



HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Bracknell Forest

HM Inspectorate of Probation, March 2024



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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Bracknell Forest Youth Justice Team (YJT) 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, Bracknell YJT was rated as 'Good'. We also reviewed the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was not rated because there were no resettlement cases within the timescale covered by the inspection.

The quality of intervention that children receive when they have a court or out-of-court disposal in Bracknell Forest is impressive. There is a real understanding of 'child first' principles, but this is not at the expense of managing risk to others effectively and maintaining a good recognition of the needs of victims.

Practitioners often go above and beyond expectations and displayed high-quality assessment skills, demonstrating a keen ability to analyse risks and support strengths effectively. Planning is proportionate and focused, and sequenced well to ensure good engagement from children. Interventions are delivered promptly and there is good coordination with other agencies to ensure maximum effectiveness. Review activity is also undertaken well when changes in circumstance occur.

All of this activity is backed up by a skilled and enthusiastic management team and a wider, often integrated, partnership approach that wants the best outcomes for children by delivering the 'right intervention at the right time'.

The broader partnership delivering youth justice interventions must not rest on its laurels though. The strategic youth justice management board is only now beginning to become effective and has yet to demonstrate that this efficacy can be maintained. Previously, several important key partners, particularly the probation service, have not engaged satisfactorily. If the board is to develop, then all strategic partners need to improve their understanding of the profile and needs of children open to the YJT and given high caseloads, the capacity of YJT practitioners to continue delivering highly effective interventions.

Work is also required to maintain the effectiveness of out-of-court disposal delivery. Crucially, the police need to develop a more coherent child-first approach to this activity with both the YJT and other youth justice services in the Thames Valley area as a matter of urgency and expedite the introduction of Outcome 22¹ to ensure proportionate outcomes for all children. Locally, the partnership also needs to understand its out-of-court disposal data more effectively.

If these actions are addressed with pace, the children in Bracknell Forest may well experience an even better offer of intervention than the high-quality one they are already receiving.



Sue McAllister

Interim Chief Inspector of Probation

¹ Police deferral of a prosecution pending engagement with an intervention activity.

Ratings

Bracknell Forest Youth Justice Team
Fieldwork started November 2023

Score 28/36

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

Outstanding



2.2 Planning

Outstanding



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



2.4 Reviewing

Good



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



Recommendations

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

The Bracknell Forest Youth Justice Team manager should:

1. work with partners to ensure sufficient performance data is produced and is effectively analysed to provide a strong understanding of the needs and profile of children working with the YJT.

The Youth Justice Management Board should:

2. review resourcing across all services delivering youth justice interventions in Bracknell Forest to ensure there is sufficient resilience and capacity to continue delivering high-quality work
3. monitor the attendance and engagement of all partners at the board and ensure they all actively advocate for children open to the YJT in their own organisations
4. satisfy itself that there is a comprehensive and integrated review of the Thames Valley Police and YJT out-of-court disposal partnership agreement and guidance that effectively covers issues of disproportionality across all protected characteristics and firmly embeds an understanding of trauma, risk of harm, and safety and wellbeing.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Bracknell Forest YJT over a period of a week, beginning 27 November 2023. We inspected post-court cases where the sentence began between 028 November 2022 and 22 September 2023 and out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 28 November 2022 and 22 September 2023. The YJT has had no resettlement cases for three years. We also conducted 11 interviews with case managers.

Bracknell Forest is one of six unitary authority areas within Berkshire in Thames Valley in Southern England. It covers three towns, Bracknell Forest, Sandhurst, and Crowthorne, and includes the areas of North Ascot, Warfield, and Winkfield. The population of Bracknell Forest is 125,174, with a 10-17-year-old population of 12,885 (46 per cent of the overall child population). Of these young people, 6,521, are male and 6,364 are female.²

The overall population in Bracknell Forest has increased by 10 per cent in the last 10 years. This has contributed to increasing the diversity of children living in the area, many of whom have a complexity of need. There are 93 known first languages spoken in local authority schools in the area and while 14.9 per cent of secondary school pupils have special educational needs or an education, health, and care plan (EHCP), this rises to 53.6 per cent for children open to the YJT at the time of our inspection. Furthermore, the last full inspection of children's services special educational need and disability (SEND) provision highlighted significant areas of weakness in the area's practice, and this has since been a priority for activity within the authority.

