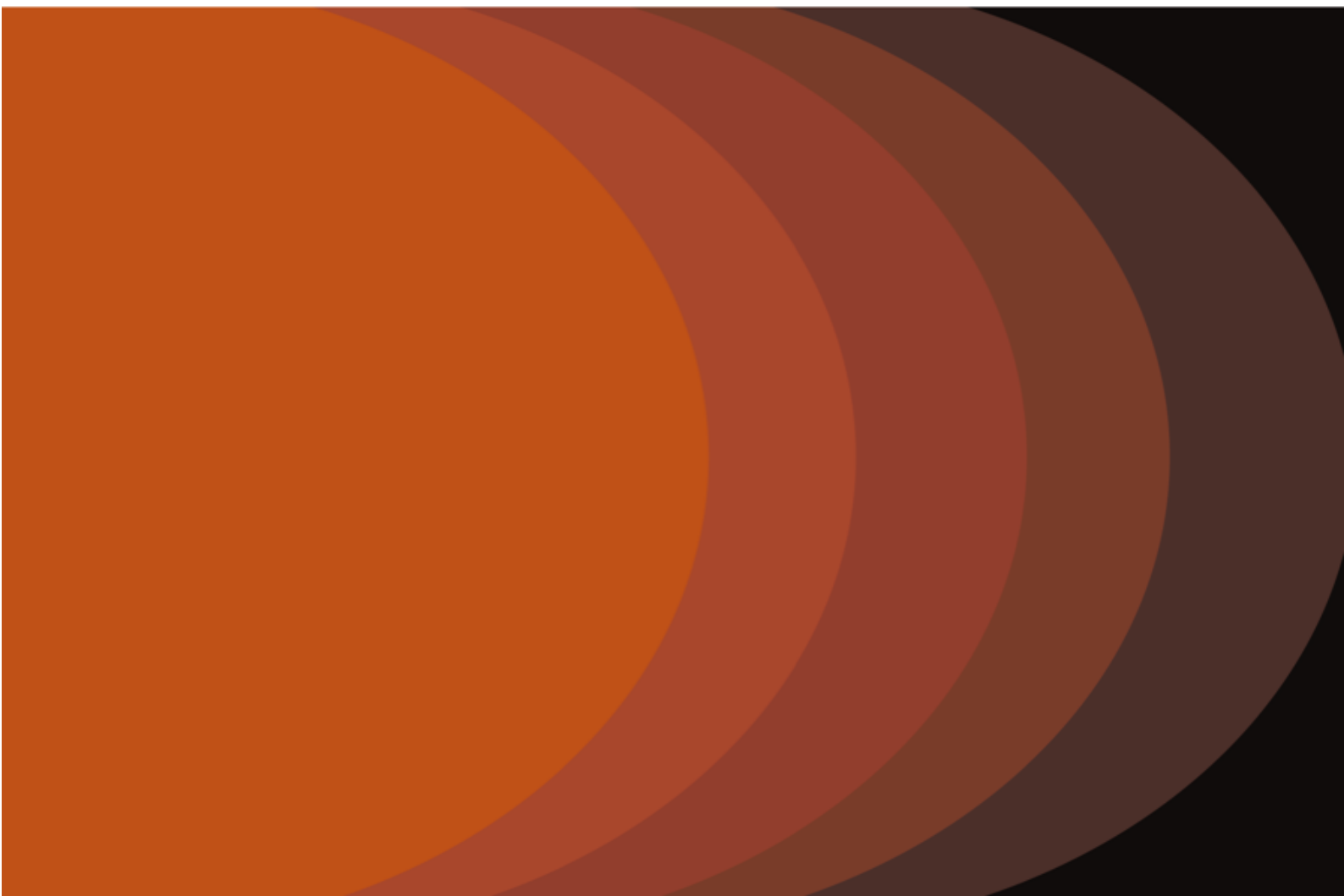




HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in
St Helens

HM Inspectorate of Probation, February 2023



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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated St Helens 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, St Helens YJS was rated as 'Good'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Good'.

