people services, targeted youth support, and SEEDS (support, experiences, enjoy, development and succeed) adolescent support unit. The head of the YJS reports to the head of partnerships, intensive support, policy, and performance. The YJS management team includes the head of service, two area team managers, and an advanced practitioner. The area team managers have lead responsibility in areas including out-of-court disposals, prevention, restorative justice, support around sexual harm, and courts. They also supervise case managers and specialist staff. We last inspected Blackburn with Darwen YJS in 2016.

At the time of the inspection there were 16 children subject to court disposals and five children were working with the YJS on an out-of-court disposal. The majority of the caseload are boys aged 15–17 years. The most common offences are violence against the person, in the inspection case sample these offences made up 67 per cent of all offences at the time of inspection. Cared for children and those working with the children's social care team are overrepresented in the YJS caseload. Levels of mental ill-health (67 per cent), substance misuse (57 per cent), and children with learning disabilities (71 per cent) are high.

The area is experiencing some difficulties with serious youth violence and has established that this links to an increase in its custody figures. The partnership recognises this is a priority and is working proactively to tackle serious youth violence, and reduce and avoid remand and custody where appropriate. The number of Blackburn with Darwen first-time entrants is significantly lower than the national average for England and Wales, and the North West. Reoffending rates are slightly higher than for England and Wales. The YJS experienced a spike in reoffending in July 2018 to June 2019 but this has continued to decrease year on year and is now only marginally above the national average.

The Lancashire police constabulary covers the Blackburn with Darwen area. The YJS has strong links with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Violence Reduction Network, the latter providing funding for the prevention offer.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- Board members are committed to the partnership and understand their role and responsibilities. Membership includes required partners of appropriate seniority.
- The board understands the complexity of the needs of the service. There is priority access for YJS children. It advocates for the YJS to secure and protect provision – for instance, identifying alternative funding streams to maintain prevention services.
- The board receives comprehensive data, produced by the YJS, which provides a detailed analysis of the service. Partners contribute analysis from their services, including the Police and Community Safety Partnership. The board uses this information appropriately to influence service delivery.
- The participation of children, families, and victims is a priority and mechanisms are in place to obtain their views. These impact positively on service delivery, including changes to court facilities, designing the YJS logo, and children's involvement in recruitment.
- Partnership arrangements include in-house staff from police, probation, health, and education services.
- The board understands risks to the service and is taking steps to mitigate against these.
- The management team is cohesive, supportive, and visible. Communication is effective and lines of accountability are understood. There is a high level of care for the staff and those accessing the YJS.
- Connectivity between the board and the YJS is strong, and there is a collaborative approach to developing the strategy, priorities, and values. There is a clear line of sight between the board and the YJS. Staff have a strong understanding of the board functions and are confident in sharing their views at this level.

Areas for improvement:

- The gap in speech and language therapy provision for post-16s has been recognised, and funding recently secured. However, the board needs to ensure that this provision is embedded without delay.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- Staff are motivated, passionate, and dedicated to meeting the needs of children, families, and victims. There is a high level of care and commitment, which extends from senior managers to operational staff.
- Workloads are demanding but manageable; managers respond if capacity becomes difficult. This is frequently revisited by the management team to ensure that quality is maintained.
- The allocation of work is appropriate. Children are matched to the practitioners based on their skills and who would best meet the child's needs.
- Supervision for managers, practitioners, and the wider staff group is frequent, supportive, and effective.
- Staff can access clinical support and case consultation through a team of specialist therapists and clinical psychologists.
- The team is confident, experienced, and knowledgeable. The YJS invests in its staff and provides opportunities for progression.
- There is a thorough and supportive induction process for staff and volunteers. New staff are adequately prepared and have time to transition into their role.
- The appraisal process is structured and provides opportunity to review practice and identify personal and professional development. In our staff survey, all respondents described this as 'very valuable' or 'quite valuable'.
- The learning and development offer is robust and comprehensive, catering for the needs of staff. This ensures that they are adequately skilled for the role. Staff are proactive in identifying their own learning needs, to make sure that they continue to deliver high-quality services.
- The staff group knows and understands those it works with. Team meetings are used to disseminate analysis of the cohort, including desistance factors and demographics.
- Staff and volunteers feel valued, respected, and appreciated by the service. Their achievements and hard work are acknowledged by managers and through formal award processes.

Areas for improvement:

- Where practitioners are required to identify complex needs such as speech, language, and communication needs, the YJS should ensure that refresher training and support is undertaken routinely.