Hospital admissions for self-harm in children in Bracknell Forest have increased in recent years, especially among girls. Such emotional and mental health needs are reflected in the proportion of children on the YJT's current caseload, with 22.2 per cent, having identified emotional or mental health issues. The number of care-experienced children open to the YJT has risen in the last six months and, at the point of inspection, 25.3 per cent of the YJT's caseload were looked after in a placement within or outside of the area. The service itself noted that it is working with increasing numbers of children at the edge of care.

Children's services were rated 'outstanding' in the last Ofsted inspection. The YJT is co-located structurally and physically within children's services. The head of service has a portfolio that also includes the Multi agency Safeguarding Hub and Children's Social Care's Duty and Assessment Team.

The YJT shares police, probation, and Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) areas with the eight other Thames Valley YJTs and this has led to a collaborative approach to youth justice overall in the area. The local youth court is in Reading.

Caseload trends have seen increasing numbers of out-of-court disposals making up the bulk of the YJT caseload - 80 per cent in 2022/23. The YJT also has a strong prevention offer for children displaying concerning, non-offending behaviours.

² Office for National Statistics. (December 2022). UK Population estimates, mid-2021.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJT and conducted 14 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 YJT vision embraces the approach of providing 'the right service at the right time'. We saw evidence during fieldwork that this had been put into operation.
- The youth justice management board is chaired by an independent chair with an extensive background in the strategic oversight of youth justice services.
- There is a board induction and comprehensive terms of reference detailing expectations, roles, and responsibilities of board members.
- The board has shown increasing signs of stability and efficacy in the last six months, reflective of a change in board chair arrangements.
- The YJT is well represented across strategic and operational partnerships, both within the local authority and across the region.
- The YJT has a stable and knowledgeable leadership team who are well liked and respected within the authority and among partners, and who provide an effective link with the board.
- The YJT has a racial disproportionality action plan in place. Review of this plan and completion of a disproportionality audit have resulted in effective practice. The YJT has a good understanding of diversity need overall and this is reflected within operational delivery.

Areas for improvement:

- The management board does not yet fully understand the needs and challenges facing children working with the youth justice team. Its lack of access to a comprehensive and granular suite of performance data means its knowledge of the needs of this cohort is underdeveloped.
- Attendance at board meetings has recently stabilised, but previously has not been of a sufficient frequency or consistency from key partners such as police, probation, and education. This has affected the board's efficacy and only now is it starting to overcome these deficits.

