

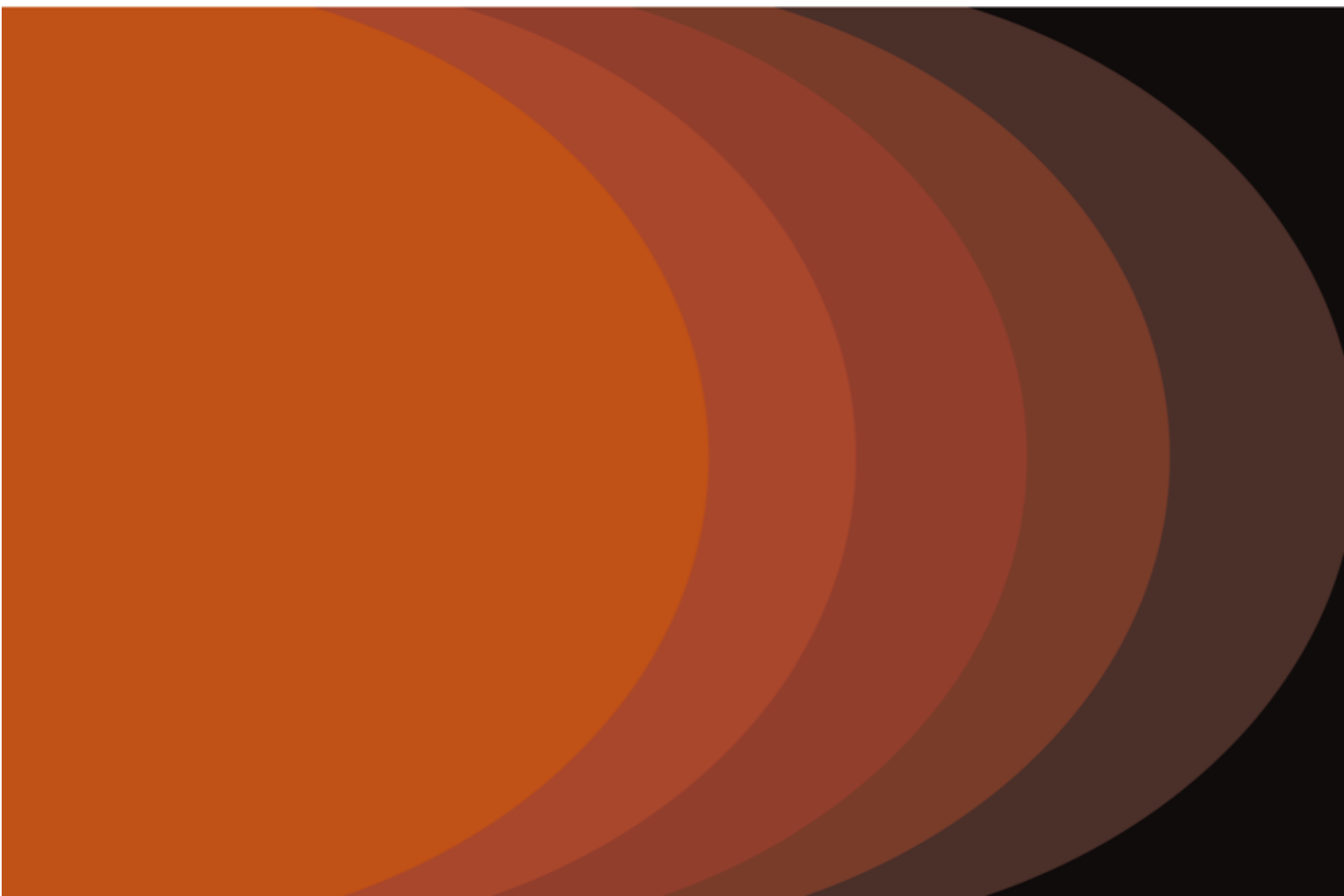


Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in

Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly

HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2022



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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

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

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Foreword

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

The inspection found an effective service, with strengths apparent across assessment and reviewing for court orders. Assessing, planning and delivering services in out-of-court disposals were excellent areas of practice. However, improvements were required in court orders when planning and delivering services for children's desistance and managing their risk of harm to others. The YOS's arrangements for information and facilities are rated as 'Outstanding', and its governance and leadership, staffing and partnerships as 'Good'.

The YOS management board receives comprehensive performance and participation reports. The service promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place. However, we found little evidence to show that the partners set the direction and vision for the YOS. The inspection also found that the panel for out-of-court disposals (the Bureau) is not multi-agency and is not consistently presented with all the assessment information relevant to children and their families.

The YOS is a well-resourced service that focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families. Staff and volunteers felt valued by managers and their peers, and we saw that the service promotes a culture of caring both for its staff and for the children and families that it works with.

Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard. The service also has specialist staff to work with families, care-experienced children and children at risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. It was disappointing to see, however, that the YOS seconded probation officer post was vacant. In addition, the YOS victim liaison workers are police officers, and the service must be assured that this approach does not restrict some victims' engagement because of their possible pre-held assumptions about the police service.

The YOS office base is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children. We found that children from the two local authorities were treated equitably and staff ensured that they had access to resources based on their needs and were not restricted by resources in their locality.

In this report, we make a number of recommendations that we hope will support Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS to build on its strong foundations and ensure that it continues to deliver a high-quality service for children.



Justin Russell
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly Youth Offending Service

Fieldwork started: May 2022

Score 28/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Good



1.3 Partnerships and services

Good



1.4 Information and facilities

Outstanding



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Outstanding



2.2 Planning

Good



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Outstanding



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

Requires improvement



Executive summary

Overall, Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly Youth Offending Service (YOS) is rated as 'Good'. This rating has been determined by inspecting the YOS in three areas of its work, referred to as 'domains'. We inspect against 12 core 'standards', shared between the domains. The standards are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. They are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with children who have offended.¹ Published scoring rules generate the overall YOS rating.² The findings and subsequent ratings in those domains are described below.

Organisational delivery

The YOS's arrangements for information and facilities are rated as 'Outstanding'. The arrangements for governance and leadership, staffing, and partnerships are rated as 'Good'.

The YOS management board is co-chaired by the Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly heads of children's services and both have previous experience of working in youth justice settings. New board members receive an induction into their role from the YOS service manager and are given an induction pack. However, the board has not held any development sessions since before the pandemic and it felt that the vision and strategy for the service was set by the YOS leadership and managers, with little input from the partners on the management board.

Each quarter, the board receives a comprehensive performance report, the reoffending toolkit actions and findings report, and the participation report. In addition, it has received reports and generated action plans relating to disproportionality, serious youth violence and the YOS's response to HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic reports.

Partners acknowledge that the YOS is a well-resourced service that focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families. The inspection found evidence that the management board has challenged the probation service regarding its resourcing of the YOS and lack of a probation officer in post.

The YOS produces a participation report that enables the board to hear the views of children and families. However, it was disappointing that, from a management board perspective, it did not highlight examples of how this feedback had influenced service delivery.

The YOS has a stable and experienced workforce. The service manager is supported by four team managers and there is a wealth of youth justice experience within the management team. There are three case management teams and there was no evidence of disharmony between them, with all staff working together in the best interests of the whole service. Staff are comfortable with their workload, receive regular supervision and feel supported by their managers. Allocation of cases

¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards can be found here:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

² Each of the 12 standards is scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0 to 36, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows: 0–6 = 'Inadequate', 7–18 = 'Requires improvement', 19–30 = 'Good', 31–36 = 'Outstanding'.

considers which staff have previously been involved with the family, so that consistency of case manager is prioritised. Staff do all they can to encourage good engagement and compliance from the child.

Staff feel encouraged to take up training opportunities. Volunteers are offered the same training as paid members of staff and are not restricted to training that is only linked to their role. The YOS actively encourages staff development through offering management opportunities within the service and supporting staff to complete external qualifications. Staff and volunteers reported that they felt valued by managers and by their peers, and there is a sense that the YOS is a caring organisation where people take pride in their work.

A YOS risk management panel is convened if a child is assessed as high risk for safety and wellbeing and/or risk of harm to others. The YOS also has a resettlement and reintegration panel which is a subgroup of the YOS management board. It is a multi-agency meeting, chaired by the YOS service manager, which commits additional support and resources to unblock any issues that the child may have as they leave custody or end their time with the service.

The YOS has a youth respect officer, who delivers individual interventions to children at risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. It also has a family support worker and a dedicated restorative approaches key worker, who works directly with care-experienced children to prevent their prosecution when it is appropriate to do so.

Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard. The service can access a psychologist for case discussions and has a seconded Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services clinical nurse specialist. The YOS has a speech, language and communication therapist for two days per week and a full-time substance misuse worker.

The YOS monitors its performance regarding children's education, training and employment (ETE). It has a full-time ETE worker and there is an education themed YOS management board held annually.

It was disappointing to see that the YOS half-time seconded probation officer post was vacant. The skills and experience of managing risk of harm that probation officers bring to the service is a gap in provision.

The YOS has two victim liaison workers who are Gwent police officers, and when victims are identified they will make the initial contact. The service must be assured that this approach offers all victims the opportunity to take part in a restorative justice intervention and does not restrict engagement because of potential assumptions they have about the police service.

The inspection team observed that the YOS promotes a culture of caring both for its staff and for the children and families that they work with. The YOS office base is on the boundary between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, and is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children. It is very child friendly, with motivational quotes on the walls around the building.

The YOS has access to both local authorities' databases, and relevant partners have their own access to the YOS case management system. YOS staff use desktop computers, as well as smartphones and laptop computers, to facilitate agile working. They can also use tablet computers when working with children and families.

The YOS promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place, which includes a peer-led assessment review group. Both senior practitioners and managers use a 'QA buddy', which can be any member of staff, to help them audit cases. The YOS performance report includes an update on the quality assurance work being undertaken in the service, and this has led to themed audits taking place. At the request of the YOS, other agencies complete an independent 'deep-dive' audit of one of the cases presented to the reintegration and resettlement panel.

A participation report is produced and reported to the management board. It outlines the feedback that has been collated from children through self-assessments and an online system called the 'Viewpoint Hub'. There is evidence to suggest that, as part of its learning culture, the YOS reviews cases when serious incidents occur. It also reviews outcomes of other areas' inspections and thematic inspections, and develops action plans to improve its own practice.