The inspection found a strong service, with strengths clearly evident across the casework for court disposals and out-of-court disposals, both of which we rated as outstanding across all elements of assessment, planning, delivery and implementation, and review. This is attributable to the colossal efforts of the staff and head of service. Despite longstanding issues in relation to vacancies, sickness, and attrition, we found practitioners to be skilled, experienced, and resilient. They are able to build positive relationships with children, which translated into effective outcomes. Overall, we were impressed with the breadth and provision of partnership services, with children being able to access a range of interventions and support swiftly, alongside clear and specific pathways for universal, targeted, and specialist provision. Staff work together collaboratively and there are strong peer support networks across the service.

However, the service needs to make improvements to its governance and leadership and must apply effort to developing a sustainable model of oversight. Many of the statutory partner agencies have had their own organisational challenges, which have resulted in a turnover of senior leaders and a lack of board attendance. Board chair arrangements have also been inconsistent over the previous 12-18 months. These issues have impacted on the continuity and cohesiveness of the board. Relationships with some of the board attendees, and the services they represent, need to be strengthened and expectations clarified. We also found a disconnect between the board and frontline YJS practitioners, leading to many staff feeling unvalued, with minimal reward and recognition arrangements, activities or incentives in place.

Moving forward, the challenge is for the YJS management board to establish a consistent, cohesive membership and set of arrangements to allow it to prioritise the key issues identified within this inspection. In particular, it should ensure appropriate staffing resource and that all of the YJS building is suitable for service delivery. At the time of our inspection, there were planned service management changes due to take place and it is clear these would have left the YJS in a vulnerable position. We were pleased to see these were reconsidered and alternative strategic arrangements implemented as a result of our inspection.

In this report, we make several recommendations that will enable St Helens YJS to make important improvements in its service for children who have offended and to build on its existing strengths.



Justin Russell
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

St Helens Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started November 2022

Score 29/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1	Governance and leadership	Requires improvement	
1.2	Staff	Requires improvement	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Good	
1.4	Information and facilities	Requires improvement	

2. Court disposals

2.1	Assessment	Outstanding	
2.2	Planning	Outstanding	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
2.4	Reviewing	Outstanding	

3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1	Assessment	Outstanding	
3.2	Planning	Outstanding	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Outstanding	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Outstanding	

4. Resettlement¹

4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Good	
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¹ The rating for resettlement does not influence the overall YJS 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 justice services in St Helens. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The St Helens Youth Justice Service Management Board should:

1. establish consistent and cohesive chairing arrangements and board membership
2. develop individual and collective knowledge and understanding of board members' roles and the service's work, and provide effective challenge to partners
3. improve the relationship between the board and practitioners so that all can recognise how strategic priorities influence operational delivery
4. provide the management team with the necessary staffing resources and ensure the necessary work is completed on the YJS building
5. improve the analysis and use of data to shape strategic and operational delivery.

The Probation Service should:

6. provide a probation officer to the YJS to support effective transitions and risk management.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in St Helens Youth Justice Service (YJS) over a period of a week, beginning 07 November 2022. We inspected: cases where the sentence or licence began between 08 November 2021 and 02 September 2022; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 08 November 2021 and 02 September 2022; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 08 November 2021 and 02 September 2022. We also conducted 13 interviews with case managers.

St Helens YJS is a multiagency partnership that sits within children's services in St Helens Borough Council. The service is led by the assistant director of children's services, and the head of service for YJS and Prevent has responsibility for the YJS. Governance is provided by the multiagency YJS management board, which is chaired by the director of children's services.

In 2019, a full-service restructure of the YJS was undertaken. This was part of the overall improvement work for the service, in line with the feedback from previous inspections. Much had changed; statutory case numbers had fallen significantly and work in the service had not developed in line with evidence-based practice. The new structure was implemented to provide sufficient staffing to meet changing demands while offering the scope to develop new and innovative ways of working, with a particular emphasis on developing local prevention. At the point of inspection, cohort data for St Helens YJS indicated that 71 children were open to the YJS. Of these, 32 per cent were prevention, 28 per cent were out-of-court disposals, and 25 per cent were court disposals.

The restructure challenged the existing workforce, which had not experienced significant change for many years. Subsequently, the YJS has experienced periods without a full staffing complement, due to vacancies and periods of sickness.