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:

- Comprehensive data and analysis are produced, providing detailed insight and understanding of the profile of the cohort, its demographics, and its desistance, risk, and safety needs. This results in a good understanding of performance across senior managers, partners, and operational staff.
- The YJS uses the data to identify emerging trends and patterns, and to target resources – for example, recognising the increase in the number of children from a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) heritage and then tailoring provision.
- Education is a priority; the partnership has in place, and is developing, services to improve experiences and outcomes for school-aged children. YJS children have access to a comprehensive post-16 educational offer and 90 per cent are in education, training, or employment.
- Children can access a wide range of reparation projects and can gain formal qualifications for the skills they have developed.
- Constructive activities to build on strengths are available.
- Good relationships with children's social care (CSC) enables a joined-up approach to addressing needs.
- Risk management processes are rigorous and well managed by the partnership.
- There is a good transition process which supports children moving into the Probation Service.
- There is excellent health service provision. The YJS offers a health clinic where children can access physical, mental, and dental health and substance misuse services.
- There is a thorough package of provision for children involved in harmful sexual behaviour. This can avoid criminalisation where appropriate and structured intervention is available for children.
- Victims' needs are valued and they are offered restorative justice services and support.
- Children at risk of exploitation receive wraparound support and intervention. The complexities of exploitation are understood by the partnership.

Areas for improvement:

- Analysis and monitoring of under-16 education provision need strengthening to include reintegration rates to mainstream schooling, suitability of provision, and impact.
- Recognition of, and understanding of how to escalate, concerns to the partnership when education packages are unsatisfactory requires development.
- Not all staff are confident in identifying speech, language, and communication needs or understand the pathways to access provisions for under-16s.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Good

Strengths:

- Policies, procedures, and guidance are thorough and regularly reviewed. They provide clear detail on protocols and practice, and staff understand these well.
- There are joint working protocols between the YJS and each of its partners. These detail expectations for the services, roles, responsibilities, and information sharing.
- Premises are safe and accessible. Children are seen within the community at home or in local hubs. They also have access to the office in Blackburn, which is centrally located. In our interviews with four children, all felt safe in the locations in which they are seen.
- The health clinic is vibrant, child friendly, and welcoming, providing easy access for children.
- Reparation is undertaken in a variety of community venues, both indoors and outdoors. These combine a safe location for the children and reparation to the community.
- A digital strategy is in place which is developing technology to improve performance. Practitioners have access to the information and communications technology (ICT) packages Child View Case Management System, children social care (CSC) records, and Youth Justice Application Framework.
- Staff can work from home, or at the office and family hubs; they have good access to the ICT tools they need.
- Although internal quality assurance is developing, current processes are sufficient for effective oversight of practice. Board members have led on audits, and this has encouraged partnership scrutiny and a sense of responsibility for YJS provision.
- There is a dedication to learning and driving service improvement. The YJS has commissioned the University of Central Lancashire to complete pieces of work – for instance, exploring the effectiveness of prevention and diversion programmes.
- The YJS uses opportunities to learn from both serious case reviews and cases where the best outcomes have not been achieved.

Areas for improvement:

- To ensure maintenance of high performance, more evaluation is needed to provide an evidence base of results being achieved.
- More external scrutiny is needed to enhanced evaluation.
- To continue to be confident that low-risk decisions are appropriate, more frequent sampling and oversight are needed.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The involvement of children, families, and victims is an identified priority for the YJS but also sits within the council-wide children and young people's participation strategy. There is a genuine dedication to hearing the voices of those accessing the service and using this to inform service delivery. The service has also achieved the investors in children award for its work in including children in key decisions and service delivery.

The service is proactive in seeking the views of children, families, and victims to inform reviewing and evaluation of its practice. Gathering, collating, and analysing the views of children, families, and victims is a continual process. The YJS uses a QR (quick response) code for access to online services, alongside other options to feed back. This approach has increased the volume of feedback received. On a quarterly basis, the YJS undertakes targeted participation-led activity either via focus groups or individually with children. Through this activity, children have been able to change processes and procedures to improve experiences. This includes the court being held in a less formal, child-friendly room, with a separate and moveable waiting area. Children are routinely involved in recruitment and have designed the service logo.

High value is placed on the views and experiences of children, and professionals have used these to understand need and the targeting of responses. For instance, development of the youth violence strategy involved consultation with children who had lived experience of the YJS, to inform how this issue would be tackled. The YJS also supported a child to attend a university police training course, to upskill trainee officers in understanding the child's perspective of contact with the police.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for an interview or text survey. We interviewed four children, and three children completed our text survey.