The YOS has had resettlement panels for children leaving custody since 2014. As a result of the low number of children receiving custodial sentences, the remit of these panels has been extended to include all children open to the YOS and those who are finishing YOS interventions where there are unmet needs. The resettlement and reintegration panel is a subgroup of the management board, and it was evident that partners are committed to these panels to support effective joint working.

Children from the two local authorities are treated equitably and staff ensure that they have access to resources based on their needs, rather than being restricted by availability in their locality. The service completes an annual disproportionality report on black, Asian and minority ethnic children. The YOS is currently consulting on its draft equality and diversity policy, which includes a helpful guide to people's diversity characteristics, which informs staff on appropriate questions to ask.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the YOS continues to follow official advice from the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. Risk assessments on practice and service delivery were created and shared with staff and volunteers. The YOS maintained contact with children and families using various platforms, including FaceTime, WhatsApp, Skype, telephone, text, messenger, email and mail. Interventions were delivered using creative methods, including YouTube clips, worksheets sent through the post and resources emailed to parents or carers. If a child had no means of contact, the YOS bought a basic mobile phone so that they could make contact by telephone. However, if an engagement, public protection or safeguarding situation arose that required face-to-face contact, the YOS ensured that this contact was made. In January 2021, the YOS was able to start using its workshop for individual meetings with children.

Our key findings about organisational delivery are as follows:

- The management board is co-chaired by the heads of children's services from both areas.
- A comprehensive suite of data and regular monitoring reports are presented to the management board.
- The YOS is well-resourced and focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families.
- The service produces a participation report that enables the board to hear the views of children and families.

- There is a stable and experienced workforce, whereby staff from different teams work together in the best interests of the whole service.
- Staff are encouraged to take up training opportunities and volunteers are offered the same training as paid members of staff.
- Staff and volunteers feel valued by managers and by their peers, and there is a sense that the YOS is a caring organisation where people take pride in their work.
- Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard.
- The YOS office base sits on the boundary between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, and is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children.
- The YOS promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place.
- Members of the resettlement and reintegration multi-agency panel work effectively together to meet the needs of children.
- Children from the two authorities are treated equitably and staff ensure that they have access to resources based on their needs and are not restricted by what is available in the local area.

But:

- There was little evidence to show that the management board partners set the YOS's direction and vision.
- The board has not held any development sessions since before the pandemic.
- The management board did not highlight any examples of how children's feedback influences service delivery.
- There has been no probation provision to the YOS, and so the skills and experience in managing risk of harm that probation officers bring to the service are missing.
- Having police officers as victim liaison workers could restrict victims' engagement because of their possible pre-held assumptions about the police service.

Court disposals

We took a detailed look at five community sentences managed by the YOS. There were no custodial sentences within the timeframe covered by the inspection. We also conducted four interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment; planning; implementation and delivery of services; and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance, to keep the child safe, and to keep other people safe.

Our key findings about court disposals are as follows:

- Assessing and reviewing were strong in the areas of desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others.
- Case managers built on the child's strengths.
- Planning was robust in relation to a child's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others.

- Staff used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement.
- Staff understood the importance of developing a working relationship with the child and motivating them to engage.
- There was good evidence of multi-agency work to deliver services.
- Staff took the views of children and their parents or carers into account.

But:

- Case managers did not always consider the victim's needs and wishes as part of the assessment and planning process.
- There was limited evidence that concerns relating to actual and potential victims were addressed when planning and delivering services.
- Staff did not consistently take account of the child's desistance when putting plans in place.
- When delivering services, staff did not focus sufficiently on the child's desistance or their risk of harm to others.
- There was poor contingency planning to manage children's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others.
- Staff did not always consider the child's wider diversity factors when reviewing their progress.

Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 10 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of one youth conditional caution, one youth caution and eight community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in nine cases.

We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance, to keep the child safe and to keep other people safe.

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 about out-of-court disposals are as follows:

- An AssetPlus assessment is completed on all children who become known to the YOS.
- Assessment, planning and delivering services for out-of-court disposals are strong areas of practice in all three areas.
- Case managers appropriately analysed the child's diversity needs and considered their levels of maturity and motivation to change.
- Staff focused on understanding the child's learning style and their individual needs when planning interventions.
- The victim's needs and wishes were considered in relevant cases inspected.
- Case managers developed an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers.

- Case managers focused on ensuring that the child would be able to access mainstream services when their intervention ended.
- Staff used multi-agency meetings to ensure that all professionals were up to date with the child's progress.

But:

- The Bureau³ is not multi-agency, and it is not consistently given all the assessment information relevant to children and their families.
- Staff had not identified all the potential risk factors in some cases.
- The classification of risk to a child's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others was not always reasonable when all the available information was taken into account.
- Contingency arrangements were needed in planning to support the child's safety and well-being, and manage their risk of harm to others.
- Case managers had not considered the protection of actual and potential victims in every relevant case.

³ The Bureau is the decision-making panel for out-of-court disposals.

Recommendations

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

The Chair of the Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS Management Board should:

1. make sure that board members are actively engaged in setting the direction and vision for the YOS
2. review the format and purpose of the Bureau and ensure that it has the relevant information and input from the necessary agencies, so that out-of-court disposals meet the needs of the child.

The Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS Management Board should:

3. challenge the Probation Service to ensure that it provides the appropriate provision to the YOS.

The Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS Service Manager should:

4. review the service offered to victims and make certain that all who want to engage are enabled to do so
5. improve the quality of services to promote children's desistance and manage their risk of harm to others.

Background

Youth offending teams (YOTs) work with children aged 10 to 18 who have been sentenced by a court, or who have come to the attention of the police because of their offending behaviour, but have not been charged – instead, they were dealt with out of court. HM Inspectorate of Probation inspects both these aspects of youth offending services.

YOTs are statutory partnerships, and they are multidisciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to have staff from local authority social care and education services, the police, the Probation Service and local health services.⁴ Most YOTs are based within local authorities, although this can vary.

YOT work is governed and shaped by a range of legislation and guidance specific to the youth justice sector (such as the National Standards for Youth Justice) or else applicable across the criminal justice sector (for example, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements guidance). The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) provides some funding to YOTs. It also monitors their performance and issues guidance to them about how things are to be done.

We carried out inspection fieldwork in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly over the week beginning 09 May 2022, looking at cases which started between October 2021 and March 2022.

The Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly Youth Offending Service (YOS) is a dual local authority YOS, covering both the Blaenau Gwent and the Caerphilly areas in Gwent, Wales. Gwent is made up of five local authorities in total. The YOS is part of children's services in Caerphilly County Borough Council, which sits within the wider social services directorate. Caerphilly County Borough Council has 'hosted' the YOS since its creation on behalf of both local authorities. The number of children it engages with across the two areas is usually at or around 70 per cent for Caerphilly and 30 per cent for Blaenau Gwent.

The under-17 population of Caerphilly County Borough is 37,670, equivalent to 20.7 per cent of the overall population. Based on the Census (2011), 1.68 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 in the area identified as black, Asian or minority ethnic. For Caerphilly's Year 11 school leavers, 91 per cent continued their full-time education in either school or college, compared with a Wales average of 90.4 per cent.⁵ For Year 13 school leavers, 74.8 per cent continued their full-time education in school, college or higher education, compared with a Wales average of 80 per cent.

The under-17 population of Blaenau Gwent is 13,619, equivalent to 19.5 per cent of the overall population. Based on the Census (2011), 1.7 per cent of children aged 10 to 17 in the area identified as ethnic minority. For Blaenau Gwent Year 11 school leavers, 89.1 per cent continued their full-time education in either school or college, compared with a Wales average of 90.4 per cent.⁶ For Year 13 school leavers, 85.7 per cent continued their full-time education in school, college or higher education, compared with a Wales average of 80 per cent.

⁴ The *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* set out the arrangements for local YOTs and partnership working.

⁵ Pupil Destinations 2020, Careers Wales.

⁶ Pupil Destinations 2020, Careers Wales.

Performance reports indicate that the number of first-time entrants to the YOS for January to December 2020 was 148 per 100,000 population, which was higher than the average for Wales but lower than the England and Wales national average. The service has seen an eight-year trend of decreasing the first-time entrants' rate, which is now at its lowest recorded level. The rate of reoffending is slightly higher than the England and Wales national average, but with no children receiving a custodial sentence for over two years, the custody rate is lower than both the Wales and England and Wales national averages.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the YOS continues to follow official advice from the Welsh Government and Public Health Wales. Risk assessments on practice and service delivery were created and shared with staff and volunteers. The YOS maintained contact with children and families using various platforms, including FaceTime, WhatsApp, Skype, telephone, text, messenger, email and mail. Interventions were delivered using creative methods, including YouTube clips, worksheets sent through the post and emailing resources to parents or carers. If a child had no means of contact, the YOS bought a basic mobile phone, so that they could make contact by telephone. However, if an engagement, public protection or safeguarding situation arose that required face-to-face contact, the YOS ensured that this contact was made. In January 2021, the YOS was able to start using its workshop for individual meetings with children.

Contextual facts

Population information⁷

148	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly ⁸
167	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in England and Wales
35.4%	Reoffending rate in Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly ⁹
34.2%	Reoffending rate in England and Wales
251,751	Total population Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly
23,543	Total youth population (10–17 years) in Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly

Caseload information¹⁰

Age	10–14 years	15–17 years
Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS	21%	79%
National average	18%	82%

Race/ethnicity ¹¹	White	Black and minority ethnic	Unknown
Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS	98%	2%	0%
Youth population (10–17 years) in Blaenau Gwent	98%	2%	0%
Youth population (10–17 years) in Caerphilly	98%	2%	0%

Gender	Male	Female
Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS	87%	13%
National average	86%	14%

⁷ Office for National Statistics. (June 2021). *UK population estimates, mid-2020*.

⁸ Youth Justice Board. (2022). *First-time entrants, January to December 2020*

⁹ Ministry of Justice. (January 2022). *Proven reoffending statistics, April 2019 to March 2020*.

¹⁰ Youth Justice Board. (January 2022). *Youth justice annual statistics: 2020 to 2021*.

¹¹ Data supplied by the YOS.