The YJS provided a snapshot of the demographics of St Helens, which reveals that 21.4 per cent of the population falls within the 0-18 years category, equating to 38,680 young people in the area. St Helens rate of children looked after remains well above the national average (130 per 10,000 under 18-year-olds compared to 97 for the north west and 67 for England). In the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, St Helens was ranked as the 26th most deprived local authority in England out of 317. Ninety-eight per cent of St Helens residents consider themselves to be white British, which is higher than the England population average of 85 per cent.

In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, the YJS established its business continuity plan, and then developed a further document outlining recovery from Covid-19. In line with government guidance, all staff were advised to work from home and continue to do so on a hybrid model basis. More recently, the YJS has progressed to its 'business as usual' approach, continuing to deliver interventions within children's homes, in schools, out in the community, and virtually.

The latest Youth Justice Board (YJB) data reveals an overall reduction of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system in St Helens from 169 in April 2019 to March 2020 to 129 in April 2021 to March 2022. This is below the current England and Wales rate of 143. The data shows that there has been a steady decrease in reoffending, year on year. Despite this, St Helens' current binary reoffending rate of 39.2 per cent (October 2019 – September 2020) is still above the England and Wales average of 33.6 per cent.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS 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:

- There is a current strategic plan, which sets out the YJS partnership's vision. There are terms of reference for the YJS management board, which set the expectations of board members' roles and responsibilities.
- The board chair, vice chair, and some board members are connected with other strategic boards across the wider partnership.
- The YJS head of service has links with a range of local, regional, and national strategic groups and arenas.
- Operationally, YJS managers have designated lead responsibilities and sit on relevant multiagency operational groups.
- The YJS head of service has been successful in obtaining funding from various sources to develop innovative and creative approaches and projects.
- The YJS partnership has confirmed that, as of January 2023, the board will be overseen by an independent chair to drive improvement in strategic leadership and governance.

Areas for improvement:

- Board chairing arrangements have lacked consistency in the previous 12 months.
- The turnover in membership of the YJS management board has impacted on attendance, continuity, and cohesiveness.
- There is a disconnect between the board and YJS frontline operational staff. Not all board members are of sufficient seniority to commit resources and make decisions, and many do not advocate effectively for YJS children in their own agencies.
- The YJS management board relies too much on the experienced YJS head of service. Relationships with some of the board attendees and the services they represent need to be strengthened and expectations clarified. This will ensure that appropriate discussions and challenges are undertaken, and decisions made, at a strategic level.

- Board members lack a thorough understanding of the business risks facing the YJS, which has led to insufficient progress in addressing some key issues raised by the head of service.
- The anticipated service management plans would have left the YJS in a vulnerable position. We were pleased to see these were reconsidered during the inspection and alternative plans made.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The operational staff in the YJS are the organisation's biggest asset. They are the main reason that the quality of casework is strong.
- Staff are skilled, experienced, and resilient. They build positive relationships with children to engage them effectively.
- Staff work together collaboratively and there are strong peer support networks across the service.
- The staff survey indicated that supervision was regular and of sufficient quality for 11 out of 13 respondents. Managers state that supervision is a priority.
- Management oversight was effective in all but one of the inspected court disposal cases, and in every inspected out-of-court-disposal case.
- Volunteer staff were complimentary about the balance of work and the support from YJS colleagues.
- The YJS has a comprehensive training offer and has funded staff to undertake additional qualifications, such as the Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate.

Areas for improvement:

- Staffing levels are insufficient, with the YJS currently holding several vacancies, with high levels of staff sickness and turnover in the previous 12-18 months.
- Five out of 13 respondents to the staff survey (38 per cent) stated that their workload was unmanageable.
- Practitioners report a lack of time to be able to attend many training opportunities, due to wider service demand and shortfalls in staffing.
- Induction processes for newer staff have been variable in quality, given the workload pressures across the service.
- Staff have received very little specialist risk of harm training.
- There has been a turnover of team managers and the current management team are still embedding. The workload of managers has impacted on their ability to attend to the full range of activities expected of them, with the demands of crisis management within cases adding to their workload.
- Completion of appraisals is mixed – in the staff survey, half of the respondents reported that their appraisals were not valuable.
- Staff report that links with the YJS management board are weak. Half of the 16 respondents to the staff survey were not aware of the board's activities.