- The lack of attendance by appropriate strategic probation representation means it is difficult for the board to understand the operational impact caused by the ongoing lack of a seconded resource.
- The board has not always been prompt in holding partners to account for matters that could affect operational delivery. For example, the board should have been more proactive in identifying sufficiency of speech and language therapist (SALT) resourcing earlier.
- The board was overly passive and reactive in its approach to providing strategic oversight to the YJT. Operational progress and quality were the result of the youth justice manager and team taking the initiative rather than drive and motivation from the board.
- There is no evidence that the voice of the child is effectively heard at board meetings, and this is recognised by the chair as a priority for development.
- The collaborative approach taken across the Thames Valley region has clear strengths but can hamper the development of bespoke strategies for Bracknell Forest children - for example, the failure of Thames Valley Police to consult regional YJSs satisfactorily on their out-of-court disposal policy or discuss potential changes to police secondee arrangements with the management board has negatively impacted upon the YJT.
- Action on the disproportionality action plan has mainly been completed by the YJT, with actions outstanding from external partners - police, education, and the drug action team. The management board needs to ensure these actions are completed.
- Measures to mitigate potential risks to the service need to be reviewed. For example, although there was consensus across a range of stakeholders and staff that the biggest risk to service delivery was succession planning, this was not referenced in the management board's strategic risk log.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- Staff are well motivated, skilled, and keen to do a good job. This is a stable and well-established service, that is well respected by partners.
- The management team are knowledgeable and experienced and provide crucial support and guidance to practitioners. We saw evidence that issues were escalated with satisfactory resolutions achieved.
- A considered approach is taken to the allocation of work, and the needs of both child and practitioner are understood well.
- Volunteers are well skilled and well utilised by the service.
- A suite of additional specialist workers linked to the team ensure that children's needs are mostly well catered for. Children with health needs are particularly well served.
- Supervision is regular, meaningful, and impactful. Actions within appraisals have led to tangible changes in practice. Joint supervision arrangements ensure knowledge is shared across services.
- 40 per cent of the staff come from a minority ethnic background, a higher proportion than children within the current caseload. This is reflective of a positive approach to meeting diverse need that we saw overall in Bracknell Forest.
- Good practice is recognised by managers and staff feel valued.
- The training offer is good; we saw evidence that staff were encouraged to develop themselves by undertaking targeted training opportunities.
- Domain two and three ratings were very impressive overall and indicate that, despite resilience and capacity concerns, staffing arrangements have facilitated strong outcomes for children.

Areas for improvement:

- Caseloads were at the higher end of what we have seen during this inspection programme so far. Capacity was also sometimes impacted by part-time working arrangements, and a number of staff felt workload was difficult to manage. Additionally, we saw some evidence that specialist staff linked to the service had issues with workload capacity. A review of resourcing within the service and its partners would be prudent to ensure that there is sufficient resilience in staffing arrangements.
- The partnership underestimates the impact of not having a specialist probation officer seconded to the team and the support they can offer to older or higher risk children. Alternative arrangements have been in place for seven years, and so the benefits of specialist secondment arrangements have been forgotten.

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:

- The small number of children accessing youth justice services in the authority means that the YJT has a degree of agility when it comes to identifying appropriate services for them, particularly if there has been a temporary spike in a particular cohort.
- Where analysis of the children's profile has been undertaken well - such as with those at risk of serious youth violence or exploitation - it has resulted in tangible improvements to services on offer. Work to address exploitation is particularly well coordinated across the authority.
- Reviews of the racial profile of children open to the YJT have been meaningful and resulted in a good understanding of services required to ensure that disproportionality does not become a factor in this cohort.
- A clear multi-agency approach is evident and, while there are some issues with capacity, there are no apparent gaps in services.
- There has been a focus on tackling SEND needs within the authority. The YJT has been particularly active in this regard, gaining a Youth Justice SEND Quality Mark for its work.
- SALT provision and support ensure a good understanding of the speech, language, and communication needs of the YJT cohort of children.
- There are several multi-agency forums and meetings that facilitate communication between services. These are well attended and give assurance that services can provide the right intervention at the right time. The YJT has taken a proactive approach to developing forums that meet the needs of its cohort of children. For example, the risk focus and education focus panels provide an opportunity for services to work collegiately.
- Mainstream and forensic child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provide a good offer for children with emotional and mental health needs.
- Service level agreements have been developed with some partners, and those with schools have been effective in increasing information exchange; this had previously been identified as a challenge.
- Implementation and delivery for both domains two and three were rated 'Outstanding', indicating many strengths within the partnership offer.

Areas for improvement:

- While the partnership is data rich, not all of it has been analysed sufficiently for a granular understanding of the needs of children to be fully understood; for example, there has been insufficient analysis of any differences in

characteristics between children in the prevention cohort and in the community resolution cohort.

- Further analysis is required to establish why numbers of care-experienced children entering the youth justice system have increased in the last six months, and whether services are meeting the needs of children at risk of offending and those on the edge of care. Positively, the Local Authority and Safeguarding Partnership Board has already commissioned such activity and it is now underway.
- The partnership should ensure that there is sufficient capacity within specialist provision, such as SALT, CAMHS or probation service support, and that arrangements are reviewed more effectively to ensure there is sufficient resource for the needs of the YJT cohort of children.
- Greater consideration of co-commissioning opportunities, potentially with other YJSs, may be prudent given the small size of the YJT.

