



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Devon

HM Inspectorate of Probation, November 2022



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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

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

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 justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Devon YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Devon YJS was rated as 'Good', with three aspects of court work practice rated as 'Outstanding'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as Good.

The service is child-centred reaching out to children to meet their practical needs and help them to desist from repeat offending. A personalised approach ensures that children's diversity needs are understood, and measures put in place to help children achieve and attain. Staff and volunteers are without doubt the organisation's most significant asset. They are kind, caring and ambassadors for the children they supervise. They show resilience and want to improve the quality of the services they deliver.

The head of service leads the YJS well. He is knowledgeable and skilled, with a desire to drive the service to achieve positive outcomes for children.

The board, although beginning to improve, has been disconnected from the wider YJS for some time. This has left many staff feeling undervalued. The absence of a consistent effective strategic link to operational delivery has meant that critical gaps have remained in the board's understanding of the challenges faced by practitioners. For example, educational outcomes for many YJS children have been poor, but the board has not fully tackled this problem to bring about change. Furthermore, while the board has access to universal YJS data about the profile of children in the cohort, the range is limited and there is a lack of forensic analysis. The board intends to address these deficits. This is reassuring.

Staff have access to a wide range of services to help children and their parents and carers. In particular, the health offer is excellent and making a real difference in improving children's emotional wellbeing. Resources and information used by the YJS have been reviewed by the speech and language therapist and redesigned to make them more child-friendly and accessible.















The YJS can be proud of the way it honours the children it supervises and the effective support it provided to children during the pandemic. It must now focus on bringing together the whole of the partnership. In this report we make six recommendations to further improve the work of Devon YJS. We trust that they will assist the service as it continues its improvement journey.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Devon Youth Justice Service Fieldwork started September 2022		Score	26/36
Overall rating		Good	
1. Organisational delivery			
1.1	Governance and leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2	Staff	Good	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Good	
1.4	Information and facilities	Good	
2. Court disposals			
2.1	Assessment	Good	
2.2	Planning	Outstanding	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
2.4	Reviewing	Outstanding	
3. Out-of-court disposals			
3.1	Assessment	Good	
3.2	Planning	Good	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Good	
4. Resettlement¹			
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Good	

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

Recommendations

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

The Devon Youth Justice Service should:

1. ensure robust contingency plans are in place for all children that address their safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others
2. review and produce quality assurance arrangements that drive improvement across all aspects of case management in court and out-of-court service delivery
3. review management roles and responsibilities to ensure more parity in work distribution.

The Devon Youth Justice Service Management Board should:

4. expand the breadth and depth of management information, forensically analyse segmented data, and use findings to improve outcomes for children
5. ensure that strategic relationships with children's social care translate into positive outcomes for YJS children
6. strengthen connectivity with YJS staff to build closer collaboration that improves outcomes for children.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Devon YJS over a period of a week, beginning on 05 September 2022. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 06 September 2021 and 01 July 2022; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 06 September 2022 and 01 July 2022; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 06 September 2021 and 01 July 2022. We also conducted 36 interviews with case managers.

Devon County Council serves one of the largest geographical areas in the country, covering 2,600 square miles, with a total population of 795,286². The youth population (10 to 17) comprises 68,691 children. Children and young people represent around 18.3 per cent of the county's total population, a slightly lower proportion than the south west as a whole.

Devon remains a predominantly white population, with 2.5 per cent of the total population reporting as Black, Asian, or minority ethnic. There is significant variation in the size of the Black, Asian or minority ethnic populations between district areas, with just 1.3 per cent in Torridge and up to 7.5 per cent in Exeter, according to the 2011 census. The Devon schools census data shows a Black, Asian or minority ethnic population of 8 per cent.

Devon Youth Offending Team became Devon Youth Justice Service in January 2022 after a consultation process involving children, parents, partners, staff, and others. The geography of the county means that the distances children and their families must cover to access resources are a real challenge. Devon YJS addresses these needs by having several centres where children and families can be seen: two permanent offices in Barnstaple and Exeter, a delivery base in Newton Abbot, and a variety of other premises across the county. This includes running referral panels in a variety of settings.