- There are minimal reward and recognition arrangements, activities or incentives in place for staff.
- Staff morale has been impacted over the last 12-18 months, with many staff indicating they feel unvalued and not listened to.
- Staff report that the additional demand of covering a specialist court role has caused anxiety and a lack of confidence

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:

- There is a satisfactory strategic and operational analysis of YJS children's desistance needs. Children can swiftly access a range of services and support, and there are specific pathways for universal, targeted, and specialist provision.
- The YJS has a full-time police officer, and a second police officer due to commence in January 2023 to enhance the delivery of preventative work with YJS children further.
- The YJS is co-located with substance misuse services, with designated full- and part-time specialist staff able to undertake swift joint working and deliver interventions with YJS children.
- The YJS has a strong health pathway, with clear processes to ensure children access services. The partnership YJS health staff (speech and language therapist, substance misuse staff, Barnardo's emotional wellbeing therapist, and criminal justice liaison worker) undertake a weekly referrals and allocations meeting to monitor and oversee this work.
- The partnership has a full-time specialist Careers Connect Advisor for YJS children. This had led to a reduction in the rate of YJS children not in education, employment or training (NEET) from 52 per cent in 2018 to 26 per cent currently. The YJS achieved the Association of YOT Managers Youth Justice SEND (special educational needs and disability) Quality Mark in 2022.
- Workers across all operational roles collaborate well, facilitate children's engagement effectively, and foster positive relationships with children. This contrasts with work at a strategic level, which is not strong.
- There are clear arrangements and strong joint working between the YJS and children's services.
- The YJS contributes to a variety of internal and external multiagency operational groups and panels for children deemed to present a high risk of harm to others or a high level of safety and wellbeing concerns.
- Partnership managers have a broad understanding of the specialist work their staff undertake with YJS children, and there is regular supervision, joint oversight, and communication with relevant YJS team managers.
- The YJS has a wide range of preventative and early help provision. Delivery of statutory and prevention casework is enhanced by a range of additional and innovative voluntary sector interventions.
- Inspectors found a varied and bespoke reparation offer, with a breadth of personalised one-to-one projects.

- Links with community safety and antisocial behaviour outreach officers are well-established, with strong information-sharing to support active risk management, desistance, and safety and wellbeing.
- Despite the anxieties and lack of confidence highlighted by YJS staff, survey feedback from the chair of the youth bench stressed the high quality of work carried out by the YJS within the youth court.

Areas for improvement:

- The part-time (0.8 full-time-equivalent) seconded probation officer post has been vacant since September 2022. Arrangements need to be strengthened to ensure children's transition needs are met.
- The pre-16 education, training and employment (ETE) worker post has been vacant for several months. The YJS partnership has stated it will recruit to this post once the parameters of the role have been revised to fit with an early help approach.

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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- The YJS has comprehensive policies to deliver its service. These are accessible to staff and include operational guidance and HR policies.
- Referral pathways are clear. There are service level agreements and working protocols between the YJS, key partners, and services.
- Processes for learning lessons are in place across the partnership. Critical learning reviews are shared at board level and disseminated to staff through team meetings, individual supervision, and email.
- The YJS building is in a good location, child friendly, and safe. Children have been consulted and involved in the look/décor of the building.
- Referral order panels take place in a good location at the local fire station.
- The YJS has a participation strategy, developed in August 2022, and holds a YJS children's forum. It publishes a quarterly 'you said, we did' newsletter.
- Victim and restorative justice staff undertake evaluations of all victims and children completing restorative justice.