In the text survey, children were asked to rate the YJS on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being poor and 10 fantastic. All three children rated the service as 9 or above. When asked to rate the YJS on how helpful they had been, with 1 being 'not helped at all' and 10 being 'helped massively', all three children scored the YJS as 10. One child stated:

"[The YJS] were very helpful and understanding and made sure they did the best by me. If there was anything I was struggling with at the time or just bothering me in general, they made sure they were doing their job properly but also treating me like a human being".

In the interviews, children were asked if they understood the aims of the YJS. All four answered 'yes', and it was evident that they had a good grasp of its roles and responsibilities. We also asked how they rated the services they received, and all four answered 'very good'. When they were asked whether they had been able to access the right services and support, all four answered 'yes'.

One child commented:

"They don't just help you with the offence, they don't get stuck in that moment. They look forwards rather than backwards and that's good because I'm trying to look forward in my life... My worker has helped me loads. I had started to make some big changes in my life and my worker has helped me with that change".

Diversity

- The partnership and YJS are invested in the children and aim to recognise and address diversity needs. Continued oversight of demographics allows the service to monitor and understand disproportionality. This information is effectively disseminated within, and understood by, the service and partnership. At the time of the inspection, children from black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage represented 24 per cent of the YJS caseload. Children of this heritage aged 10–17 years make up 41 per cent of the local population, which means that there is not an overrepresentation on the caseload. However, the proportion of children of white heritage on the caseload is disproportionately high.
- Reducing the overrepresentation of cared for children is a priority. At the time of the inspection, 28 per cent of the caseload were cared for by the local authority, including children placed in and outside of the area. Initiatives have been put in place to address this, including the prevention offer targeting cared for children. There is also a joint agency protocol to reduce the criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers.
- Data analysis is used to identify emerging trends and patterns, enabling the YJS to respond and target resources. This includes recognising the increase in the number of children from GRT heritage accessing the service and then tailoring provision.
- Provision for girls is effective and personalised. In the cases we inspected, their needs were recognised, and practitioners offered bespoke intervention.
- Recognition of children with learning needs is a strength. In the cases we reviewed, these needs had been identified, analysed, and considered in planning. Where required, reasonable adjustments were made to ensure that provision was accessible.
- The diversity needs of staff and volunteers are acknowledged and attended to. In our surveys, the majority of staff and volunteers stated 'very well' when asked how well their diversity needs had been recognised and responded to.
- The lack of a strategic approach to diversity risks inconsistent responses and practice being developed. Drawing all the initiatives succinctly together will provide clarity, consistency, and accountability.
- Several of the policies stress the importance of considering diversity needs. However, more detail and strategic direction on how the service intends to meet all protected characteristics, as well as disproportionality, is needed.
- The diversity of the workforce is not fully reflective of the cohort of YJS children or the local population. Staff breakdown is 52 per cent female, and 10 per cent of black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage. This does not reflect the percentage of children of this heritage aged 10–17 years in the local population, which sits at 41 per cent, or the percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic children in the current caseload, which sits at 24 per cent. However, this enables girls to work with a female practitioner. Future recruitment should consider securing a more diverse team.
- In most of the cases we reviewed, consideration of diversity needs was sufficient. However, further development is needed to ensure that the lived experience and identity of children is consistently explored, analysed, and captured.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at six community sentences and one custodial sentence managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating² 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?	86%

Assessment of desistance was impressive, comprehensive, and analytical. Other agencies working with the child were consulted and their expertise, along with the practitioners' professional judgements, provided insight into the child's behaviour. It was evident that practitioners recognised and understood desistance, but also the impact of early experiences and trauma on presenting behaviour. The child's voice was central and effectively supported practitioners in exploring and interpreting motivation, maturity, and individual personal circumstances. In every case, strengths and protective factors had been analysed; this provided balanced assessments but stressed the importance of building on these areas. Where children had learning needs, there was a thorough exploration of impact and adjustments needed.

Practitioners had a strong understanding of potential adverse outcomes for children, and clearly articulated the nature, context, imminency, and impact. Assessment of safety was bolstered by information from other professionals, enabling a holistic comprehension of risks to the child. Information about historical concerns and past events was appropriately considered, to provide an in-depth understanding of the child's lived experience. Practitioners demonstrated a detailed knowledge of extra-familial harm and how this could present different risks to their children.