There are four main police custody centres. Two of these are in Devon and two are in adjoining unitary authorities.

The rate of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system (CJS) continues to remain low compared with Devon's statistical neighbours. In real terms, 94 fewer young people entered the CJS for the first time in Devon in 2021 than in 2019 (154 down to 60). The YJB figures for the April to June 2020 cohort show that Devon children who reoffended committed 1.83 further offences during this period, with a reoffending rate of 32.4 per cent. This is consistent with Devon's statistical neighbours.

Data from the local Live Reoffending Tracker, covering April 2021 to June 2021, shows that 12 children out of a cohort of 122 reoffended (a rate of 9.8 per cent). Each of the 12 children who reoffended committed an average of 2.33 offences. The total number of reoffences was 28.

² All data shown below was provided by the Devon YJS

Domain one: Organisational delivery

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

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows.

1.1. Governance and leadership



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

Requires improvement

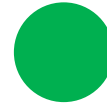
Strengths:

- The YJS board is well integrated into wider strategic safeguarding arrangements and community safety partnership boards, including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Service level agreements and joint working protocols are in place with all providers in the partnership.
- The partnership has established a range of services for YJS children. There are strong links with the third sector, and this has created broader access.
- The head of service is visible, skilled, experienced, knowledgeable, and approachable. The management team has clear lines of accountability, where roles and responsibilities are understood well.
- There is a suitable risk register in place, with appropriate mitigations and controls to support effective service delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- There has been a notable disconnect between the board and operational staff for some time. Many staff do not understand the role of the board and report that direct communication and feedback about their work is limited.
- Until recently, those above head of service level had gaps in their knowledge about youth justice, and this had affected the strategic delivery of effective services. However, new senior leaders have greater experience of YJS, and the Deputy Director (Children's Services) will be chairing the board going forward.
- Management information available to the board is not sufficiently analysed or broad enough. It is not segmented, and gaps in the information mean that board members do not fully understand the needs of all YJS children. The board does not understand disproportionality across all protected characteristics well enough.
- The board needs to better understand why there are a significant number of YJS children aged under 16 in alternative provision.
- The partnership needs to build on its commitment to being 'child first', by creating more opportunities for children and their parents/carers to influence strategy, practice, and service delivery.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- The YJS provided excellent pastoral and professional support for all staff during Covid-19.
- The YJS leadership team motivates staff to achieve the best for the children they supervise.
- All staff are committed, keen, caring, and willing to go the extra mile to support the children they are working with.
- Staff provide considerable voluntary contact to children and their parents/carers while they are awaiting panel decisions.
- Case managers' workloads are reasonable, and this enables them to deliver individualised and responsive services for children.
- Most staff receive regular supervision, which affirms how much they are valued by their managers. The supervision agreement with practitioners provides an effective tool to ensure consistency across work areas and personal development.
- Cases are allocated in a fair and considered way that maximises the skills of operational staff.
- Induction activity has improved for all, especially board members, in the partnership and new staff joining the organisation.
- Volunteers are supported well, feel valued and receive up-to-date and timely information to carry out their responsibilities as referral order panel members.

Areas for improvement:

- Managers' workloads are not equally distributed and, as a result, management oversight is not effective in keeping children and others safe. There needs to be a review of the management team's roles, responsibilities, and lines of accountability.
- There is currently no YJS-specific learning and development plan in place.
- Reward and recognition initiatives need to be strengthened, including affirmation from the board.
- The service has engaged in a peer review and a recent diagnostic review; however, it has been slow to respond to some areas identified for improvement following the peer review.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

Strengths:

- Children are consistently asked about their views on the quality of the interventions they have received. Feedback on planning activity resulted in a revised child-friendly 'my plan' document being produced.
- There is excellent access to SALT services to meet children's desistance, safety and wellbeing needs and keep other people safe. Documents and resources are regularly revised so that they are better understood by children and their parents/carers. There is evidence of SALT informing the way practitioners engage with children.
- The wider health offer, which includes Y-SMART (drugs and alcohol service), and the in-house child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) are effective and making a difference to children's quality of life. The education worker is a good advocate for YJS children and attends a number of county-wide meetings to help them achieve positive outcomes.
- The YJS uses an impressive range of services and interventions to support children to desist from offending, support their aspirations and keep them safe. All interventions build on children's strengths.
- In the post court cases that we reviewed, inspectors found that children had access to the services they needed to support desistance and risks to others in 87 per cent of the cases. In out-of-court cases, inspectors found that case managers had access to the services they needed to support desistance in 78 per cent, and to support risks to others in 83 per cent.
- There are a variety of reparation projects, and the restorative justice offer is effective and actively engages with victims to keep them safe.
- Relationships with youth courts are effective, arrangements with the police to keep others safe and support the safety and wellbeing of children work well and the provision of a probation specialism adds value in the YJS.

Areas for improvement:

- The management board does not consistently take a forensic approach to analysing and interrogating the data available to it across a range of areas. This means that it does not fully understand the changing profile of YJS children and cannot always identify the right services to target their needs.
- The board has not fully examined or understood the reasons why 53 per cent of YJS children under 16 are in alternative education provision and 44 per cent of those over 17 are not in education or training.
- The YJS needs to explore and scrutinise children's wider protected characteristics and interrogate the data on disproportionality to equip the service to achieve better outcomes. Some staff reported that relationships with children's social care are strained and not always achieving positive outcomes for YJS children.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Good

Strengths:

- The YJS has a range of policies that largely describe and guide the work of practitioners.
- The facilities available at the Ivybank office are excellent. Activities are plentiful and tailored to children's specific needs. This office is centrally based and accessible.
- Given the large geographical area covered by the YJS, staff work across sites, youth centres and community spaces to deliver services – this enables children to be seen in locations that suit them and their parent/carers.
- ICT access is good, which enables staff to carry out planning, service delivery and reviewing of work.
- Staff can work effectively from both office bases and remote settings.
- There are effective processes in place to ensure that the YJS learns from things that go wrong.
- The views of children and their parents/carers are sought both formally at key stages of the supervisory process, and on completion of interventions.

Areas for improvement:

- There have been historical slippages in policies not being reviewed regularly. Some are not sufficiently detailed to support effective service delivery.
- Policies need to be reviewed from a disproportionality perspective to ensure that the needs of all children with protected characteristics are met.
- The YJS does not produce information on diversity across a range of needs regularly enough.
- Quality assurance processes are underdeveloped and there is no written assurance policy.
- The YJS does not thoroughly evaluate the impact of services across all provision, and its evaluation is not adequately informing service delivery. The incoming chair of the board and head of service recognise that the quality assurance process and other scrutiny mechanisms require development.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

Devon YJS values, gathers, and intentionally considers the views of children and their parents/carers. It collects and captures their views in different ways, including regular consultation events, surveys, audits, and end of intervention feedback. The service can show how, on several occasions, the contributions of children and their parents/carers have had an impact on informing service delivery. For instance, following requests from children and their families, the service has greatly improved the language it uses in formal documents and planning.

The service employs a participation worker, whose primary role is to obtain feedback on the quality of services received by children and their families. Questions include: 'Do you understand what was in your plan?' 'Do you understand what you need to do to stop offending?' 'Were you listened to by your worker?'

Responses are aggregated and analysed. Results show that there are clear strengths in the service, but that more could be done, especially to involve children and their parents/carers in developing strategic initiatives and plans.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to obtain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 9 children who consented, and one child replied. We also spoke to six children who had accessed the service and one parent/carer.

In the text survey, children were asked to rate the YJS on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being poor and 10 fantastic. The one child who responded gave a score of 10.

In the telephone interviews, all children reported that they understood what the YJS is trying to achieve. When asked if they thought the staff had the right skills, they all responded 'yes'. Comments from children included:

"My worker is so skilled. She's amazing. She knows so much. I feel she listens and gets me."