Areas for improvement:

- There is mixed evidence that performance and quality systems drive improvement. Managers admit that quality assurance and audit have taken a back seat due to staffing issues, management and staff capacity, and crisis management of the day-to-day service delivery.
- The YJS has developed a disproportionality action plan. However, this plan is basic, not 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound), and needs further development.
- There had been an insufficient response to an independent audit (an external service review) in December 2021, which highlighted governance issues, building issues, and further work needed in the partnership's approach to disproportionality.
- The YJS acknowledges within its strategic improvement plan that further work is needed to develop data analysis and partnership understanding of data.
- The upstairs floor of the building has been closed since Covid-19 because of health and safety work required. This was impacting negatively on staff morale, office space, team management visibility, and team cohesiveness and, therefore, potentially hampering effective work with children.
- Many partnership service level agreements end in March 2023. There is a need to prioritise the formal reviewing of these to ensure service continuity.
- HR processes are bureaucratic and difficult, which has led to challenges in recruitment to posts within the YJS.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS has a participation strategy, developed in August 2022, holds a YJS children's forum and has a 'you said, we did' notice board in the reception area. This was a response to a request by YOS children to display service responses to their suggestions. Alongside the strategy, the YJS has undertaken a range of activity to capture the voice of children in the services they receive.

- The YJS has reviewed planning documents and procedures to develop plans that are more 'child-friendly'. A service update newsletter is circulated quarterly and this includes updates on the YJ forum outcomes.
- Capturing children's voices digitally – at the end of 2021 and early 2022, as part of a programme with CELLS (Choices Education Lifelong Learning Skills); the YJS audio-recorded some children's experiences, which were shared at the YJS partnership board. Going forward, the YJS aims to make more audio/video recordings to diversify how it captures the voice of the child.
- Education awards – the YJS continues to hold termly education awards for children involved in the service to recognise educational achievements, including their qualifications, attendance or behaviour. Each child receives a certificate and voucher. Children are consulted about whether they would prefer to have their award presented at a celebration event or not.
- 'Do It Profiler' – each child open to the YJS is screened using a document called the Do It Profiler. Through the child completing this tool, the YJS is capturing the child's voice in terms of how best to support their learning needs/styles.
- Office improvements – children were consulted about improvements to the YJS office, which included creating a girls' room, choosing the colour scheme for intervention rooms, the outside railings cover, and equipment for the office, including a punch bag, breakfast bar, and table tennis.

The YJS 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 11 children who consented, and six children replied – although only two completed the survey fully.

When asked how they rated the service they had received from the YJS, two responded with a score of 10 out of 10, two with eight out of 10 and two with a score of seven out of 10. Positive responses included:

"They are always fair with appointments and would work with you to make sure you get the right session that will work the best for the individual. I think they are very good and should be highly looked at because they have helped me a lot in the past two years."

Two people responded to the question on how much the YJS had helped either themselves or (if they were a parent) their child to stay out of trouble. One child said:

"They have helped me by kind of making me understand life more and why it's not worth making bad choices."

One child responded to our telephone contact and was complimentary about the service received. This child felt that their YJS workers had the right skills to do the work and said that they have been able to access the right services and support to help them stay out of trouble.

Diversity

Within the current St Helens strategic plan, the YJS partnership recognises that ongoing work is needed. It highlights more needs to be done in terms of recognising diversity, understanding how children are impacted by their diverse needs and ensuring the board effectively utilises this information to provide a diverse services and resources for children. The plan also acknowledges further work needs to be undertaken in relation to addressing the disproportionality of children who are looked after and working with the YJS in St Helens.

The YJS has a diversity and inclusiveness policy, developed in 2022, which sets out explicit terms of reference for a range of groups with protected characteristics. YJS staff were aware of these groups and how to access them. The YJS has developed a subsequent action plan. However, this plan is basic and needs further development.

Background data reveals an over-representation of black and minority ethnic children (11 per cent in the YJS cohort, but 3 per cent in the wider population). Inspectors were pleased to see that there is a specific therapeutic room for interventions with girls in the YJS building. The YJS has worked hard to develop and deliver a reducing reoffending by children looked after (ROCLA) strategy given the over-representation of children looked after within the YJS cohort. This strategy has recently been revised to include regular reviews with partners about direct feedback from this group of children on the issues they believe impact on their offending, and the support systems that could assist in reducing further offending. The CLA figures currently stand at 17 per cent of the cohort (as opposed to 2.5 per cent in the national general children's cohort). The partnership feels the ROCLA strategy is having an impact on St Helens numbers but recognise further work is needed.

We judged that case managers in the inspected out-of-court disposal cases were effective in taking account of the children's diversity needs in their assessments, planning, and the way that they delivered and implemented services. However, the quality of work to address diversity in the court disposal cases (specifically planning and delivery) was more variable.