Additional caseload data¹²

219	Total current caseload, of which:
21	Court disposals
198	Out-of-court disposals

Of the 21 court disposals:

21	Total current caseload: community sentences
0	Total current caseload in custody
0	Total current caseload on licence

Of the 198 out-of-court disposals:

15	Total current caseload: youth caution
20	Total current caseload: youth conditional caution
163	Total current caseload: community resolution or other out-of-court disposal

Education and child protection status of caseload:

2%	Percentage of current caseload 'Looked After Children' resident in the YOS area
0%	Percentage of current caseload 'Looked After Children' placed outside the YOS area
5%	Percentage of current caseload with child protection plan
11%	Percentage of current caseload with child in need plan
77%	Percentage of current caseload aged 16 and under, in full-time school
11%	Percentage of children aged 16 and under, in a pupil referral unit, alternative education, or attending school part-time
30%	Percentage of current caseload aged 17+ not in education, training or employment

For children subject to court disposals (including resettlement cases):

Offence types ¹³	%
Violence against the person	40%
Criminal damage	20%
Indictable motoring offences	20%
Other summary offences	20%

¹² Data supplied by the YOS, reflecting the caseload at the time of the inspection announcement.

¹³ Data from the cases assessed during this inspection.

1. Organisational delivery

The Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly Youth Offending Service (YOS) is a dual local authority YOS, covering both the Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly areas in Gwent, Wales. The YOS is part of children's services in Caerphilly County Borough Council, which has 'hosted' the YOS since its creation on behalf of both local authorities. The management board is co-chaired by the Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly heads of children's services and both have previous experience of working in youth justice settings. New board members receive an induction into their role from the YOS service manager and are given an induction pack. However, the board has not held any development sessions since before the pandemic and there was little evidence that the management board partners have set the direction and vision for the service.

Each quarter, the board receives a comprehensive performance report, the reoffending toolkit actions and findings report, and the participation report. It was disappointing that the management board did not highlight examples of how this feedback has influenced service delivery.

In addition, the board has received reports relating to disproportionality, serious youth violence and the YOS response to HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic reports.

Partners acknowledge that the YOS is a well-resourced service that focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families. The inspection found evidence that the management board has challenged the Probation Service on its resourcing of the YOS and the lack of a probation officer in post.

The YOS has a stable and experienced workforce. The service manager is supported by four team managers and there is a wealth of youth justice experience within the management team. There are three case management teams, who work together in the best interests of the whole service. Staff are comfortable with their workload, receive regular supervision and feel supported by their managers. Allocation of cases considers which staff have previously been involved with the family, so that consistency of case manager is prioritised. Staff do all they can to encourage good engagement and compliance from the child.

Staff feel encouraged to take up training opportunities and volunteers are offered the same training as paid members of staff and are not restricted to training that is only linked to their role. The YOS actively encourages staff development by offering management opportunities within the service and supporting staff to complete external qualifications. Staff and volunteers reported that they feel valued by managers and by their peers, and there is a sense that the YOS is a caring organisation where people take pride in their work.

The YOS has access to a comprehensive suite of data and regular monitoring reports are presented to the management board. These include a quarterly participation report and reoffending report, and further in-depth analysis reports are also provided.

A YOS risk management panel is convened if a child is assessed as high or very high risk for safety and wellbeing and/or risk of harm to others. The YOS also has a resettlement and reintegration panel, which is a subgroup of the management board. It is a multi-agency meeting chaired by the YOS service manager, which commits

additional support and resources to unblock any issues that the child may have as they leave custody, receive interventions or end their time with the YOS.

The YOS has a youth respect officer, who delivers individual interventions to children at risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. It also has a family support worker and a dedicated restorative approaches key worker, who works directly with care-experienced children to prevent their prosecution when it is appropriate to do so.

Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard. The YOS can access a psychologist for case discussions and has a seconded Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) clinical nurse specialist (CNS). It has a speech, language and communication therapist for two days per week and a full-time substance misuse worker.

The YOS monitors closely its performance regarding children's education, training and employment (ETE). It has a full-time ETE worker and there is an education themed YOS management board annually.

It was disappointing to see that the YOS half-time seconded probation officer post was vacant at the time of the inspection. The skills and experience in managing risk of harm that probation officers bring to the service were therefore missing for the YOS.

The YOS has two victim liaison workers who are Gwent police officers, and when victims are identified they will make the initial contact. The service must be assured that this approach offers all victims the opportunity to take part in a restorative justice intervention and does not restrict some victims' engagement because of their possible pre-held assumptions about the police service.

The inspection team saw that the YOS promotes a culture of caring both for its staff and for the children and families that it works with. The YOS office base sits on the boundary between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, and is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children. It is very child friendly, with motivational quotes on the walls around the building.

The YOS has access to both local authorities' databases, and relevant partners have their own access to the YOS case management system. YOS staff have access to desktop computers, as well as smartphones and laptop computers, to facilitate agile working. They can also use tablet computers when working with children and families.

The YOS promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place that includes a peer-led assessment review group. Both senior practitioners and managers use a 'QA buddy', which can be any member of staff, to help them audit cases. The YOS performance report includes an update on the quality assurance work being undertaken within the service, and this has led to themed audits taking place. At the request of the YOS, other agencies complete an independent 'deep-dive' audit of one of the cases presented to the reintegration and resettlement panel.

The YOS produces a participation report and reports this to the management board. It outlines the feedback that has been collated from children through self-assessments and an online system called the 'Viewpoint Hub'. As part of its learning culture, the YOS reviews cases when serious incidents occur. It also reviews outcomes of other areas' inspections and thematic inspections, and develops action plans to improve its own practice.

The YOS has had resettlement panels for children leaving custody since 2014. As a result of the low number of children receiving custodial sentences, the remit of these panels has been extended to include all children open to the YOS and those who are finishing YOS interventions where there are unmet needs. The resettlement and reintegration panel is a subgroup of the management board, and it was evident that partners are committed to these panels in order to support effective joint working.

Children from the two authorities are treated equitably and staff ensure that they have access to resources based on their needs, and are not restricted by what is available in their area. The service completes an annual disproportionality report on ethnic minority children. The YOS is currently consulting on its draft equality and diversity policy. This includes a helpful guide to people's diversity characteristics, which helps staff to ask children and families appropriate questions.

Strengths

- The management board is co-chaired by the heads of children's services from both areas.
- A comprehensive suite of data and regular monitoring reports are presented to the management board.
- The YOS is a well-resourced service that focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families.
- The service produces a participation report that enables the board to hear the views of children and families.
- There is a stable and experienced workforce, whereby staff from different teams work together in the best interests of the whole service.
- Staff are encouraged to take up training opportunities and volunteers are offered the same training as paid members of staff.
- Staff and volunteers feel valued by managers and by their peers, and there is a sense that the YOS is a caring organisation where people take pride in their work.
- Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard.
- The YOS office base sits on the boundary between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, and is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children.
- The YOS promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place.
- Members of the resettlement and reintegration multi-agency panel work effectively together to meet the needs of children.
- Children from the two authorities are treated equitably and staff ensure that they have access to resources based on their needs and are not restricted by resources in the local area.

Areas for improvement

- There was little evidence that the management board partners set the direction and vision for the YOS.
- The board has not held any development sessions since before the pandemic.
- The management board did not highlight examples of how children's feedback has influenced service delivery.
- There has been no probation service provision to the YOS and therefore the skills and experience in managing risk of harm that probation officers bring to the service are missing.
- Having police officers as victim liaison workers could restrict some victims' engagement because of their possible pre-held assumptions about the police service.

Organisations that are well led and well managed are more likely to achieve their aims. We inspect against four standards.

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

¹⁴Key data

Total spend in previous financial year	£1,749,355
Total projected budget current for financial year	£1,758,722

In making a judgement about governance and leadership, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there an effective local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The Blaenau Gwent & Caerphilly YOS is a dual local authority YOS, covering both the Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly areas in Gwent, Wales. The YOS is hosted by Caerphilly County Borough Council and is part of children's services, which sits within the wider social services directorate. The local management board is co-chaired by the head of Caerphilly children's services and the head of Blaenau Gwent children's services. Both have previous experience of working in youth justice settings and are registered social workers. They are also the joint line managers for the YOS service manager.

¹⁴ Data supplied by the YOS.

The board meets quarterly, and its membership includes all statutory partners, as well as some non-statutory partners, including representatives from housing and community safety.

Both areas of Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly are represented on the board. New members receive an induction manual and meet the YOS service manager. Attendance by members is consistent and the level of seniority of representatives on the board is appropriate and enables it to make decisions.

The YOS has a youth justice plan in place for 2021 to 2023 and an organisational vision statement, which is included in its policy and procedure documents. However, the management board has not had any specific development sessions since 2020. Therefore, it is difficult to see how it has influenced the direction of the YOS over the past two years.

Board members hear the views of children and families through the quarterly participation report, which collates all the feedback that has been gathered. It was disappointing that the management board did not highlight examples of how this feedback has influenced service delivery. The inspection team concluded that board members are not ambitious enough in their vision to drive the YOS forward in order to make it an outstanding service.

Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?

Partners acknowledge that the YOS is a well-resourced service that focuses on prevention, diversion and early intervention to support children and families. The YOS has a prevention and early intervention strategy in place and provides a prevention initiative called 'Reach Engage and Change Happens' (REACH), which is part-funded by both local authorities' Welsh Government Children and Communities grant. The service's out-of-court disposals diversionary provision is part-funded by the Gwent Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

At the time of the inspection, the YOS was consulting on its equality and diversity policy for 2022-2025. This included a guide on helpful questions to encourage discussions about diversity with children and families.

The YOS presents a performance report at each management board meeting. It includes information on the profile of children known to the YOS, workload allocation, outcomes from quality assurance audits, finance and updates on service action plans. The board has also been presented with other reports, including the disproportionality audit report for 2020/2021, the serious youth violence report for 2020/2021 and the reoffending toolkit actions and findings report, which is presented each quarter.

There is evidence that the management board challenges partners about the resources they provide. For example, it challenged the Probation Service for being unable to meet its statutory requirement to provide the YOS with a probation officer.

Issues impacting on youth offending are prominent on the agendas of other key strategic groups in Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly. These include the corporate parenting groups, case review groups and Families First boards in both areas, and the Gwent Criminal Justice Strategy Board.

Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery?