"My worker is very good. She's been with the YJS for a long time. She gets kids and she gets me. She's well clever."

"I'm in care. My PA [personal advisor] is rubbish. Doesn't do anything. Gives me false hope. My YJS worker can't do enough for me. She's always there whenever I'm in crisis. She's got food for me, helped me to not get angry as much and showed me ways of talking to people more decently."

"The workers are all positive, they make time to get to know you, they tell me it's ok to be sad, I trust them, and they respect me, and I respect them."

The parent stated:

"My son has ADHD and can't concentrate very well. The worker used different communication cards and a map thing to help him understand why he had stolen the bike. I can't believe how much he has learnt through the different way they have supported him."

"My son had hardly been to school for years. He had missed out on so much. Today he started college. The YJS helped him. I'm a proud mum."

Diversity

The information below sets out some of the data on staffing and diversity held by the YJS.

Of the staff working in the YJS, 59 per cent are female; 5 per cent are Black, Asian or minority ethnic; and 8 per cent have a declared disability. Of the children on the current caseload, 21 per cent are female; 78 per cent have a learning disability or learning difficulty or are subject to an education, health and care plan (EHCP); and 19 per cent have a child in need plan.³

The collection and analysis of management information and data on disproportionality, diversity and protected characteristics is underdeveloped. Once these have improved, and there is a forensic analysis of the data, the YJS will be better able to understand the comprehensive needs of the children it supervises. YJB data for 2021/2022 shows that 4 per cent of children sentenced or cautioned in Devon are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. However, the local Devon schools' data for the same period shows that the proportion is in fact 8 per cent. To its credit, the YJS routinely monitors disproportionate treatment and outcomes for children at several points in the system, including the scrutiny of stop and search figures from the police. However, it is not clear how this information is being integrated into developing services for children who may be being treated harshly. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of girls coming to the notice of the YJS, including for violent offending, but it is unclear how the YJS is using this knowledge. The YJS needs to explore and scrutinise the diversity factors of children given out-of-court disposals so that all protected characteristics are considered and understood.

The YJS strives to be a child-first, child-centred organisation that delivers personalised services, but there several areas of diversity work that need to be developed. The service has a Diversity Forum, which has the potential to improve performance. However, attendance has historically been poor, and the forum has made little progress following discussions. Additionally, the guidance provided in a range of policies and processes to identify and respond to diversity factors needs to be much more explicit.

Operationally, direct work with children that takes account of diversity needs is strong. We found that, in planning work for court cases, attention to diversity was done well in 14 out of the 15 inspected cases. Similarly, in 19 out of the 22 inspected out-of-court cases, diversity work in planning was also strong. Services provided by the SALT practitioner are excellent. The resources that have been designed to work with children who have specific diversity needs are exceptional. Additionally, practitioners have shown courage in exploring very personal circumstances relating to children's experiences of prejudice and discrimination. This has empowered children and given them the confidence to be bolder and more ambitious.

Staff recognise that there are gaps in their knowledge, skills, and abilities in dealing with all protected characteristics. This is encouraging, as it shows how determined they are to do better. The operational workforce largely reflects the diversity of the local population. There are very few non-white senior leaders in the partnership.

³ The information in this paragraph was supplied by Devon YJS.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 15 community sentences managed by the YJS.

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	87%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	87%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	73%

Assessment work to support children in desisting from further offending is a strength. Practitioners take a forensic approach to understanding a child's offending and make good use of historical and current information. They understand diversity needs and personal circumstances well. We found that practitioners had made some good use of information held by other agencies in their assessment enquiries. Additionally, they had robustly reviewed the child's level of maturity. However, victims' needs must be addressed more consistently.

On occasions, practitioners did not always include the voice of children and that of their parents and carers to inform what they believed were the causes of the child's offending.

Assessment activity sought to identify any risks to the child's safety and wellbeing in most cases. Practitioners appropriately collected relevant information from other agencies and used it well to better understand the risks to children's safety.