YJS staff have received some diversity training, including inputs on Islamophobia, unconscious bias, and equality and diversity, but this could be further enhanced (such as including cultural competence training).

Arrangements for work with SEND children are good. The YJS achieved the SEND Quality Mark in 2022 and consideration of such approaches have been evident in many policies, such as out-of-court-disposals, resettlement, and diversity policy. We also saw positive evidence of this work within the inspected cases.

The YJS has no staff from an ethnic minority, which is not fully representative of the general St Helens population (which is 98 per cent white British) and this is an area where recruitment could be improved. Organisational data indicates that 81 per cent of staff are female and the YJS partnership has recognised that it would like to recruit more male staff to work with a cohort of children that is 89 per cent male.

Regarding staff diversity and response to diverse staff need, this is an area where further improvement is needed. In the staff survey, three out of nine staff felt their individual diversity needs had not been met.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating² for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	100%

Assessment of desistance factors was consistently strong. Staff gained a thorough understanding of children, their diversity needs, and their wider familial and social contexts. In every case, they achieved this by liaising effectively with partner agencies to access information and previous assessments, and by ensuring that children, and their parents or carers, were central to the assessment process. Assessment of victims' needs and wishes was sufficient in every relevant case, which supported and enhanced opportunities for restorative justice. In all the inspected cases, we saw a strengths-based approach and high levels of attention given to understanding the child's maturity, ability and motivation to change, and the likelihood of engaging with the court disposal.

Assessment clearly identified and analysed any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child in all inspected cases, again drawing on current and historical information from key agencies, such as social care. Inspectors agreed with classifications of safety and wellbeing in every case.

Assessment work should provide an analysis of how other people will be kept safe when there are signs that the child could present a risk of harm to others. We saw consistent evidence of this in court disposal cases. Case managers drew together current and historical issues or behaviours, which in turn resulted in balanced and well-reasoned assessments. In every case, inspectors saw evidence that case managers had used information from other agencies and sources, including social care, police, the antisocial behaviour team, education and health – all of which informed active and effective risk management where relevant.

² The rating for the standard is driven by the lowest score on each of the key questions, which is placed in a rating band, indicated in bold in the table. A more detailed explanation is available on [our website](#).

2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating³ 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?	100%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	100%

Planning to support the child's desistance was a strength in all the inspected cases. It built on the assessment of desistance factors and, in the referral orders, agreements made at the panels. Children were fully involved in planning, as were their parents or carers, where appropriate. The inspected cases consistently highlighted strong joint planning between YJS case managers and other agencies and professionals, such as substance misuse, health professionals, the Barnardo's therapist, and ETE workers. This enabled case managers to identify and sequence interventions. Although not as strong as other elements, planning to address the child's diversity was evident in most cases, but it was clear that case managers made every effort to plan for the child's individual needs, personal circumstances, and social context.

Planning to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child was strong and clearly informed by other agencies, such as social care. This led to the necessary controls and interventions being put in place to address the issues of many children within the YJS cohort. Inspectors found strength in the quality of contingency plans for safety and wellbeing in all inspected cases. This is important, as there should be a clear plan of action if the risk to a child were to either increase or decrease. Contingency plans clearly set out adequate actions or responses to be taken if, or when, circumstances changed.

We were pleased to see that planning to manage the risk of harm to others involved other agencies in every relevant case. Despite the complexity of many YJS children, there were examples of planning to address the safety of specific victims. We also saw sufficient plans for the necessary controls and interventions to effectively manage the risk of harm that some children pose to others. Alongside this, circumstances in a child's life can change quickly. Case managers need to consider the potential for change in each case so that, should concerns escalate, they are prepared and more likely to respond effectively. In all relevant cases, inspectors found that contingency planning in relation to public protection was clear and detailed about specific actions to keep others safe.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁴ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	83%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	100%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	100%

Implementation and delivery to support the child's desistance was judged sufficient in a large majority of inspected cases. Inspectors found a high level of engagement from children, which reflected the proactive approach of staff (both case managers and specialist or partnership staff) and their capacity to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with them. In the services most likely to support desistance, particularly health pathways and post-16 ETE work, case managers consistently paid sufficient attention to sequencing and the available timescales. However, there was variability in service delivery in reflecting the diversity needs of the child, which was deemed sufficient in only half the cases. Despite this, the wider familial and social context of the child, and the involvement of their parents or carers or significant others, was evident in all but one case.