Team managers regularly attend the management board and other staff members attend to present on specific pieces of work. There is a two-way relationship between the board and YOS staff, and communication from the board is shared at management and team meetings. Before the pandemic, board members attended sessions with the team and often visited the YOS office. Team managers have lead areas of responsibility and work directly with board members in these areas of practice, as well as seeing them in other meetings across the partnership.

The inspection staff survey was completed wholly by 20 people; 14 out of 20 people understood the vision and mission of the YOS 'very well'; six out of 20 were 'very aware' of the activities of the management board and understood its role; and 13 out of 20 were 'quite aware' of these activities. Most staff who completed the survey felt that they are updated on strategic issues.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Key staffing data¹⁵

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent (FTE))	41
Total headcount qualified case managers (FTE) ¹⁶	7.5
Vacancy rate (total unfilled posts as percentage of total staff headcount)	9.3%
Average caseload case managers (FTE equivalent) ¹⁷	8
Average annual working days sickness (all staff)	7.6
Staff attrition (percentage of all staff leaving in 12-month period)	9.3%

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following five questions:

Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The YOS has a stable and experienced workforce consisting of 41 staff. The YOS service manager initially joined the YOS as a student and then took on the role of a social worker, and subsequently a senior practitioner and then team manager, before eventually becoming the service manager in 2012. Alongside the YOS, this individual

¹⁵ Data supplied by YOS and reflecting staffing at the time of the inspection announcement.

¹⁶ Qualified case managers are those with a relevant social work, youth justice or probation qualification.

¹⁷ Data supplied by YOS, based on staffing and workload at the time of the inspection announcement.

also has responsibility for the Families First team and Complaints and Information team, both in Caerphilly.

The service manager is supported by four team managers, who cover information and performance, prevention and two court and community teams, as well as three senior practitioners. There is a wealth of youth justice experience within the management team, and managers work well together to support the teams. There was evidence in the cases inspected that staff do all they can to encourage good engagement and compliance from the child, and staff and managers alike are child centred and know the children in their care well.

The YOS team managers are responsible for allocating cases and use a caseload spreadsheet to manage this. They consider the number of cases held by case managers, and their specific skills and knowledge. When allocating cases, they also consider which staff have previously been involved with the family, so that consistency of case manager is prioritised. At the time of the inspection, case managers had approximately eight cases each. Of the 23 members of staff who completed the staff survey, all of them said that they find their workload or caseload manageable.

Do the skills of YOT staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The YOS has three case management teams. The prevention team key workers manage cases that are part of REACH, out-of-court disposals, the Together Project, Supporting Family Change (in Caerphilly) and antisocial behaviour interventions. The two court and community teams include social workers, who manage statutory orders and out-of-court disposals. There was no evidence of disharmony between the teams, and all staff work together in the best interests of the whole service.

The YOS has a volunteer coordinator, and volunteers can apply for a number of roles within the service, including a referral order panel member or an appropriate adult for children in police custody, mentoring or reparation. There are currently 17 volunteers actively working, and a further 18 at different stages of the recruitment process. All volunteers receive an induction, which includes specific training programmes, meeting staff and shadowing panels. Volunteers are offered the same training as paid members of staff. They are not restricted to training that is only linked to their role but are encouraged to apply for training based on their own professional and personal development. They are included in all local authority training emails and recently completed a course on adverse childhood experiences. Volunteers receive individual supervision every six months, and an annual appraisal and development plan. They are invited to team meetings and staff development days. They gave examples of when they had been listened to by the YOS management team and reported feeling fully supported and integrated into the service.

During Covid-19 lockdowns, the YOS had to change the way the referral order panels were run. They used conference calls on the telephone so that they could continue to operate, but as soon as restrictions were lifted, they returned to face-to-face panels. The YOS aims to have the same panel members on the initial referral order panel and the review panels, in order for them to develop a relationship with the child and their family. YOS staff spend time with volunteers both before and after the panel, to discuss any issues that have arisen.

Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?

Staff receive regular monthly supervision, which covers caseload, workload, any challenges to a person's emotional and mental health, the quality of work and areas of improvement and professional development. Annual appraisals are also completed and include a personal development plan.

Seconded staff receive supervision from their home agency, which completes an appraisal, and from their YOS line manager. Clinical supervision is provided when it is relevant to a person's role.

There is a comprehensive induction process in place for new staff, and there are procedures for addressing staff competency. Staff and volunteers reported feeling supported both by their managers and their peers. For the cases that were inspected, management oversight met the needs of the case in four out of five post-court cases and all out-of-court disposals.

Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?

There is a YOS staff and volunteers workforce development strategy in place for 2020-2023. The service also completed the YJB's youth justice skills audit for practitioners and keeps comprehensive training records. Staff and volunteers reported that they feel encouraged to take up training opportunities.

All YOS staff and volunteers have access to the courses available through the internal workforce development website. Caerphilly County Borough Council also offers a range of courses, such as performance management, equalities and Welsh language. Staff and volunteers can also access training courses through the Gwent Safeguarding Board and the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Board. Most staff are trained in Assessment, Intervention and Moving On 3 (AIM3) for working with children who display harmful sexual behaviour, and all staff recently completed training on child exploitation.

The YOS actively encourages staff development through offering management opportunities within the service and supporting staff to complete external qualifications, including social work degrees and the Professional Certificate in Effective Practice.

Do managers pay sufficient attention to staff engagement?

Staff surveys are regularly distributed across both local authorities, as well as within the YOS, and staff members are encouraged to complete them. Staff are also consulted at team meetings about any new policy or procedure that is to be introduced.

Staff are encouraged to share positive news at team meetings, and good practice is recognised. Staff and volunteers receive praise and appreciation emails from senior leaders and through supervision with their line managers. Staff and volunteers reported that they feel valued by managers and by their peers, and there is a sense that the YOS is a caring organisation where people take pride in their work. In the staff survey, of the 20 staff members who responded to every question, 15 said that the YOS always recognises exceptional work.

YOS staff and volunteers are regularly nominated for awards. This included the service winning the YJB's Hwb Doeth Award for innovative practice for one of its

projects and the service volunteers winning a Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) award for a number of consecutive years.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

Caseload characteristics

Percentage of current caseload with emotional wellbeing or mental health issues	17%
Percentage of current caseload with substance misuse issues	39%
Percentage of current caseload with a statement of additional learning need or an individual development plan	5%

In making a judgement about partnerships and services, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children, used by the YOT to deliver well-targeted services?

The YOS has access to a comprehensive suite of data. A performance management report is provided for the YOS management board, which includes commentary on national and local indicators and very detailed profiling and analysis. The YOS reports on the safety and wellbeing risk ratings for all assessments completed, as well as the types of intervention, the gender of the child and the relevant local authority. For cases rated as high risk, a brief outline of the child's circumstances is included. There is also a summary of safeguarding trends, including the number of multi-agency referral forms submitted and the number of children receiving care and support. The YOS also monitors the number of care-experienced children and those on a child protection plan.

Regular monitoring reports presented to the management board include a quarterly participation report and a reoffending report. Further in-depth analysis reports are also provided, and these have recently included reports on serious youth violence, disproportionality and a remand data report.

Does the YOT partnership provide the volume, range and quality of services and interventions required to meet the needs of all children?

A risk management panel is convened if a child is assessed as presenting a high or very high risk for safety and wellbeing and/or risk of harm to others. The meeting is chaired by a team manager and all YOS staff and external partner agencies involved with the child attend.

The YOS has a resettlement and reintegration panel, which is a subgroup of the management board. It was set up in 2014 to address the gaps and barriers to effective resettlement for children leaving custody. It has since widened its remit and now includes children subject to community orders who are in need of reintegration services. It is a multi-agency meeting, chaired by the service manager, which commits additional support and resources to unblock any issues that the child may

have regarding accommodation; ETE; health services; substance misuse; family services; finance and debt; and transitions to adult services.

The YOS participated in the pilot of the YJB's Enhanced Case Management (ECM) programme, which ended in July 2021. The ECM draws on a range of psychological and criminological approaches, combining cognitive theories of child development, attachment theory, desistance theory and emerging understanding on neurobiological development. The ECM model is now embedded for all YOSs across Wales through the mental health FACT (flexible assertive community treatment) teams. The YOS is also able to access the resources for a psychology-informed case discussion alongside the full-time CAMHS CNS in the YOS, who is present for each case discussion.

There is an antisocial behaviour panel, chaired by the community safety team, in both areas, and the YOS is represented on these panels. If any form of child exploitation is identified, professionals will complete an exploitation toolkit. They will then put in place a multi-agency response through safeguarding processes and procedures, including holding emergency strategy meetings. St Giles Trust works with children at risk of, or subject to, child exploitation, as well as those involved with serious youth violence. When assessing children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour, or where there are serious concerns that they have done so, the YOS works collaboratively with children's services in both local authorities, using the AIM3 model.

The YOS incorporates the REACH project, which was developed to provide a multi-agency response to children aged eight to 17 who are at risk of offending or have displayed antisocial behaviour. The project ensures that children and families can access preventative interventions, such as substance misuse provision, family support, access to emotional mental health and wellbeing services, speech and language support, and access to community activities. Children and their families work with REACH on a voluntary basis for three to six months and any agency can refer children to the project.

The YOS has a youth respect officer, who delivers individual interventions to children who are at risk of perpetrating domestic abuse. The Youth Respect Programme focuses on 14–18-year-olds who have been identified as at risk of offending or reoffending related to domestic abuse. Complementary support is also provided to the parents or carers to ensure that change is monitored and sustainable. The youth respect officer works in Caerphilly; however, the same service is available through Blaenau Gwent's commissioning arrangements with Phoenix Domestic Abuse Service, which prioritises referrals from the YOS.

The service also has a family support worker for Caerphilly children and families. When a child becomes involved with a YOS intervention, with the parents' or carers' consent, a referral is made to the family support worker. A screening assessment is completed, and the family can receive a 12-session programme tailored to their individual needs. The same service is available in Blaenau Gwent through its Families First parenting workers and, again, any referrals from the YOS are treated as a priority.

The YOS also has a dedicated restorative approaches key worker, who works directly with care-experienced children to prevent them from being prosecuted when it is appropriate to do so. They also deliver restorative approaches training to residential unit staff, foster carers and other accommodation providers.