Assessments to identify all relevant factors linked to keeping other people safe were weaker. We found that practitioners had not identified all significant factors. In some cases, it was unclear to whom the child presented a risk and what the nature of this risk was. Disappointingly, practitioners did not consistently gather or verify information from other agencies. This included intelligence from the police and children's social care.

We found evidence of under-recording in a number of cases, especially in the assessment of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm. While practitioners were able to articulate a broader understanding of these aspects of casework, they needed prompts to help them to be more precise.

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

2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	93%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	87%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	87%

Planning to support children so that they do not commit further offences is a strength. We found timely plans in place that clearly identified what work needed to be carried out to achieve positive outcomes for children. The plans included a detailed account of the child's personal circumstances, including their broader familial situation. In addition, plans were informed by the trauma and adverse childhood experiences that children had experienced. This meant that practitioners identified appropriate services. We found some good examples of plans that included statutory and voluntary interventions.

Planning to keep the child safe is mostly done well. We found that practitioners had carefully considered how to keep children safe when they were carrying out their work with the YJS. For instance, they had identified the most suitable locations to meet children, and thoroughly risk-assessed reparation projects. Practitioners avoided meeting children where they might encounter other children with whom they had unhealthy relationships. Plans with other agencies were largely aligned, and each service provider was clear about the actions needed to keep the child safe. Practitioners are aware of and used tailored provision well. They had made referrals to and liaised with services such as speech and language therapy, Y-SMART and CAMHS. Controls to maximise safety had been examined well but contingency planning requires further attention.

Planning to keep other people safe is detailed. The responsibilities of other service providers in managing risk were clear. For example, there are information-sharing arrangements and attendance at a range of multi-agency meetings, including risk management panel meetings. Practitioners had identified external controls to mitigate risks. Interventions to address concerns about harmful behaviours were evident, including peer associations and weapons awareness courses. Practitioners had considered actual and potential victims in most of the required cases, and there was a clear emphasis on victims' safety. However, contingency planning was too often basic. Arrangements need to be much more explicit about the actions required if the level of risk increases.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁶ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	80%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	93%

Practitioners are competent at developing meaningful working relationships with children and their parents or carers. They use different methods to engage children, including home visits, walk and talk, in-person meetings, virtual sessions, and phone contact. This has allowed regular contact that is accessible for children. Practitioners are imaginative and bold in their work. They tailored work to the children's strengths to encourage them to participate. For example, they helped children to achieve pass grades at GCSE level by arranging one-to-one tutoring and set up personalised reparation projects. Delivery is strengths-based, with a focus on making the best use of community resources. Practitioners are aware of the services available and use them well. Work to meet diversity needs is done well, especially speech and language therapy.

There are well-established multi-agency arrangements in place to support children's safety and wellbeing. However, operational relationships with children's social care are challenging and not leading to positive outcomes for all children. Services were largely well-coordinated, and partners shared the responsibility for managing risk. Practitioners were responsive when risks to the child increased, and made adjustments to keep the child safe, such as securing alternative accommodation. Practitioners understood the risks to children, such as exploitation and the trauma this can cause. They set interventions and support in place, including working with specialist providers. Practitioners were swift in completing referrals and children had timely access to in-house provision from CAMHS, substance misuse services and the SALT worker.

Inspectors found that the partnership actively monitored risks to others. Agencies worked well together to share information, and each had a responsibility for keeping other people safe. Practitioners worked collaboratively with children and their parents/carers to help them to understand external controls and encourage them to see how these were helping to keep victims safe. Practitioners innovatively delivered a range of interventions, including driving offences, eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EDMR) therapy and weapons awareness.

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

Our rating⁷ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	93%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	87%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

The reviewing of work to judge the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending is impressive. Practitioners carry out both formal and dynamic informal reviews as personal circumstances change. Consideration of protective factors and diversity needs, as well as a robust examination of personal and familial circumstances, appear consistently in casework.

Practitioners consistently reviewed children's motivation and appropriately addressed any barriers that they identified whether structural or individual. Dialogue with children and their parents and carers was facilitated well in all the inspected cases. This helped practitioners to better understand the children's broader lived experiences and empowered parents and carers to become involved in their children's supervision.