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 service has an appropriate range of policies and procedures that are accessible to staff and are well understood.
- There is appropriate consideration of diversity need in policies and procedures. Work to analyse the reasons for potential disproportionality provides assurance that these policies can be 'living' documents which staff can use as tools for reflection on practice.
- Escalation processes are embedded and utilised well by the YJT.
- The 'hub and spoke' model, implemented following the closure of the old office, works well. Staff are more integrated with other services, thus facilitating service delivery and ensuring children are seen in appropriate venues.
- The installation of medical equipment at some venues was the direct result of consideration of health and safety needs in the case of potential serious youth violence risks. It is a good example of proactive planning to improve safety measures.
- ICT provision is reliable and promotes good working practices. There is good information exchange between the YJT, health, and other children's services teams.
- There is a participation strategy in place. It is not yet fully delivering the impact envisaged, but the YJT is aware of this and is taking actions to develop it further.
- There is a thorough suite of regular and meaningful QA activity and evidence that bespoke multi-agency exercises are undertaken where things have not gone to plan and there is learning.

Areas for improvement:

- The Times Square office is sometimes used to see children because it is centrally located and accessible, but it is corporate and not a child-friendly venue. Consideration might be given to sourcing an alternative central venue for children if needed or ensuring the meeting rooms in the Community Hub better reflects the needs of children as well as adult community users.
- The analysis of management information is underdeveloped and would benefit from additional capacity. This would assist in identifying trends or spikes affecting provision and ensure children's diverse needs are met.
- Important actions relating to the sharing by the police of key data on children with no further action - highlighted in a comprehensive multi-agency audit in early 2023 - have not been followed up satisfactorily.
- The partnership's understanding of victim data is underdeveloped, and the clear challenge faced in gaining victim consent needs addressing as a priority.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

A YJT children's participation strategy aims to deliver a systematic approach to hearing the voices of children and take action in response.

Participation activity is undertaken across three levels. Level one is about ensuring that children engage in their assessment, planning, implementation, and review activity. Level two is about strengthening feedback and communication channels, and level three aims to ensure there is tangible evidence of children's participation impacting at a strategic level.

We saw some efficacy with this approach, such as feedback on venues and contributions to the violence reduction unit's strategy. However, the service realises its overall approach is still a work in progress. For example, more systematic feedback to the management board is needed. The YJT is aware of challenges and the activity required to develop the approach.

The YJT does keep copies of feedback provided by children, parents, and carers. The copies provided to us by the YJT were positive.

The YJT contacted, on our behalf, children who had open cases at the time of the inspection, to gain their consent for a text survey. We delivered the survey independently to the 21 children and parents and carers who consented, and 12 people replied. We also spoke directly to two children during fieldwork.

Feedback from children and parents and carers was positive and reflected the relationship-based approaches that we saw within the cases we inspected. One child noted:

"My caseworker has communicated with me on a respectful level and helped me with difficulties I have had. With the team in general they have helped me realise what I did to offend was wrong and are helping me around this. I've had some change happen recently and they have helped me regarding it and understood why it has happened. They are helpful, kind, and respectful altogether."

We saw good evidence of engagement with parents and carers during our inspection and this too was reflected well in responses to our questions, with one parent reflecting on interactions with her son's caseworker that:

"She was amazing - she was so good with her words, she stayed calm. She always knew the right things to say and how far to challenge my son. She was very patient and knew how to have a laugh, which helped with the connection."

While the feedback overall was overwhelmingly positive, it is of note that neither of the two children who we spoke to during fieldwork said that they had access to equipment or materials needed to help them complete work with the YJT. This reflects the YJT's own analysis that, while it is undertaking much positive activity to increase child participation, there is still work to do to ensure a consistently robust and systematic approach.