The service has a directory of interventions and is creative in how it works with children to address their needs. This includes the 'Road to Learning' programme, which is a course for those who have been involved in motoring offences; 'Street Doctors', which is a programme for those who have been involved in knife crime 'Stay Safe', programme for those who have been involved in fire-setting and/or arson; a five-week course for those who have perpetrated hate crimes; and 'Respect and Protect', which is a programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse. The YOS also promotes a 'learning through play' philosophy, which means using interactive games to engage children while delivering interventions.

The YOS has two victim liaison workers who are Gwent police officers, and when victims are identified they will make the initial contact. The victim also receives a leaflet produced by the three YOSs in Gwent, which highlights the restorative justice opportunities available. These include a letter of explanation or apology, mediation, a face-to-face meeting or reparation. A victim safety assessment is done, which explores the victim's individual needs, and signposts them to other agencies for support, if necessary. A victim contact report is also completed, which outlines any injuries and the impact of the offence on the victims. With the victim's permission, this is then shared with the various panels and with the case manager, so that it can influence the detail of the victim awareness sessions with the child who has offended.

All staff and volunteers are trained in restorative approaches, and the training is repeated annually for new starters. The YOS uses a victim case audit tool and completed a number of audits during 2020/2021. Feedback from victims is included in the quarterly participation report. As outlined above, the YOS uses its two police officers as victim liaison workers. It must make sure, therefore, that this approach offers all victims the opportunity to take part in a restorative justice intervention and does not restrict some victims' engagement because of their possible pre-held assumptions about the police service.

There was a wider choice of reparation projects before Covid-19, and the YOS hopes that, eventually, all of the programmes will be reinstated. The YOS has access to 'Unit 6', where they can carry out woodwork projects, arts and crafts, and a bicycle project, where it teaches children how to fix bicycles. It also recently acquired an allotment, where children will be taught about growing produce and healthy eating. Reparation also includes making bird boxes and benches, which are distributed in the local community parks. All children receive an induction, so that projects can be matched to their interests and skills.

Feedback from the court stated that the YOS liaises well with all court users, and that staff are professional, assertive, knowledgeable and helpful. There is a system in place whereby the YOS has direct contact with a youth legal adviser, and a YOS representative attends the youth panel meeting, ensuring good communication and working relationships. The panel meeting is also used as a training opportunity when required.

Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?

Health service provision to the YOS is of a high standard. The service can access a psychologist for case discussions and have a full-time seconded CAMHS CNS. The CNS holds Friday morning consultation clinics, where referrals and cases are discussed, and they advise staff on strategies and approaches to working with

individual children. The CNS provides direct work with children and ensures that the first meeting is alongside the case manager, so that any barriers can be broken down. Children can also be referred to the 'SPACE (Single Point of Access for Children's Emotional Wellbeing) – wellbeing' panel, which enables each child to be assessed for both early intervention and specialist provision relating to their mental health and emotional wellbeing needs. The YOS also has a speech, language and communication therapist for two days per week, who has delivered training to YOS staff to enable them to screen cases effectively.

The YOS has a full-time substance misuse worker, who is also responsible for referring YOS children to appropriate community-based drug and alcohol services. Referrals are made when children need to receive a more intensive intervention or as an exit strategy to general community provision at the end of their YOS intervention. The YOS substance misuse worker provides assessment and treatment, and keeps YOS staff up to date with trends in drug use and new substances.

The YOS monitors its performance regarding children's ETE. It has a full-time ETE worker and there is an education themed YOS management board annually. Children at risk of being excluded from school are discussed at the resettlement and reintegration panel. In both areas, the YOS sends the education department a fortnightly list of all children known to the service, and this is then shared with schools, so that partnership working can begin. For 2021/2022, the average number of hours for which a school-aged child was accessing education and training provision had increased by the end of their YOS intervention for post-court cases.

For children older than school age, the local authority progression and engagement coordinators in both areas share the identification tool that allows partners to see who is at risk of not being, or is not, in ETE. This also highlights which children are known to the YOS, so that professionals can work together. In 2021/2022, the average number of hours for which a child aged over 16 was accessing ETE provision had also slightly increased by the end of their YOS intervention for out-of-court cases.

In addition to their role as victim liaison workers, the YOS police officers complete a daily check of the police database, to see if any children have been in police custody, either through arrest or voluntary attendance. They also track and monitor children for intelligence purposes, by identifying information from the police system and matching it with children known to the YOS.

The YOS has a service level agreement in place with both Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent children's services departments. There is a clear understanding, shared between all staff, about the referral process for social services intervention.

It was disappointing to see that the YOS's half-time seconded probation officer post was vacant. The skills and experience in managing risk of harm that probation officers bring to the service are therefore a gap for the YOS. However, the service was working closely with the Probation Service on its youth to adult transfers. When a child is approaching 18 years of age, their case is referred through the integrated offender management process for discussion about suitability for a transfer to adult services. If the child has ongoing identified needs, then the YOS will remain involved for the first three months of any transition period. Children being considered for a transfer are also discussed at the YOS resettlement and reintegration panel.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YOS uses various methods to obtain children's feedback, ensuring that it includes all children. The feedback includes the different activities that children have been involved in – for example, their experience of the Bureau, referral order panel, reparation, interventions and the workshop. The inspectors saw evidence of how children's feedback had changed processes and practice. A participation report is produced and reported to the management board. It outlines the feedback that has been collated from children through self-assessments and the Viewpoint Hub.

As part of the inspection process, children are invited to participate in a text survey, and those whose cases are inspected are offered the opportunity to speak to an inspector, to give their feedback.

Inspectors spoke to two children and received a text response from four. They all felt that their YOS workers had the right skills to do the work and they said that they had been able to access the right services and support to help them stay out of trouble.

One child, who rated the YOS 10 out of 10, said:

“My case manager made me feel comfortable in doing the work and also taught me a lot”.

When asked if the YOS worker had the right skills, one child said:

“My case manager is easy to talk to and she understands me”.

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

In making a judgement about information and facilities, we take into account the answers to the following four questions:

Do the policies and guidance in place enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

There is a full range of policies and guidance in place, which are reviewed annually and are accessible to staff. People are kept up to date with any changes through emails and team meetings. Information-sharing protocols are in place and understood across the partnership. There is an escalation process for all partners if they need to challenge another agency, and staff feel supported by managers in raising concerns.

Does the YOT's delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children and enable staff to deliver a high-quality service?

The YOS promotes a culture of caring both for its staff and for the children and families that it works with. This was evident in the way people spoke about the children they work with and in their interactions with each other.

The YOS has been based at its current office, which sits on the boundary between Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, since 2013. It is excellent accommodation that offers a safe and calming environment both for staff and children. It is very child friendly,

with motivational quotes on the walls around the building. One room was designed for girls, reflecting their specific needs, as set out in a thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation. Staff can also access a range of community-based facilities in other areas, including community centres and schools, and will visit children at home.

The YOS was able to keep its office open for staff throughout the pandemic and had a skeleton rota in place for office-based staff each day. In June 2021, it opened up its office again for face-to-face contact with children, using risk-assessed rooms and activities, Covid-19 screening questions, social distancing and the wearing of personal protective equipment.

Do the information and communications technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

The service has access to both local authorities' databases, and relevant partners have their own access to the YOS case management system. The South East Wales emergency duty team has access to the YOS database to inform out-of-hours interventions. The YOS case management system enables the service to produce data on performance.

YOS staff had access to desktop computers and were allocated smartphones and laptop computers during the Covid-19 restrictions, when the Welsh Government wanted staff to work from home where possible. Staff also have access to tablet computers to use when working with children and families.

Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

The YOS promotes a learning culture and has a robust quality assurance framework in place, which includes a peer-led assessment review group. Managers review all AssetPlus assessments, and there is a gatekeeping process for reports that are presented to the Bureau, referral order panels and court. Senior practitioners and managers use a 'QA buddy', which can be any member of staff, to help them audit cases. This approach enables all members of staff to take part in, and be responsible for, quality assuring the work of the service.

The YOS performance report, which is presented quarterly to the management board, includes an update on the quality assurance work being undertaken within the service, and this has led to themed audits taking place. For example, the YOS updated the management board with findings in relation to serious youth violence offences that had been committed by children open to the YOS during 2020/2021. The YOS also completed a victims' code self-assessment in June 2021. At the YOS's request, partner agencies will complete independent 'deep-dive' audits of cases presented to the reintegration and resettlement panel. This review looks at: whether the referral to the panel was relevant and timely; whether the identified needs and risk merited multi-agency interventions; and the contribution of partner agencies to supporting the child.

As part of its learning culture, the YOS reviews cases when serious incidents occur. It also reviews outcomes of other areas' inspections and thematic inspections, and develops action plans to improve its own practice.

Resettlement

Resettlement policy and provision

The YOS has a resettlement policy, dated 2021, and has had resettlement panels in place since 2014. As a result of the low number of children receiving custodial sentences, the remit of these panels has been extended to include children leaving YOS interventions where there are unmet needs, as well as children leaving custody.

The resettlement and reintegration panel is a subgroup of the management board and is held every six weeks. The panel is multi-agency and chaired by the YOS service manager, and pathways include support with accommodation; ETE; health services; substance misuse; family services; finance, benefits and debt; and transitions. It was evident that partners are committed to these panels in order to support effective joint working. An annual report is presented to the management board on the workings of the panel, which includes the attendance rates of partner agencies.

The YOS also has custody and resettlement practice guidance for staff to use when they have a custody case. It does not, however, set out the processes that case managers should follow when recalling children to the secure estate when they are subject to licence conditions.

There were no resettlement cases considered as part of the inspection, but staff who had managed a custodial case described communication with the secure estate as very good. Each child is allocated a resettlement worker and there are weekly conversations between the YOS and the establishment. Information exchange with the secure establishment is timely, and any adjudication outcomes are usually received within 24 hours.

Staff maintain good relationships with families and will take parents or carers to visits and facilitate video and telephone calls, so that families can stay in touch. When appropriate, staff from partnership agencies will see children in secure establishments and will liaise with their counterparts in the institution. In order to ensure continuity of care from custody to the community, they will share information and progress on interventions being completed.

YOS staff are encouraged to attend all initial planning meetings, remand review meetings and sentence review meetings, as well as to complete welfare visits. The full YOS resources are available for children in the secure estate, alongside all other service interventions. These are provided by case managers, partner agencies or specialist workers in both the YOS and the secure estate.