The quality of reviewing activity in keeping children safe was mostly positive in the cases inspected. Where necessary, reviewing responded appropriately to changes linked to safety and wellbeing, information was obtained from other agencies that were involved, and plans were revised to support ongoing work. This systematic approach was helping children to understand how their wellbeing needs were changing. Furthermore, this insight was helping them to build on the progress they were making.

When necessary, practitioners responded to changes in factors related to risk of harm and amended plans to better protect others from harm. Again, this applied in all relevant inspected cases. Written reviews were completed in a timely manner in almost all cases, as required. This ensured that other practitioners involved in delivering risk of harm work had full access to all the current information.

In several of the inspected cases, and through conversations with practitioners, we found that when orders/requirements had formally come to an end, practitioners continued to offer voluntary contact to ensure that the child's assessed needs had been fully met. This was appreciated by the children and their parents and carers.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 23 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of 14 youth conditional cautions, five youth cautions, three community resolutions and one other disposal. We interviewed the case managers in 19 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating⁸ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	87%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	78%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	65%

Overall, analysis of desistance was done well, and practitioners had sought to understand the responsibility the child took for their behaviour, their attitude towards their offending and their reasons for becoming involved in offending. This approach enabled practitioners to go deeper into understanding how children's adverse childhood experiences may have resulted in their offending.

The attention that practitioners paid to the role that diversity factors had played in the children's offending was impressive. It was clear that time had been invested in building a clearer picture of the child's lived experience. Case managers actively sought information from other agencies. This helped them to consider patterns of previous behaviour and any barriers to engagement.

Assessment work that clearly identifies and analyses risks to the child's safety and wellbeing is weaker. Practitioners did not always make use of information they had gathered from other agencies, especially findings from their assessments. We did not agree with a number of risk classifications made by case managers and this should have been picked up by managers.

Assessment activity did not clearly identify and analyse the risk of harm to others posed by the child in far too many cases. We found several examples where case managers had underestimated the risk of harm to others. This included a failure to identify who is at risk and the nature of that risk. This is concerning, and the YJS needs to improve this area of work. Too often assessments lacked analysis and the context of risk of harm was not understood well enough.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating⁹ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	78%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	65%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	74%

Planning to support the child's desistance was variable. Plans did not always contain the key interventions or identify who would deliver these services and within what timescales. It was encouraging to find that, during the pandemic, interventions had been revised and personalised to meet children's needs. For example, some activity was to be completed at home and offending behaviour work was to be completed through 'walking and talking'. Once again, planning that combined information on diversity and personal circumstances was robust. This ensured that plans were directly relevant to meeting the children's needs.

Given that practitioners had spent considerable and meaningful time with children and their parents and carers, they had access to substantial amounts of information. This helped them to assess how prepared children were to engage with services.

Planning did not adequately promote the safety and wellbeing needs of all children. In these cases, there was insufficient evidence to reassure inspectors that all staff fully understood the need for comprehensive plans that would help to keep children safe. The information included in plans frequently lacked substance. Furthermore, practitioners had not aligned their plans with those prepared by children's social care. Additionally, contingency planning was poor in far too many cases.

Planning activity to promote other people's safety was again variable. Practitioners did not always liaise effectively with the police and the concerns of actual and potential victims did not come through in plans. Furthermore, there were delays in producing plans, and this led to an escalation in risk of harm to others.

Again, contingency planning was poor and the absence of robust arrangements led to the potential for further harm being caused to others. Given the variability in the analysis of assessment work, it is unsurprising that similar deficits were repeated in this area. Comprehensive plans that consider the safety of all actual and potential victims are needed. This will help practitioners to ensure that, in their supervisory work, they remain focused on reducing harm to others.

⁹ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating¹⁰ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	83%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	74%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	74%

The quality of services delivered to help children to not commit further offences was much better. We found examples where mental health support and speech and language interventions were provided, and these were improving the child's emotional wellbeing and supporting desistance. Reparation work was tailored well to the individual child and focussed on developing life skills. These findings were also evidenced from direct feedback given to us by children with whom we spoke.