Diversity

In Bracknell Forest, the most recent Youth Justice Board (YJB) annual data (2021/22) indicates that, when comparing the offending population with the general population of those aged 10-17, Black or minority ethnic children are not overrepresented; 18 per cent of the youth population are from a minority ethnic background whereas only 13 per cent of the YJT caseload are from this background.³

The most recent YJB data (2021/22) indicates that the YJT's annual female caseload was six per cent. However, the current female caseload is 35.7 per cent. The small number of children receiving YJT support means that slight fluctuations in throughput can have significant impact on percentages; this makes mitigations against disproportionality more difficult to deliver due to the greater likelihood of a sudden spike or drop. Nonetheless, we saw evidence of bespoke activity for children if a spike occurred. For example, additional support had been provided for girls within the recent increase, and there was an attempt to understand the reasons for recent aggressive behaviours noted with some girls.

Forty per cent of staff within the YJT are from a minority ethnic background. However, staff recognise they are a majority white team and want to consolidate greater understanding across the team about issues relating to racial diversity. All case managers are female. If a child requests a male worker, the service will utilise male volunteers or practitioners from other services, though the absence of male case managers within the YJT is stark.

Staff have had a suite of diversity training, including on unconscious bias, to help them understand and support children's diverse needs. We found staff had reflected on their training, recognised the diverse needs of children well, and used this knowledge constructively to plan interventions and deliver bespoke approaches based on diverse need.

An impressive disproportionality audit was completed by the YJT in early 2023. As a result, the YJT reports improvements in assessments relating to children's identity and sense of self, with greater consideration of the impact of familial offending, attitudes to education, and how this can impact on children, as well as how others perceive them. Our case inspections backed up this assertion of good-quality practice, and we saw evidence of professional curiosity – where staff were proactive in wanting to find out more about children's diverse needs.

Further analysis is required to establish why numbers of care-experienced children entering the youth justice system have increased in the last six months, and whether services are meeting the needs of children at risk of offending and those on the edge of care.

Learning or cognitive disabilities were a factor for many of the children we inspected. Staff had been proactive in identifying the impact of these disabilities, and one of the aims of developing the YJT education meeting was to progress a multi-agency offer of support for these children.

³ The most recent YJB annual data (2021/22) suggested that 19 per cent of the YJT's caseload's ethnicity was unknown. We had access to more up-to-date information on site and were reassured that this percentage was due to previous recording and reporting issues. There is currently a recorded ethnicity for all YJT children as recording processes had improved. The current YJT minority ethnic caseload sits at 14.3 per cent, which is still below the proportion for all children living in the authority.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at six community sentences managed by the YJT.

2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁴ 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?	83%

We identified a high degree of complex need for the children within our case sample. This was well understood by practitioners, and their analysis of desistance, risk to the child, and risk to others was undertaken well throughout assessment activity. This analysis always took into consideration important factors such as childhood trauma and care status, wherever required. It is of particular note that three of the six children we inspected were care-experienced, reflecting the increase of children within this cohort open to the YJT.

Assessment analysed diversity considerations sufficiently in every case inspected. Inspectors noted good evidence of the child's diverse needs being considered by the practitioner, with practitioners engaging proactively in conversations with the child. This assisted them in understanding the unique impact of diversity for each child, and this was then incorporated effectively into each child's assessment. Assessment activity was well coordinated with partners, and there was evidence that information from sources such as children's services, MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements), health, and multi-agency forums was utilised effectively.

There was consideration of the wishes of the victim in every relevant case that we inspected, and we were pleased to note that practitioners identified and analysed risks posed to others well, providing assurance that the service had a good understanding of how to identify and address these risks.

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?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	83%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

Planning activity was generally undertaken well, with a good balance on supporting desistance, and keeping the child and other people safe. Planning was proportionate, prioritised, and focused. We saw a positive emphasis on planning to overcome structural barriers, such as education provision, which could potentially inhibit the child's progress during the YJT's intervention.