The YOS has good partnership links with local housing authorities and both children's services departments. Staff can also access Caerphilly County Borough Council's intensive support team, which offers provision to help maintain children in their home environment. The resettlement and reintegration panel also has a young person's homelessness officer as part of its membership.

When a child is sentenced to custody, the YOS service manager and relevant team manager will review the case and the sentence given. At the time of the inspection, some staff had completed training in resettlement work, with others due to attend in the coming months.

Diversity

Throughout our standards, we expect a personalised and responsive approach for all children, which includes taking account of their diversity and protected characteristics. Those factors may influence our judgements in specific standards. Here, we present an overall summary of the approach to diversity that we found in this YOT.

Children from the two authorities are treated equitably and staff ensure that they have access to resources based on their needs and are not restricted by the resources available in their area. The YOS is currently consulting on its draft equality and diversity policy. This includes a helpful guide to people's diversity characteristics, which helps staff to ask children and families appropriate questions.

The service completes an annual disproportionality report on ethnic minority children. It also includes other disproportionality data in its quarterly performance reports, which are presented to the management board.

The most recent disproportionality report looked at children open to the YOS during April 2020 to March 2021. There were 236 children on prevention cases, out-of-court disposals and court interventions. Out of these, 230 identified as 'white' – either White Welsh, British or European. Six children identified as ethnic minority, (compared with two in the previous year), of which four were male and two were female. The YOS will monitor this and report it to the management board.

When considering disproportionality, the YJB asks the YOS to report on children who are subject to statutory interventions. For 2020/2021, there were 51 children. Of these, one child identified as ethnic minority, which shows that children identifying as such in the statutory cohort are not over-represented.

At the time of the inspection, the YOS had 219 interventions open, of which 25 per cent were for females, 39 per cent were for those with substance misuse issues and 17 per cent were for those with emotional, mental health and wellbeing concerns. Six children had either a statement of additional learning needs or were subject to individual development plans.

In 2020, the YOS 'Be Me' project won an award for 'Best Innovative Practice'. It was created to improve the wellbeing of children, with a focus on girls. The project looks at confidence building and self-esteem through the use of beauty treatments, in partnership with a local salon. Tutorials, support and advice are provided on a one-to-one basis and children are also offered careers advice sessions. This project was led by children, following consultation and engagement with girls known to the service.

2. Court disposals

We took a detailed look at five community sentences managed by the YOS. There were no custodial sentences within the period covered by the inspection. We also conducted four interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment; planning; implementation and delivery of services; and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance, keep the child safe and keep other people safe.

HM Inspectorate of Probation's ratings panel applied professional discretion to the ratings given for the quality of planning and for implementing and delivering services. Although these were both rated as insufficient in some of the cases inspected, there was evidence that practice was strong when case managers planned work to support the child's safety and wellbeing, and manage their risk of harm to others. When delivering services, practice was strong for supporting the child's safety and wellbeing but could have been improved for managing the child's risk of harm to others. After considering all of the evidence, the panel agreed to increase the rating for planning from 'Requires improvement' to 'Good', and for implementing and delivering services from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires improvement'.

All assessments were strong in the areas of desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others. Case managers took account of the child's attitude towards their offending and considered their personal circumstances. They focused on the child's strengths and recognised their level of maturity and motivation to change. Staff had taken the views of children and their parents or carers into account and had used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement. Inspectors did not always agree with the level of risk of harm to others in the cases inspected. This related to case managers not taking account of all the risk factors and therefore considering the risk to be lower than it should have been. Work with victims needed developing, as their needs and wishes were not consistently considered, and therefore an opportunity for a restorative process was missed.

All of the cases we inspected were strong when planning for a child's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others, although work to plan appropriately for the child's desistance needed improving. There was evidence in the inspected cases that staff focused on and understood the importance of developing a working relationship with the child and motivating them to engage with planning their interventions. When planning for the child's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others, case managers addressed their risks and involved other agencies appropriately. The victim's needs and wishes were not always considered as part of the planning process, and there was limited evidence that concerns relating to actual and potential victims were addressed. Work to set out contingency arrangements to manage the child's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others needed to improve.

There was some good evidence of multi-agency work to deliver services, especially in regard to children's social care, health service and substance misuse provision. When delivering services, however, YOS staff did not consider the child's desistance or their risk of harm to others as carefully as they considered their safety and wellbeing. There were examples where work was not focused on the intervention plan and was not being delivered in a timely manner.

Reviewing was a strong area of practice across all three areas. Case managers built on the child's strengths and considered their motivation and engagement levels. They included the views of the child and their parents or carers when considering the progress that the child had made. When reviewing how to keep the child safe and their risk of harm to others, case managers had considered information from other agencies and made the necessary changes to the ongoing plan. However, reviewing and responding to the child's diversity factors needed to improve.

Strengths

- Assessing and reviewing were strong in the areas of desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others.
- Case managers built on the child's strengths.
- Planning was robust in relation to the child's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others.
- Staff used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement.
- Staff understood the importance of developing a working relationship with the child and motivating them to engage.
- There was good evidence of multi-agency work to deliver services.
- Staff took the views of children and their parents or carers into account.

Areas for improvement

- Case managers did not always consider the victim's needs and wishes as part of the assessment and planning process, and there was limited evidence that concerns relating to actual and potential victims were addressed when planning and delivering services.
- When assessing risk of harm to others, case managers did not consistently take account all the risk factors present.
- Staff did not always consider what would support the child's desistance when putting plans in place.
- When delivering services, staff did not focus sufficiently on the child's desistance or their risk of harm to others.
- There was poor contingency planning to manage children's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others.
- Staff did not always consider the child's wider diversity factors when reviewing their progress.

Work with children sentenced by the courts will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections, we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards.

2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating¹⁸ 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?	100%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Assessments analysing how to support a child's desistance was a strong area of practice. In all five inspected cases, there was sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, and the assessments considered the child's attitude towards, and motivation for, their offending. Staff took account of the child's diversity issues in four out of five cases and considered their personal circumstances in all cases. Information from other agencies had been used to inform the assessment, and every assessment focused on the child's strengths and protective factors, and recognised their level of maturity, ability and motivation to change. They had involved the child and/or their parents or carers in the assessment and taken their views into account.

In one case, the needs and wishes of victims were not taken into account and therefore an opportunity for a restorative process was missed.

The factors in court orders that relate most to a child's offending are lifestyle, learning and ETE, substance misuse and their living arrangements; in all cases we inspected, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to address these factors and support desistance.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

Assessments analysing how to keep children safe was a strong area of practice. In all cases, the risk to the child's safety and wellbeing had been identified and analysed appropriately by the case manager. The assessment used sources of information, including other assessments, and involved other agencies where appropriate in every case inspected. The appropriate controls and interventions to keep the child safe had been identified in all five cases.

Inspectors judged the case manager's assessment of the level of safety and wellbeing as reasonable in every case. Overall, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to keep the child safe in all of the inspected cases.

¹⁸ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

Assessment to keep other people safe was a strong area of practice. The case manager had used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement. They had identified the appropriate controls and interventions to minimise harm presented by the child in all of the cases.

Inspectors judged the case manager's assessment of the level of risk of serious harm to others as reasonable in only three of the five cases inspected. This related to case managers not taking account of all the risk factors present and therefore considering the risk to be lower than it should have been. Overall, however, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to keep other people safe in all of the cases.

2.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating¹⁹ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	60%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	80%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	80%

Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?

Professional discretion was applied to this area of practice. In four out of the five cases inspected, staff planned the services most likely to support desistance, paying attention to appropriate timescales and sequencing. In all cases, they took account of the child's personal circumstances and social context. In four out of five cases, staff had considered the child's strengths and protective factors, level of maturity and motivation to change. Disappointingly, the victim's needs and wishes had been considered in only three out of the five cases.

Planning was proportionate to the court outcome, which meant that interventions could be completed within the timescales in all cases. Overall, planning supported the child's desistance sufficiently in only three of the five cases.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

Planning that focused on keeping children safe was a strong area of practice. In all cases, the risks to a child's safety and wellbeing were addressed. Case managers used information from other agencies to inform their planning and had identified the appropriate controls and interventions to promote the safety of the child in four out of the five cases inspected. In only three cases, contingency arrangements for any changes to the level of risk were evident but, overall, planning focused on keeping the child safe in four out of the five cases.

¹⁹ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Planning to promote other people's safety by addressing the factors related to the risk of harm to others was evident in all cases. In all but one case, staff involved other agencies where appropriate. However, planning for contingency arrangements to manage the risks identified was evident in only three of the five cases inspected.

Disappointingly, planning to address concerns related to actual and potential victims was only evident in three of the five cases. Overall, planning that focused on keeping people safe was evident in four of the five cases.

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

Our rating²⁰ 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?	40%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	80%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	60%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?

Professional discretion was applied to this area of practice. Delivery of services to support a child's desistance was the poorest areas of practice. An area of work that needs more consideration is the sequencing of services, where only two out of the five cases inspected were judged to be sufficient. In four cases, staff had considered the child's diversity needs, and in three cases they had taken account of the child's social context, their strengths and positive factors. In all but one case, service delivery offered opportunities for access to provision when the intervention was finished.

In all cases, staff had developed and maintained an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers and had encouraged and enabled the child to comply with the interventions. Disappointingly, however, overall, support for the child's desistance was evident in only two of the five cases.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?

Delivering services that focused on keeping children safe was a stronger area of practice. It was evident that the child's safety and wellbeing had been promoted through service delivery in all but one of the five cases inspected. In three of the

²⁰ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

cases, staff had involved other agencies in keeping children safe. Overall, service delivery supported the safety of the child in four of the five cases.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?

Delivering services that considered how to keep other people safe was a weaker area of practice. The services delivered managed and minimised the risk of harm and staff sufficiently involved other agencies in only three of the five cases inspected. The protection of actual and potential victims had been considered in four of the five cases. Overall, inspectors judged that the safety of other people was supported sufficiently in only three of the cases.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Outstanding

Our rating²¹ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	80%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	100%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	80%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

Reviewing how to support a child's desistance was a strong area of practice. Case managers were aware that children's circumstances can change rapidly, and that this can result in an increase, or sometimes decrease, in their likelihood of reoffending, risk of harm to others or in risks to their safety and wellbeing.