Assessment of how to keep others safe was sufficient in most cases. However, there needed to be more consistency in identifying all potential victims and analysing the nature of these concerns. In some cases, harm to those present during violent incidents was not sufficiently understood. Exploring and identifying potential triggers to harm was a strength; we found detailed accounts of external controls and factors that could mitigate concerns. Practitioners effectively used information held by other services and examined past experiences and behaviours.

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 on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting child desistance?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	71%

Practitioners were skilled at translating assessed desistance needs into clear plans for children. There was a balanced approach to planning where areas of concern were addressed and there was a clear focus on building and developing areas of strength. Planning was tailored to the child, considering maturity and personal circumstances. In the cases we reviewed, adjustments were made to encourage engagement and promote accessibility, including co-working cases for a male/female dynamic and home appointments. The child's learning style and needs were considered, and information was presented in child-friendly language. In most cases, children and parents were involved and their views were central to planning but this approach needed to be consistent in all cases.

Planning to keep children safe was impressive. Information sharing between services was a strength; there was a collaborative approach and shared responsibility to promoting safety. The risk management oversight arrangements had effectively supported services in coordinating their approach. This ensured that plans were aligned, with the roles and expectations of each service clearly detailed to avoid duplication. For instance, in many of the cases we reviewed, exploitation was a concern, and there had been effective communication between services and close liaison with children and families to develop realistic safety plans. Practitioners were utilising their access to specialist provision, referring quickly, and enabling key services, such as substance misuse, to be part of initial planning.

Planning to keep others safe was detailed. It had considered the changing dynamics of risks – for instance, how these could be different within the community compared with custody. Appropriate interventions to address concerns had been identified and tailored to the child – for instance, adapting weapons sessions to relate to the child's previous behaviour. Practitioners understood the importance of external controls and had worked well with the partnership to ensure that these were identified and monitoring arrangements were in place. Contingency planning required further development and strengthening. In the cases we reviewed, arrangements and actions to address changes in risks were not specific to the child. Immediate risks had been addressed but more detail on the response of the practitioner and professional network would have supported effective risk management.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁴ 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?	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 were skilled at engaging with children and families, and developing positive working relationships. Children and families were involved and had influence in deciding on the work to be completed and how this would be undertaken. Sessions were tailored to meet the needs of the children, considering learning styles and making adjustments where required – for instance, having shorter and more frequent sessions or completing these in an environment where the child was comfortable. A variety of interactive methods was used to enhance learning, including discussions, videos, and games. Intervention was sequenced and proportionate, enabling children's areas of concern to be addressed at a pace that the child could manage. However, practitioners recognised that building on areas of strength and protective factors was equally important. We saw numerous examples of case managers pursuing support to access and maintain post-16 education placements.

The work to keep children safe was exceptional. Communication between services was strong and there was an ongoing commitment to attending multi-agency meetings, sharing information and support for children. There was a considered approach, whereby professionals identified who was the best practitioner to lead on intervention without overwhelming the child and family. Children and families were consulted about their safety worries, and the practitioner ensured that they understood which intervention was being completed, and why. Children had quick access to specialist provision, including mental health and substance misuse services.

The YJS risk management and oversight arrangements had supported effective coordination between services to keep others safe. This process brought professionals together frequently, sharing information and determining actions to mitigate risks and support the child. There was a confidence in knowing when to escalate cases to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) for additional support. Risk management had also been effective in cases assessed as medium risk, which sat outside the risk management oversight arrangements. In the cases we reviewed, appropriate intervention to address concerns was completed; again, this was personalised to meet the learning needs of the child.

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting child desistance?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	57%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	57%

Children and families were meaningfully involved in the reviewing of desistance. Their views were captured in formal review assessments and taken into consideration when exploring the child's progress. Practitioners had a balanced approach to reviewing, exploring both areas of concern and strengths. Any changes to desistance had been analysed and, where required, adjustments to work had been made. Where there were difficulties in engagement, the practitioner responded quickly, discussing this with the child and adapting their practice and delivery. There had also been a flexible approach to intervention and services; where need had changed, the practitioner had reviewed sequencing and proportionality. This had enabled the child to get the right support for desistance at the right time, avoiding them feeling overwhelmed.