Practitioners had regular contact with children and their parents and carers, with high levels of engagement. This was not limited to reviewing personal circumstances and gathering updates, but also involved delivering a range of interventions that supported the child's achievement and progress.

Service delivery to keep children safe was not consistently done well in every case. There were delays in responses from some partners, including children's social care. While these matters were correctly escalated, lengthy delays aggravated the adverse experiences of children. Practitioners made good use of specialist services, such as CAMHS and speech and language therapy. In several cases, case managers used the strategies provided by the speech and language therapist to support work on safety.

Work with partners to keep children safe was limited and coordination of this work was inconsistent. This needs immediate attention. Initial gaps in assessment and planning for this work were having a negative impact on service delivery. The YJS has some assurance and gatekeeping systems in place, but these were not working well enough because managers lacked capacity.

In a number of inspected cases, not enough services were delivered to keep other people safe. There was evidence of risk management meetings taking place, but these did not always lead to activity. The attention paid to the needs of potential and actual victims was particularly weak. However, in some cases, we found evidence of worksheets being completed, individualised knife crime awareness sessions taking place and effective restorative work being delivered.

¹⁰ The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. [A more detailed explanation is available in the data annexe.](#)

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Good

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

Strengths:

- Devon YJS has an out-of-court disposal policy titled 'Joint Youth Decision Making Process between D&C Constabulary and Devon Youth Offending Service'. The policy is supported by a range of guidance.
- Arrangements for out-of-court disposals are diverting a significant number of children from formal criminal justice processes and reducing the number of first-time entrants.
- The YJS has a well-established panel that supports joint decision-making. This is multi-agency, including partners from the YJS, police, health, CAMHS, speech and language specialists, and education, social care, alcohol and drug services. Partners work together to achieve fair and proportionate outcomes for children.
- There is an escalation process to manage disagreements between partners. It is concise and clear.
- The use of out-of-court disposals is monitored well to avoid overuse or inappropriate use.
- The youth intervention clinic, currently being piloted, is used well by the police to support and refer children to services that will help them to desist from offending. Management information is collected and used well to measure impact and learning.
- Arrangements for supporting victims of crime are strong.

Areas for improvement:

- Internal and external scrutiny arrangements for the out-of-court disposals scheme need to be more robust.
- The newly designed 370 police document does not explicitly include issues relating to safety and wellbeing. While it includes the need to take a trauma-informed approach, it needs to provide clearer guidance to support practitioners to ensure these issues are covered comprehensively.
- Report writers who have completed assessments, following an adjournment, do not attend the panel to present their findings and recommendations. This is a missed opportunity, given that assessments are carried out on these children because they have committed high gravity offences or who have complex needs or both.
- The voice of the child and their parents/carers is not always clearly evident in all cases that come to the decision-making panel.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



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

Good

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected two cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- There is a resettlement policy dated 2021. It puts the child first and is understood by those who are responsible for resettlement.
- The policy promotes the need to build on a child's strengths and their protective factors. This was evidenced well in the two cases we reviewed.
- Children in custody receive frequent visits, both in person and through video conferencing.
- YJS staff often provide transport for families, and the YJS contributes towards travel costs.
- Practitioners regularly write to children in custody and inspectors have seen evidence of children writing back.
- Release on temporary licence is used well to support reintegration into the community.
- Victim workers are creative in their work with children while in custody.

Areas for improvement:

- The resettlement policy does not include guidance on how Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement cases are to be dealt with.
- Practitioners are required to produce individualised plans, but they are not given sufficient guidance on what good diversity works in these plans entails.
- The bail and remand guidance policy is not dated and this makes it difficult to know how long it has been issued for.
- Although planned, there has been no specific resettlement training for staff for some time. Staff have largely relied on their own experiences and applied learning from other training they have attended.
- More guidance is needed in the resettlement policy to keep other people safe.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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