

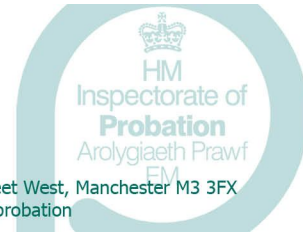


Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuenctid

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<i>From:</i>	Alan MacDonald, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
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Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Barnsley

The inspection was conducted from 25-27 July 2016 as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report is published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Context

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. We examined 20 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Barnsley Youth Offending Team (YOT). In all cases, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff. The published reoffending rate¹ was 30.6% for Barnsley, compared to 37.8% for England and Wales.

Summary

Overall, we found the YOT to be performing well with a highly skilled and tenacious group of practitioners. Staff were committed to the children and young people with whom they worked and demonstrated understanding of the issues and obstacles they needed to overcome on the path to leading offence-free lives. The team were well supported and directed by managers who were viewed as knowledgeable, competent and committed to the work with children and young people.

The YOT benefitted from the co-location of an impressive range of partner agencies: including mental health, educational support, learning and disability support, family mediation, Multisystemic Therapy, restorative justice and substance misuse services. Consequently, there was good evidence of a planned approach to the work based on the contributions of all partners involved in the delivery of the sentence of the court.

¹ The reoffending rate that was available during the fieldwork was published April 2016 and was based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the July 2013 and June 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice.

Commentary on the inspection in Barnsley:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. In almost all of the cases inspected sufficient effort was made to understand the reasons for the child or young person's offending. Assessments were of a high standard: comprehensive and timely. Where appropriate, they included the perspectives of the child or young person and their parents/carers and were drawn from all available sources of information. Importantly, these assessments were reviewed and kept up to date in a manner suitable to the demands of the individual case. An inspector recorded seeing: *"clear and extensive assessment work with a strong sense of the case manager pulling together a complex set of activities delivered by a range of disciplines"*.
- 1.2. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) are written to assist courts in coming to an appropriate decision based on the nature of the offence and the circumstances of the child or young person. In ten of the cases inspected a PSR had been written and they were mostly of a good standard, almost all providing appropriate advice concerning the community options available to the court in sentencing.
- 1.3. There was sufficient planning of work to support children and young people to avoid further offending in most of the cases inspected. The practice of holding a Case Planning Meeting of all involved agencies was exemplary and provided strong evidence of management involvement and oversight of all relevant cases. This was supported by individual planning documents which were agreed with the child or young person and, where possible, their parents/carers. In one case an inspector noted: *"the plan was agreed with the young person using tools which engaged him in setting his own objectives and this fed through into the referral order contract"*.
- 1.4. In almost every case inspected assessment and planning work was appropriately reviewed and, therefore, maintained an appropriate focus on the work that needed to be done in order to reduce the risk of further offending.
- 1.5. We found evidence of sufficient assessment and planning in all custody cases inspected and it is worth noting that the use of custodial sentencing in the Barnsley area has reduced during the last two years; from a rate markedly above the national average to one which is very slightly above the figure of 0.40 per 1,000 of the 10 to 17 year old population. This reflects the growing credibility of Barnsley YOT in presenting professional, relevant and authoritative plans to the sentencing courts.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. In nine of the ten PSRs we inspected there was an accurate assessment of the risk of harm to others. Understanding of the risk of harm presented by the child or young person was followed with a plan for work to manage the risk and improve the individual's life prospects. As one inspector noted: *"there is a good PSR, which was used for sentencing, this recognised the difficulties this young woman presents, and balances this with the risk of harm to the public"*.
- 2.2. In most cases inspected there was a sufficient assessment of the risk of harm and in almost all cases there was a clear plan of action which was reviewed at appropriate intervals.
- 2.3. There was good evidence of involvement of a range of agencies in managing the risk of harm to others that the child or young person presented. This particularly included police, social care and mental health support. Further evidence of an appropriate level of review was found in cases where the risk of harm or likelihood of reoffending appeared to

increase during the course of supervision. In these cases a multi-agency Youth Priority Group meeting was convened in order to create a revised plan and make sure that the plan was delivered.