Reviewing to keep the child and others safe was not sufficient and required further development. In many cases, information shared among the professional network was a strength, but practitioners were not consistently revisiting flagged concerns for progress updates. In one case we inspected, there was information to indicate that the child could have been at risk of exploitation. While this information was shared by the police, the practitioner did not revisit concerns to understand the outcome of the intelligence and whether this had changed risks to the child. We also found that new information was not adequately followed up or discussed with the child and family. There needed to be more exploration and probing into potential concerns to understand if this impacted on risks. For instance, in one case where a child was not in full-time education, there needed to be more effort to understand how and where they were spending their time. When circumstances relating to risks had changed, there was inadequate capturing and analysis of this in formal review assessments. Adjustments to the plan or interventions to support risk and safety were not consistent or effective in mitigating concerns. Clearer contingency plans would have assisted practitioners in knowing how to respond when risks changed and strengthened future reviewing activity.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected seven cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of two youth conditional cautions, two youth cautions, two community resolutions and one other disposal. We interviewed the case managers in six 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 child desistance?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	100%

The YJS used AssetPlus as the assessment tool for all out-of-court disposals. This was completed before the child's case was held at the decision-making panel. Practitioners drew on information from other services to create a comprehensive assessment of the child and family. In all cases, children and families were meaningfully involved, and their views integrated into the assessment. Home visits were undertaken in several cases to make the assessing process more accessible and understand the home environment. The child's past experiences and behaviour were effectively analysed. Case managers demonstrated detailed knowledge of the impact of trauma on children and how this could manifest in, and impact, future behaviour. Identifying and building on protective factors was a key feature in every assessment; practitioners considered existing structural barriers and what needed addressing to build on strengths. In the majority of cases, diversity needs had been adequately assessed. Where this was not sufficient, more attention to heritage and religion was needed to understand the child's lived experience and identity. Nonetheless, where children had learning needs, practitioners had clearly explored the impact and whether adjustments were required.

Assessing to keep the child and other people safe had appropriately used information from other services, such as police intelligence. Analysis was comprehensive and it was evident that practitioners had taken time to explore and understand triggers to behaviours. Many of the cases were complex but practitioners were skilled at recognising potential adverse outcomes and risks posed to others. They provided clear detail on the nature and context of where these behaviours could occur. In all cases, inspectors found the classifications for risks to and from the child to be reasonable. Rationales to explain classifications were detailed and appropriate.

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?	86%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

Planning to address desistance was sequenced but proportionate. Key areas of need were identified, and targets were realistic and achievable. Children and families were involved in the development of plans, and we found these to be co-produced and bespoke. Practitioners were creative in how they involved children, undertaking interactive planning sessions to determine targets and also providing information so that each was fully understood. Victims' wishes were considered in all relevant cases, and, where required, these were incorporated into plans. In many cases, diversity had been explored – for instance, where a child had learning needs, appropriate reasonable adjustments were detailed. However, consideration of diversity needed to be consistent in all cases. Building on strengths and protective factors was a feature in all plans, and practitioners recognised the importance of supporting children into accessing community and mainstream services.

Planning to address children's safety was of good quality. Where other agencies were involved with the child, there was a coordinated and collaborative approach to keeping the child safe. Plans were aligned, with each service understanding its roles and responsibilities in working with the child. There was a well-thought-out approach to working with the child, whereby the professional network reviewed the intervention already completed and who would be the best professional to lead on specific work. This tailored approach avoided duplication. Although sufficient in many of the cases, contingency planning needed to be more robust. Clearer detail and consideration of the actions and responses required when risks to the child changed would have strengthened this area.

Planning to keep other people safe was impressive. In every case, potential and future victims were considered. This included interventions to assist children in understanding the impact for victims, and external controls and measures needed to keep others safe. Practitioners had recognised the complexities in the cases and how these could affect risks to others – for instance, the importance of supporting a child with their emotional wellbeing and understanding how this could trigger risky behaviour. The YJS risk management arrangements worked well in the cases where this additional oversight was needed. It was evident that other professionals valued this process and were active in determining the plans to manage risks to and from the child.

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.

Good

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?	71%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	100%

Practitioners proactively encouraged engagement and were skilled at maintaining the participation of children and families in voluntary interventions. There was a flexible approach to appointments, children were seen in accessible safe locations at a convenient time. Practitioners make good use of in-house specialists, with children seen quickly by substance misuse, mental health, and post-16 careers professionals. There was a clear focus on providing children with access to mainstream provision and community opportunities. This assisted in building on existing strengths and also linking children into provision that they had previously not been able to access, such as employment and training. There was strong advocacy from practitioners in ensuring that the needs of the children in their care were met. This included offering robust intervention and appropriate alternative packages to avoid further criminalisation when a child was involved in a further offence.