Four of the six children inspected were aged 14 or under, so it was pleasing to see that sufficient consideration was given to the child's maturity, ability, and motivation to change in every case that we inspected. This reflected the personalised approach that we saw throughout much of the service's work.

Consideration of victims was a particularly strong element of the YJT's planning activity. We saw evidence that victims were consulted by the service's victim's worker, and in every relevant case, planning gave sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim, as well as addressed specific concerns related to actual and potential victims. We also saw examples of non-offence-related risks being addressed at the planning stage and this gave assurance that potential risks to others was always at the forefront of the YJT's thinking.

Contingency planning was strong and was done well in every case we inspected and ensured that the child themselves and others would be safeguarded in the event of circumstances deteriorating. This reflected a forward-thinking ethos within the service; practitioners were always thinking 'child first' and what measures could be put in place to sustain positive outcomes for the children they worked with.

The children we inspected were vulnerable; five out of six had correctly been assessed to be at high risk for their own safety and wellbeing. Planning to safeguard children in these circumstances can be difficult as it invariably involves liaison with multiple professionals. The integrated approach across the local authority was evident in the cases we inspected, with the exception of one case where planning did not effectively consider the child's multiple needs and was not sequenced satisfactorily.

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?	83%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	83%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	83%

The implementation of services to support the child's desistance was undertaken well. There was a focus on ensuring needs such as accommodation or education, training, and employment (ETE) were met.

We saw a strong collaborative approach with children and parents or carers in every instance, and concerted efforts were made to support children to engage with the requirements of their intervention in every case. Where enforcement action was required, it was undertaken well in every relevant instance, and inspectors reported a balanced, considered and proportionate approach by practitioners.

The only concern noted in the delivery of services to address desistance was in one instance where a child had moved in and out of area. This is not an uncommon difficulty faced by YJSs and reflective of the complex nature of the children that they work with. Bracknell Forest YJT may wish to evaluate whether this could be a factor in affecting the delivery of positive outcomes for children going forward.

Implementation and delivery of services to safeguard the child were also done well. We saw good links with the Makesafe Service and a coordinated approach to addressing issues such as exploitation and sexual health. This approach to keeping children safe reflected the ambitions articulated to us by the Makesafe manager and practitioners.

This coordinated, collegiate approach was replicated in work delivered to keep others safe, which was also undertaken well by the YJT. In particular, we saw evidence that the service's well-attended risk focus meetings were used effectively to coordinate the delivery of relevant, risk-focused activity, such as curfew and 'whereabouts' monitoring.

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.

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	83%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	83%

Inspectors identified that reviewing activity did not always lead to necessary adjustments in ongoing plans to keep the child safe when there were identified changes to the child's circumstances. However, where we saw that it did lead to adjustments, it was done so frequently, as circumstances changed, and this led to tangible improvements in plans and interventions. This included activity such as the addition of a doorstep curfew for one child to help monitor missing episodes or escalating concerns when the response from a social worker indicated no role for social care. This escalation led to a reconsideration of circumstances and the child was subsequently made subject to child in need planning.

Reviewing also sufficiently focused on supporting the child's desistance and in all but one instance review activity led to necessary adjustments to the ongoing plan of work. In particular, we saw evidence that the service's education focus meeting was well utilised to ensure that attendance concerns and SEND needs were prioritised appropriately by the partnership.

Reviewing activity continued to take a strengths-based approach, and children and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved in this activity in five of the six cases inspected.

There were some concerns regarding the YJT's identification and response in review activity to keep others safe; it was only undertaken sufficiently in three of the relevant five cases where there had been changes. There was though, input from other agencies in four of the five relevant cases where this input was required, and necessary adjustments were made in three of the four relevant cases. Overall, inspectors indicated that this activity was undertaken sufficiently well. Risks were discussed in and out of supervision between practitioner and line manager, and high-risk meetings were used well to share information with partners.

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 six cases managed by the YJT that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of three youth conditional cautions, one youth caution, and two community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in five cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	83%

The assessment of desistance needs and the analysis of how to keep the child and other people safe was strong in all but one case inspected.