- 2.4. In cases where risk of harm was identified, there was consistent evidence of active communication with the range of other agencies involved with the child or young person.
- 2.5. In over two-thirds of cases where there was a known or identifiable potential victim the risk of harm to those individuals was managed effectively. In two cases victim work was planned insufficiently and in one case the inspector found that: *"there is a specific victim of this offence, but there is no explicit plan in place should A meet him in the community"*.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Safeguarding and, where applicable, vulnerability needs were clearly and appropriately explained in all of the PSRs we inspected.
- 3.2. In almost all cases there was a sufficient assessment and plan for the identified safeguarding and vulnerability needs of the case. There was strong evidence of a partnership approach that, in individual cases, sought to manage both the vulnerability and risk of harm present. In one case the inspector commented that the risk of harm and vulnerability management: *"draws on the full multi-agency response to manage Y's risk, including police markers on the addresses, support for mum, and intervention for Y"*.
- 3.3. In the cases we inspected there was good evidence of effective management oversight of vulnerability concerns and that all case managers were fully conversant with the relevant local policies.
- 3.4. In all of the three custodial cases inspected there was a clear assessment and plan with regard to the child or young person's vulnerability throughout the sentence. An inspector recorded the particularly impressive approach adopted by one case manager thus: *"The work with this young man was detailed and complex, involving a number of partner agencies. When the case manager sat with him, to write his intervention plan, she knew that he might be overwhelmed with all of the work that was going on to support him. She focused the intervention plan on what his three key priorities were, and he responded to this as it seemed to give him some control."*

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. We found that, in almost all cases inspected, there was a sensitive and responsive approach to the diverse needs of the children and young people with whom Barnsley YOT worked.
- 4.2. Where a PSR was required, the child or young person and their parents/carers had been appropriately and sufficiently involved in the PSR preparation and had also been suitably involved in subsequent assessment and planning processes. Barriers to engagement with supervision were identified and overcome in almost all cases.
- 4.3. Due to the strength of partnership arrangements the case managers were able, quickly and appropriately, to secure the support of other agencies in the delivery of the sentence. This was particularly notable in relation to accessing substance misuse and mental health services due to the co-location of professional colleagues. In one of the custody cases the following practice was identified: *"X had received visits from his substance misuse worker and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service worker in custody and it was clear that the staff working with X were working closely together and sharing information."*

- 4.4. In five of the cases inspected the child or young person was returned to court due to non-compliance with the requirements of the sentence. In most instances this led to the continuation of the sentence. While the sanction of breach was justifiable in each case, it might have been possible for the Barnsley YOT to consider a wider range of enforcement and engagement strategies prior to a return to court.

Operational management

It is evident that Barnsley YOT had the benefit of a skilled, knowledgeable and committed group of staff. They were ably supported by their local managers and case managers had confidence in the supervision and oversight of their work. The practice of holding multi-agency Case Planning Meetings for every case was one that contributed to high quality assessment, planning and review of the work being undertaken. This was viewed by the inspectors as exemplary practice and, importantly, it was an approach which was systematically and uniformly deployed in the management of all cases.

Key strengths

- The inspectors formed the view that this was a skilled, experienced and knowledgeable staff group which demonstrated committed engagement to the needs of the children and young people with whom they work.
- There was a well-deployed approach to the management oversight of cases, including multi-agency Case Planning Meetings chaired by the relevant manager.
- There was an impressive range of partnership agencies involved in supporting the work of the YOT and in most instances the workers involved were based in the same office building.
- Pre-sentence reports, further assessments, planning and review were timely, accurate and of a good standard in almost all of the cases inspected.
- Cases were well managed with consistently high standards of recording demonstrated in the inspection sample.

Areas requiring improvement

- Management oversight should seek to achieve appropriate victim safety plans in all cases where there is an identifiable or potential victim.
- Management should develop re-engagement strategies such as enforcement panels to increase compliance with the sentence of the court without recourse to breach action.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YOT to facilitate and engage with this inspection. Please pass on our thanks, and make sure that they are made fully aware of these inspection findings.

If you have any further questions about the inspection please contact the lead inspector, who was Mike Ryan. He can be contacted at michael.ryan@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07789 927667.

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Note 1: As an independent inspectorate, HMI Probation provides assurance to Ministers and the public on the effectiveness of work with those who have offended or are likely to offend, promotes continuous improvement by the organisations that we inspect and contributes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Note 2: We gather evidence against the SQS criteria, which are available on the HMI Probation website - <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation>.

Note 3: To request a paper copy of this report, please contact HMI Probation Communications at communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 0161 240 5336.