There was a strong health offer; in the cases we reviewed, children were able to access physical, mental, and dental health provision. Access to mental health support was swift and when risks to the child increased, the response from this provision was immediate. In one case where it was believed that a child's life was in danger, the practitioner organised a joint visit with the mental health practitioner immediately. Within a very short period, the child had access to services and support to keep them safe. There were two cases where delivery to keep the child safe was not sufficient. In one, concerns had not been flagged to other professionals to ensure that their response was meeting the child's needs. In the other case, information sharing needed to be stronger to ensure other professionals were aware of risks to the child and family. However, in all other cases, professional working relationships were effective and a shared responsibility in keeping the child safe.

Appropriate interventions were completed to address risks. The work undertaken was impactful; in particular, sessions on weapons covered risks to others but also how this increased potential harm to the child. In all cases, victims were protected and measures were put in place to mitigate and monitor risks. Children also completed work to understand the victim's perspective. Inspectors found this to be effective in reducing risks as children reflected on their behaviour and understood victim impact.

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

Strengths:

- There was a commitment to diverting children. The child-first and trauma-informed ethos was shared by the police. Their joint initiatives had contributed to the low first-time entry figures.
- Prevention was a priority; a prevention officer was in post, targeting cared for children at risk of criminalisation and those at risk of exclusion.
- There were effective relationships between the YJS and the police, and both were represented on the panel and contributed to decision-making. There was an escalation process if the panel did not reach a decision.
- While the police gravity matrix guidance was used to inform decisions, the individual needs of the children and mitigating factors were considered, enabling the most appropriate outcomes for children.
- Outcome 22 was a disposal option; this provided diversion without the child receiving a formal criminal sanction, and only partial admittance to the incident was required.
- The process was thorough and robust. An AssetPlus assessment and report were produced which provided comprehensive information for the panel's decision making. There were mechanisms to avoid eligible children going to court.
- Intervention was offered for all disposals, and children could access the same services and provision as post-court cases.
- The profile and needs of children accessing out-of-court disposals was known and understood, including demographics, desistance, risk, and safety factors.
- The scrutiny panel provided a good level of evaluation. Multi-agency, quarterly panels were held to review cases and provide feedback.

Areas for development:

- Policy and protocol required more explicit detail – for instance, on the outcomes available, eligibility criteria, timeframes, and guidance to avoid overuse of disposals. This would have provided clarity on expectations, consistency, and accountability.
- Practitioners understood the process but formal recording of elements such as the enforcement process, scrutiny, and evaluation arrangements would have provided clarity.
- Parameters and eligibility criteria for Outcome 22 needed further development to ensure that practitioners and the panel understood and used it consistently.
- Reviewing and evaluation required strengthening. The YJS achieved strong results, but deeper analysis would have provided an evidence base to understand why. Any future analysis should include the impact of Outcome 22.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Good

Strengths:

- The policy was comprehensive. It provided guidance on provision for constructive resettlement, breaking down expectations of delivery for each step of the child's journey.
- Pathways for constructive resettlement were established and embedded. There were strong partnership relationships and an ethos of shared responsibility. Routes to resolve structural barriers and flag concerns were established and embedded.
- Planning started early, ensuring that children's health and accommodation needs were met. Support was bespoke, assisting children to build on strengths.
- The YJS was proactive in communicating with the child and family. This was frequent and meaningful, supporting the development of trusting relationships.
- Risks were addressed robustly and effectively. Victims' needs and safety were prioritised, and measures were put in place to mitigate risks to others and promote safety.
- Transitions of children to probation services were well managed.
- The YJS recognised that resettlement practice needed reviewing and development, and they had been proactive in undertaking the necessary work to achieve this.
- Analysis had identified serious youth violence as being linked to increases in custody/remand. The partnership was exploring this and developing a multi-agency response for prevention.
- In response to increases in custody and remand, community alternatives had been reinvigorated and enhanced. This had enabled more children to receive bail packages.
- Where the best outcomes for children had not been achieved, partnership reviews were undertaken, and learning identified and disseminated.
- Children and families were involved in reviewing and evaluating custody and remand. The YJS provided the opportunity to share their views and experiences.
- Practitioners had been trained and received good support in managing resettlement cases.

Areas for development:

- In the cases we inspected, the recognition and understanding of diversity required strengthening. This would ensure consistency and that all resettlement pathways were meeting the child's needs.
- Attention to additional resettlement needs, such as the completion of appropriate work to address concerns and support rehabilitation, were not completed in all cases.

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.](#)