Children's diversity needs were assessed well, and consideration of cultural heritage was evident. This provided a good sense of how children's diverse needs had impacted upon their offending behaviour and how children's self-identity had been taken into consideration. This understanding of the structural barriers impacting on a child's background can be crucial in understanding how the partnership can best meet their needs. There was a good understanding of children's ETE needs and the focus on understanding these challenges reflected broader authority-wide strategic priorities, as well as activity carried out at the YJT's multi-agency education forum.

Classification of safety and wellbeing was appropriate, and this was supported by defensible, well-reasoned rationales.

Assessment and analysis of safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others reflected a mature approach to analysing risk. This enabled practitioners to maintain a 'child-first' focus, centring on a child's strengths and protective factors, alongside identifying factors to address and manage concerns and risks. Where the risks to the child and risks to others were assessed well it was because there was an understanding and analysis of the intersectionality between risk factors. Factors such as missing episodes and exposure to situations which increased the child's risk of being exploited, alongside the child's behaviours towards others, such as carrying weapons, were well considered and evidenced.

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.

Outstanding

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	83%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	83%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	83%

Planning activity was an area of strength for the YJT. We saw proportionate and sequenced planning which addressed desistance factors and supported the safety of the child and others. The only instance where planning was not done well was when it was delayed and this contributed to a lack of timely, coordinated safety planning with appropriate partners, such as children's social care and probation.

We saw positive efforts to engage relevant partner agencies in planning to keep both the child and others safe. This approach chimed with the collegiate approach that partner agencies told us about and reflected the positive impact that co-location with other children's services teams appeared to be having on practice. For example, where the child displayed evidence of neurodiversity, practitioners enlisted support from specialist partners to assist in developing a meaningful plan for the child. Consideration was also given to how partners could contribute to exit strategy planning to ensure progress could be maintained post intervention. This is a vital area for consideration given the short-term nature of interventions within out-of-court disposals and the need to maintain consistent support for the child going forward.

We saw evidence that children and parents or carers were effectively involved in planning activity. This co-production of plans guaranteed that everyone understood what would be done during an intervention, the role individuals and partners needed to play in ensuring a successful outcome, and how all involved could be held to account.

Planning that took into account the needs and wishes of victims may need further review by the YJT, so the service can assure itself they are doing all they can to take victim's wishes into account. It is vital the YJT ensures that victims voices are heard when producing plans to address offending behaviour. This is not only to enable an appropriate focus upon victims' safety but to also provide assurance there is work to support the child in understanding the impact of their actions upon victims.

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.

Outstanding

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

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

In every case inspected, service delivery was sufficiently focused to support the child's desistance. All options available to children on statutory court orders were available for out-of-court disposals, and we saw a number of interventions which were strengths-based, and which helped children understand their behaviour.

All interventions that we inspected took into account diversity issues and reflected the wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents or carers. All interventions gave sufficient attention to enabling the child's engagement and facilitated access to other mainstream services.

Work undertaken to keep the child safe was delivered effectively in every case that we inspected. This work always involved other agencies, where required, and was well coordinated. In particular, work to address contextual risks was undertaken well both by the YJT and via the Makesafe adolescent team. It was also noticeable that if a child was considered to be at risk of harm there was a robust multi-agency response and offer of support. This gave reassurance that the service was committed to ensuring external safety and wellbeing barriers that might impact on the child's desistance were addressed promptly and effectively, giving the child the best chance possible to engage and complete their intervention with the YJT.

The implementation and delivery of services to support the safety of others were undertaken equally well and were sufficient in every case that we inspected. Consideration was given to non-convicted behaviours where there were patterns of behaviour, and we judged that sufficient attention was given to protecting all actual or potential victims in every case that we inspected.

Additionally, there was a 'golden thread' running through some activity whereby a therapeutic approach - noted within activity delivered to keeping the child safe - was also replicated when delivering work to keep others safe. The focus on tackling the child's own trauma was seen as key in ensuring others were kept safe.