Reviewing cases resulted in the identification of, and a subsequent response to, changes in the factors linked to desistance in three of the four relevant cases we inspected. Case managers built on the child's strengths and considered their personal circumstances, including their wider familial and social context, in every relevant case. Disappointingly, the review included an analysis of, and a response to, the child's diversity factors in only one case out of four where it was relevant. Case managers considered the child's motivation and engagement levels in all of the relevant cases, and in every case, the child and their parents or carers had been involved meaningfully in the process, and their views were taken into account.

In two of the three relevant cases, the review led to changes in the plan of work and, overall, four out of the five cases inspected focused sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance as part of the reviewing process.

²¹ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

Reviewing how to keep children safe was a strong area of practice. Case managers identified and responded to changes in the child's safety and wellbeing. When reviewing, case managers had considered information from other agencies and made the necessary changes in the ongoing plan in all of the relevant cases. Overall, reviewing focused on keeping the child safe in all of the cases inspected.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Reviewing a child's risk of harm to others was a strong area of practice. The case manager had identified, and responded to, changes in risk in three of the four relevant cases. Reviewing was informed by information gathered from other agencies in all but one of the relevant cases. The reviewing process had led to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to manage and minimise risks in two of the three relevant cases. Overall, reviewing focused on keeping other people safe in four of the five cases inspected.

3. Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 10 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of one youth conditional caution, one youth caution and eight community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in nine cases.

We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance, work to keep the child safe and work to keep other people safe.

We also inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for out-of-court disposals, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews.

The YOS provided diversion and prevention activities and completed AssetPlus assessments on all children referred to these services. Therefore, children and families could receive a lot of early intervention work before a child was referred for an out-of-court disposal. At the time of the inspection, the YOS's caseload showed that most of its work was with children on community resolutions, with only a small number going to the Bureau and receiving a youth caution or youth conditional caution.

The Bureau was the decision-making panel for out-of-court disposals, and because of its set-up, should have been viewed as part of the criminal justice system. It consisted of a police sergeant, a YOS senior practitioner or team manager, a community panel member and the YOS police officer, who could also represent the views of the victim. It worked in a similar way to referral order panels and courtrooms, and was not a multi-agency panel. At this stage, however, children were not part of the criminal justice system and could be diverted away. The panel was not set up to recognise this, and panel members should have included those agencies that were focused on the safeguarding and welfare of children, as well as those that were part of the criminal justice system.

Although an AssetPlus assessment was completed on all children, the Bureau only received a summary report and did not have access to all the information relevant to the child and their family. Therefore, detailed information from the assessment was not consistently presented to the Bureau. This made it more difficult to ensure that children were receiving an outcome that supported their individual needs, and that any diversity concerns were recognised. The YOS captured and collated the views of children who had attended the Bureau, and had examples of how this feedback had helped the service make changes to the process.

Although there were issues with the Bureau process, overall, assessment by YOS staff was a strong area of practice for out-of-court disposals in all three areas. Case managers appropriately analysed the child's diversity needs and considered their levels of maturity and motivation to change. They took account of the victim's needs and wishes, and used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their judgements. Risks to the child's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others were identified; however, inspectors found that the classification was not always reasonable and that case managers did not consider all of the risk factors, and therefore judged the risk to be lower than it should have been.

Planning was a strong area of practice. There was evidence in the inspected cases that staff focused on understanding the child's learning style and individual needs when planning interventions. The risks had been identified and analysed

appropriately when planning for a child's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others, and staff had considered the victim's needs and wishes. However, contingency arrangements for any changes to the level of risk were not consistently evident in all cases.

Implementation and delivery of services was also strong across the three areas. Case managers considered the child's wider social context, developed and maintained an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers, and encouraged and enabled the child to comply with the interventions. They also focused on the child being able to access mainstream services when their intervention ended. This included, for example, involving the REACH project and other agencies in delivering services – for example, substance misuse and CAMHS services – and they had used multi-agency meetings to ensure that all professionals were up to date with the child's progress. When delivering services in relation to the child's risk of harm to others, case managers had not considered the protection of actual and potential victims in every relevant case.

Strengths

- An AssetPlus assessment was completed on all children who became known to the YOS.
- Assessment, planning and delivering services for out-of-court disposals were strong areas of practice in all three areas.
- Case managers had appropriately analysed the child's diversity needs and considered their levels of maturity and motivation to change.
- Staff focused on understanding the child's learning style and their individual needs when planning interventions.
- The victim's needs and wishes had been considered in relevant cases.
- Case managers developed an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers.
- Case managers focused on ensuring that the child would be able to access mainstream services when their intervention ended.
- Staff used multi-agency meetings to ensure that all professionals were up to date with the child's progress.

Areas for improvement

- The Bureau was not multi-agency, and it was not consistently given all the assessment information relevant to children and their families.
- Staff had not identified all the potential risk factors in some cases.
- The classification of risk to a child's safety and wellbeing, and their risk of harm to others was not always reasonable when all the available information was taken into account.
- Contingency arrangements were needed in planning to support the child's safety and wellbeing, and manage their risk of harm to others.

- Case managers had not considered the protection of actual and potential victims in every relevant case.

Work with children receiving out-of-court disposals will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections, we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards.

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating²² 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?	90%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Assessments analysing how to support a child's desistance was a strong area of practice. In all cases, there was sufficient analysis of offending behaviour and the assessments considered the child's personal circumstances and their strengths and protective factors. In all but one case, staff took account of the child's levels of maturity and motivation to change, and had involved the child and their parents or carers in the assessment and taken their views into account.

In every case, there was an appropriate analysis of the child's diversity needs, and case managers had used information from other agencies to inform their assessment. The victim's needs and wishes had been taken into account in all the relevant cases.

The factors in out-of-court disposals that relate most to a child's offending are learning and ETE, lifestyle and substance misuse, and in all of the 10 cases we inspected, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to address these factors and support desistance.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

Assessments analysing how to keep children safe was a strong area of practice. In all but one case, the risk to the child's safety and wellbeing had been identified and analysed appropriately by the case manager. The assessment used sources of

²² 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

information, including other assessments, and involved other agencies where appropriate in every case we inspected.

Inspectors judged the case manager's assessment of the level of safety and wellbeing as reasonable in eight out of the 10 cases. Where they disagreed, this was because of case managers not taking account of all the risk factors, and therefore considering the risk to be lower than it should have been. Overall, however, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to keep the child safe in all of the inspected cases.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

Assessment to keep other people safe was a strong area of practice. All but one of the cases clearly identified and analysed the risk of harm to others. Similarly, in nearly all of the cases staff had used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement. Inspectors judged the case manager's assessment of the level of risk of serious harm to others as reasonable in only seven out of the 10 cases inspected, with three cases having a lower risk factor than our inspector determined. Overall, the assessment analysed sufficiently how to keep other people safe in all but one of the cases.

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating²³ 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?	90%

Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

Planning to support a child's desistance was a strong area of practice. In all cases, staff planned the services most likely to support desistance, paying attention to appropriate timescales and sequencing, and took account of the child's personal circumstances and social context. In nearly all cases, when planning for a child's desistance, case managers considered the child's strengths and protective factors. Staff took account of the child's diversity issues and their level of maturity and motivation to change in eight out of 10 cases.

In all but one case, consideration had been given to the opportunities for the child to integrate into the community and access mainstream services after completing their out-of-court disposal. Every relevant case showed evidence that the victim's needs and wishes had been considered, and in all but one case, staff had involved the child and their parents or carers in the planning process.

²³ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

Planning was proportionate to the disposal type, which meant that interventions could be completed within the timescales, in all cases.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

Planning that focused on keeping children safe was a strong area of practice. In every case, planning promoted the child's safety and wellbeing, and in all relevant cases, information from other agencies was included to inform planning. In two out of the 10 cases inspected, contingency arrangements for any changes to the level of risk were not evident but, overall, planning focused on keeping the child safe in all of the cases.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Planning to keep other people safe was a strong area of practice. Planning to promote other people's safety by addressing the factors related to the risk of harm to others was evident in all but one case, and case managers had involved other agencies in every case. However, planning for contingency arrangements to manage the risks identified was not evident in two of the 10 cases inspected.

Planning to address concerns related to actual and potential victims was evident in nearly all of the relevant cases. Overall, planning that focused on keeping people safe was evident in nine of the 10 cases.

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating²⁴ 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?	90%

Does service delivery focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

Delivery of services to support a child's desistance was a strong area of practice. In all cases, interventions to support desistance had been sequenced appropriately and delivered in good time. In eight out of the 10 cases inspected, the case manager had considered the child's diversity needs, and in all but one case the child's opportunities for community integration and access to mainstream services had been taken into account.

²⁴ 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. See Annexe 2 for a more detailed explanation.

In every case, staff considered the child's wider social context, developed and maintained an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers, and had encouraged and enabled the child to comply with the interventions.

Interventions proportionate to the disposal were evident in all cases and, overall, support for the child's desistance was sufficient in all 10 cases.

Does service delivery focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

Delivering services that considered how to keep children safe was a strong area of practice. It was evident that the child's safety and wellbeing had been promoted through service delivery in all of the cases inspected. In eight of the nine relevant cases, staff had involved other agencies in keeping children safe. Overall, service delivery supported the safety of the child in every case.

Does service delivery focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Delivering services that considered how to keep other people safe was a strong area of practice. The services delivered managed and minimised the risk of harm in all but one case, although staff had not considered the protection of actual and potential victims in one of the relevant cases. Overall, inspectors judged that the safety of other people was supported sufficiently in nine of the 10 cases inspected.

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

In making a judgement about out-of-court disposal policy and provision, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a policy in place for out-of-court provision that promotes appropriate diversion and supports sustainable desistance?

The YOS provided diversion and prevention activities through various programmes and projects across both local authorities, ensuring that children and families could receive appropriate early intervention work. The inspection found that the YOS was very proactive in engaging children and families before they received an out-of-court disposal. The REACH programme ensured that children had an AssetPlus completed at an early stage, so that preventative interventions could be put in place if needed.

There was a Gwent out-of-court disposal framework and Bureau process 2019-2022. The policy set out an escalation process in the event of disagreements about outcomes arising, although these situations had rarely happened.