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 annex.](#)

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

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:

- The YJT has a detailed internal operational policy that gives clear guidance to practitioners.
- There is a clear prevention and diversion approach in evidence. Much of the YJT's work falls within these parameters and the inspected case data suggests that practitioners are doing pre-court work to an impressive standard.
- The adolescent 'Makesafe' triage panel provides an effective forum to discuss and implement interventions for the complex adolescents who need robust structured support at the out-of-court disposal stage.

Areas for improvement:

- Working arrangements between police and the YJT need to be more integrated. For example, there is no co-produced protocol between the YJT and police. Thames Valley police guidance is out of date and is not child friendly; it needs to be revised urgently. This recommendation to Thames Valley police has been made in another recent inspection within the region and has not yet been progressed. It is essential that the guidance considers issues of disproportionality across all protected characteristics, and firmly embeds an understanding of trauma, risk of harm, and safety and wellbeing.
- In the absence of the option of Outcome 22 as a substantive decision (where police defer a prosecution pending the child's engagement with an intervention), there has been little consideration of whether too many children are potentially being given street-delivered community resolutions. This highlights the importance of developing a more integrated approach to policy development.
- The ratio of children receiving community resolutions is not unduly high within the context of overall court disposal and out-of-court disposal ratios, and reflects the diversionary approach taken locally. However, these disposals constitute 80 per cent of the YJT's caseload and so there need to be better arrangements to assess the effectiveness of the local approach in practice. Analysis and understanding of the current use and effectiveness of community resolutions are limited. There needs to be a more cohesive understanding of where there are challenges, such as gaining victim consent for community resolutions. More granular data is needed to achieve this goal.
- The joint decision-making process needs to be reviewed to ensure the voice of external partners is heard at the out-of-court disposal decision-making

meeting; currently the process utilises available feedback, but crucial partner agencies' involvement is too passive.

- Given that a significant number of out-of-court disposal decisions are made outside of the joint decision-making process, there needs to be a more robust means of ensuring that diversity needs are always considered if the decision is a single agency one.
- There is minimal evidence of child or parent or carer feedback into the development of out-of-court disposal policy and provision.
- The external scrutiny panel arrangements are currently not fit for purpose, and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner needs to conclude the review of arrangements as a matter of urgency.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

This standard has not been rated because there were no resettlement cases that fell within inspection timeframes. Our key findings were as follows.

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews.

Strengths:

- Although no child has been in custody for three years, the YJT has a resettlement policy detailing pre- and post-release requirements. It details the appropriate pathways to be considered for a child in custody and references the concept of constructive resettlement.
- The YJT has recently updated a remand guidance document which outlines procedures for remanded children. It is positive that the service has not overlooked this aspect of resettlement.
- The policy includes details of how to overcome barriers and challenges within the child's resettlement journey.
- We saw a strong focus on child-centred, multi-agency working within the YJT that provided some reassurance that a child entering custody would receive appropriate support in line with their needs.
- There is good in-house parenting provision in the YJT which will be of huge benefit when supporting families of any children who go into custody in the future.
- There is a good connection with the authority's commissioning service, providing reassurance of support in commissioning services for children if needed to assist with resettlement.

Areas for improvement:

- The policy and guidance are untested. The YJT would benefit from developing links with neighbouring YJSs or Feltham young offender institution to explore shadow and learning opportunities. This would support grounding practitioners understanding of this area in local evidence-based practice.
- When the policy is next reviewed, there needs to be greater clarity about arrangements for managing the risk of harm to others and victim considerations.
- The YJT might wish to review training opportunities. Not all of the staff who responded to our survey and said they worked with children in custody noted that they had sufficient training in this area.
- The YJT's understanding of transition planning for children moving from the youth to adult estate is underdeveloped and needs to improve.
- The policy needs to be more explicit on how the diversity needs of minority ethnic children and girls will be met in the event of a custodial sentence.

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.](#)