The out-of-court disposal framework incorporated a two-tiered approach. The first tier was for a child who had been arrested for their first offence, been identified as committing the offence and accepted responsibility. In these cases, if the child agreed, the police would consider them for a community resolution. The child was then referred to the YOS police officer for a period of 28 days. A member of the YOS management team had to approve any agreement for a child receiving a second or third community resolution. The second tier was for a child who had been arrested or taken part in a voluntary interview, been identified as committing the offence, with

sufficient evidence to charge them, and they had accepted responsibility. In these cases, if the child agreed, the police would consider them for a referral to the Bureau. The outcome from the Bureau could be a youth caution or a youth conditional caution.

The Bureau was the decision-making panel for out-of-court disposals. It should have been viewed as part of the criminal justice system because of the way it was set up, as it worked in a similar way to referral order panels and courtrooms, and was not a multi-agency panel. At this stage, however, children were not part of the criminal justice system and could be diverted away. The panel was not set up to recognise this, and panel members should have included those agencies that were focused on the safeguarding and welfare of children, as well as those that were part of the criminal justice system.

The Bureau members only received a summarised AssetPlus report and so did not have access to all the information relevant to the child and their family. Therefore, detailed information from the assessment was not consistently presented to the Bureau. This made it more difficult to ensure that children were receiving an outcome that supported their individual needs, and that any diversity concerns were recognised.

At the time of the inspection, the YOS's caseload showed that most of its work was with children on community resolutions, with only a small number going to the Bureau and receiving a youth caution or youth conditional caution. However, the Bureau and its procedures needed to be reviewed to make sure that the child's needs were being met at each stage of the process.

Does out-of-court disposal provision promote diversion and support sustainable desistance?

In Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly, the YOS police officers received a notification about a potential out-of-court disposal through the police database and reviewed the incident to ensure that it fitted the criteria. They produced a regular report on the quality of the information they received, in order to identify any reoccurring problems that could be addressed with the referring police officers. If the criteria were met, they liaised with a YOS team manager, who allocated the case. Checks were made with other agencies, such as children's services and education providers, to see if the child was known and had had any previous contact with the YOS. If the case was going to the Bureau, a date was set.

At this stage, the YOS police officer contacted the victim, to make sure that their views were represented in all assessments and reports. The case manager then completed an AssetPlus assessment and liaised with the YOS police officers regarding the child's views on any involvement in a restorative process. All interventions available to children on statutory orders were available to those receiving an out-of-court disposal.

It was expected that an out-of-court disposal would be completed within three months, although a disposal could stay open on a voluntary basis for longer if needed. When a child did not comply with their disposal, efforts were made to support engagement.

Are the out-of-court disposal policy and provision regularly assessed and updated to ensure effectiveness and maintain alignment with the evidence base?

The Gwent out-of-court disposal framework and Bureau process was reviewed by the partners on a biannual basis. Partners included Gwent Police, Monmouthshire and Torfaen YOS, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly YOS, Newport YOS, the Crown Prosecution Service and Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service. In addition, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner had in place a scrutiny panel that included the courts, magistrates, police and the three YOSs in Gwent. Its purpose was to conduct reviews of the decision-making process and the rationale for out-of-court disposals being made.

As part of the YOS performance report and the monitoring of various grants that the YOS received, reports were generated to analyse out-of-court disposal work. The YOS also produced an annual report looking at children who had been issued with a second or third community resolution. The YOS captured and collated the views of children who had attended the Bureau, and had examples of how this feedback had helped the service make changes to the process.

Annexe 1: Methodology

HM Inspectorate of Probation standards

The standards against which we inspect youth offending services are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. These standards are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with children who have offended.²⁵

The inspection methodology is summarised below, linked to the three domains in our standards framework. We focused on obtaining evidence against the standards, key questions and prompts in our inspection framework.

Domain one: organisational delivery

The youth offending service submitted evidence in advance, and the head of Caerphilly children's services and head of Blaenau Gwent children's services delivered a presentation covering the following areas:

- How do organisational delivery arrangements in this area make sure that the work of your YOS is as effective as it can be, and that the life chances of children who have offended are improved?
- What are your priorities for further improving these arrangements?

During the main fieldwork phase, we conducted 13 interviews with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. We held various meetings, which allowed us to triangulate evidence and information. In total, we conducted 12 meetings, which included meetings with managers, partner organisations and staff. The evidence collected under this domain was judged against our published ratings characteristics.²⁶

Domain two: court disposals

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Forty per cent of the cases selected were those of children who had received court disposals six to nine months earlier, enabling us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined five court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

²⁵ HM Inspectorate's standards are available here:
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

Domain three: out-of-court disposals

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Sixty per cent of cases selected were those of children who had received out-of-court disposals three to five months earlier. This enabled us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, and implementation and delivery. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place.

We examined 10 out-of-court disposals. The sample size was set based on the proportion of out-of-court disposal cases in the YOT.

Annexe 2: Inspection data

In this inspection, we conducted a detailed examination of a sample of five court disposals and 10 out-of-court disposals. In each of those cases, we inspect against standards regarding assessment, planning and implementation/delivery. For court disposals, we also look at reviewing. For each standard, inspectors answer a number of key questions about different aspects of quality, including whether there was sufficient analysis of the factors related to offending; the extent to which children were involved in assessment and planning; and whether enough was done to assess the level of risk of harm posed, and to manage that risk.

To score an 'Outstanding' rating for the sections on court disposals or out-of-court disposals, 80 per cent or more of the cases we analyse have to be assessed as sufficient. If between 65 per cent and 79 per cent are judged to be sufficient, then the rating is 'Good' and if between 50 per cent and 64 per cent are judged to be sufficient, then a rating of 'Requires improvement' is applied. Finally, if less than 50 per cent are sufficient, then we rate this as 'Inadequate'. Resettlement cases are not separately rated; the data is for illustrative purposes only.

The rating for each standard is aligned to the banding at the key question level where the lowest proportion of cases were judged to be sufficient, as we believe that each key question is an integral part of the standard. Therefore, if we rate three key questions as 'Good' and one as 'Inadequate', the overall rating for that standard is 'Inadequate'.

Lowest banding (proportion of cases judged to be sufficient key question level)	Rating (standard)
Minority: <50%	Inadequate
Too few: 50-64%	Requires improvement
Reasonable majority: 65-79%	Good
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding ☆

Additional scoring rules are used to generate the overall YOT rating. Each of the 12 standards are scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; and 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0 to 36, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows:

- 0–6 = Inadequate
- 7–18 = Requires improvement
- 19–30 = Good
- 31–36 = Outstanding.

Domain one standards, the qualitative standard in domain three (standard 3.4) and the resettlement standard (standard 4.1) are judged using predominantly qualitative evidence.

The resettlement standard is rated separately and does not influence the overall YOT rating. We apply a limiting judgement, whereby any YOT that receives an

'Inadequate' rating for the resettlement standard is unable to receive an overall 'Outstanding' rating, regardless of how they are rated against the core standards. Where there are no relevant resettlement cases, we do not apply a rating to resettlement work.

Data from inspected cases:²⁷

2.1. Assessment (court disposals)	
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	
a) Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	100%
b) Does assessment sufficiently analyse diversity issues?	80%
c) Does assessment consider personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?	100%
d) Does assessment utilise information held by other agencies?	100%
e) Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	100%
f) Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	60%
g) Is enough attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and their likelihood of engaging with the court disposal?	100%
h) Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of victims, and opportunities for restorative justice?	80%
i) Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	80%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	
a) Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	100%
b) Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	100%
c) Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	

²⁷ Some questions do not apply in all cases.

a) Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	80%
b) Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	100%
c) Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to manage and minimise the risk of harm presented by the child?	100%

2.2. Planning (court disposals)

Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

a) Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	80%
b) Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?	60%
c) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?	100%
d) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	80%
e) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	80%
f) Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of victims?	60%
g) Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	100%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

a) Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	100%
b) Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (e.g. child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	80%
c) Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	80%
d) Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	60%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
a) Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	100%
b) Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	80%
c) Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	60%
d) Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people?	60%
e) Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	60%

2.3. Implementation and delivery (court disposals)

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	
a) Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	40%
b) Does service delivery account for the diversity issues of the child?	80%
c) Does service delivery reflect the wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents or carers, or significant others?	60%
d) Does service delivery build upon the child's strengths and enhance protective factors?	60%
e) Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers?	100%
f) Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration, including access to services post-supervision?	80%
g) Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	100%
h) Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate?	20%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	
a) Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	80%
b) Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-coordinated?	60%

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	
a) Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	60%
b) Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	80%
c) Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated?	60%

2. 4. Reviewing (court disposals)	
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	
a) Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors linked to desistance?	60%
b) Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building upon the child's strengths and enhancing protective factors?	100%
c) Does reviewing include analysis of, and respond to, diversity factors?	20%
d) Does reviewing consider the personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?	100%
d) Does reviewing consider motivation and engagement levels and any relevant barriers?	80%
e) Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement, and are their views taken into account?	100%
f) Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to support desistance?	40%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	
a) Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to safety and wellbeing?	80%
b) Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in promoting the safety and wellbeing of the child?	80%
c) Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	60%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	
a) Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to risk of harm?	60%

b) Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm?	60%
c) Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan all of work to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	40%

3.1. Assessment (out-of-court disposals)

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

a) Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's acknowledgement of responsibility for, attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	100%
b) Does assessment sufficiently analyse diversity issues?	100%
c) Does assessment consider personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?	100%
d) Does assessment utilise information held by other agencies?	100%
e) Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	100%
f) Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	80%
g) Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change?	90%
h) Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of victims, and opportunities for restorative justice?	80%
i) Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	90%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

a) Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	90%
b) Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	100%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

a) Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	90%
b) Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including any other assessments that have been completed, and other evidence of behaviour by the child?	90%

3.2. Planning (out-of-court disposals)

Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?

a) Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	100%
b) Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?	80%
c) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?	100%
d) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	90%
e) Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	80%
f) Does planning take sufficient account of opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services following completion of out-of-court disposal work?	90%
g) Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victims?	90%
h) Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	90%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

a) Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	100%
b) Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (for example, child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	80%
c) Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	80%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

a) Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	90%
b) Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	100%
c) Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	89%

d) Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	80%
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3.3. Implementation and delivery (out-of-court disposals)

Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?

a) Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	100%
b) Does service delivery account for the diversity issues of the child?	80%
c) Does service delivery reflect the wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents or carers, or significant others?	100%
d) Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers?	100%
e) Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	100%
f) Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services?	90%

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?

a) Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	100%
b) Is the involvement of other agencies in keeping the child safe sufficiently well utilised and coordinated?	80%

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?

a) Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	90%
b) Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	80%