Inspectors noted that there was a high level of coordination and information exchange between the YJS case managers and partnership staff, both internally and externally. Every relevant case saw implementation and delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child. Despite a very complex cohort of children under their supervision, YJS case managers also kept a balance between a strong focus on safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm to others, and worked consistently with a range of agencies, such as education, health, social care, substance misuse, and third-sector projects. For keeping other people safe, case managers had considered the protection of actual and potential victims in their delivery of all relevant inspected court disposal cases. An inspector noted:

“The child's health needs [were] prioritised in [the] secure estate to enable an ASD [autism spectrum disorder] assessment to be carried out, which was paramount in providing services to meet this child's individual needs and identify an appropriate placement in the community. Good joint working with the secure estate encouraged compliance and engagement, and the case manager kept parents informed throughout, which was impactful. This involved the use of a consistent interpreter at DTO [detention and training order] meetings. The case manager would have handover meetings with the child and any other staff that would be supporting him.”

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

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

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

Reviewing of progress to support the child's desistance was strong. In every relevant case, a written review of desistance was completed, leading to necessary adjustments in the plan of work in all of them. This responsiveness to changing circumstances helped to maintain children's engagement and ensured that the work delivered was effective and meaningful. Reviewing continued to focus sufficiently on building on the child's strengths, enhancing protective factors, and assessing motivation and engagement levels in every relevant case. Importantly, we found that children and their parents or carers were meaningfully involved in their assessment in all relevant cases.

A written review of safety and wellbeing was completed in every relevant case. Reviewing identified and responded to changes in factors relating to safety and wellbeing, and we saw examples where multiagency meetings were arranged to ensure a coordinated partnership approach to addressing the issues to keep the child safe. Inspectors found that reviews completed by case managers led to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work in all but one relevant case. Many of the children supervised by the YJS had complex lives, and their circumstances could change rapidly. There were evident links to multi-agency safeguarding arenas, alongside the use of joint review between the child, parent or carer, and relevant professionals (such as social care) in many of the inspected cases.

Reviewing was informed by the necessary input from other agencies to manage the risk of harm posed to others. Inspectors found that case managers consistently completed written reviews, which were supported through the activity of the YJS multiagency risk management panel, sharing of police intelligence, and strong relationships between internal and external targeted, specialist, and mainstream partnership services. As a result, we saw cases that benefited from changes to reporting, increased structure, and positive activities, or allocation of additional police or antisocial behaviour outreach team resource, as determined by the needs of the case.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

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

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁶ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	100%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	100%

Assessments routinely drew on information from multiple sources to get the best understanding of a child's circumstances and history. Full and detailed assessments were completed before the joint decision-making panel met, which assisted in decision-making and determining the support and intervention required. Inspectors found that assessments were balanced, and we saw victim issues and opportunities for restorative justice were considered in all relevant cases. The involvement of the child and their parents or carers was evident in all cases. The case manager had considered the child's diversity in a majority of cases, and their wider social and familial context in all inspected cases.

Assessment of a child's safety and wellbeing consistently included information from other agencies. The YJS had access to the children's social care case management system and could complete checks on past and present contact. YJS case managers were effective in their joint working with colleagues in social care. This was reflected in attention to relevant social, emotional, and physical factors, such as emotional wellbeing, substance misuse, and risks from others. In all cases, we agreed with the safety and wellbeing classification, and there was a clear written record of how to keep the child safe.

Assessments drew on relevant information and, in all but one case, considered who was likely to be at risk from the child's behaviour, and the nature and imminence of any risk occurring. In all cases, the YJS case manager had used available sources of information, including other assessments, to inform their own judgement.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

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

Planning in relation to desistance was strengths-based, well sequenced, and involved other agencies. Case managers considered victim wishes and the child's social and familial context in all relevant cases. Practitioners took an inclusive approach. They took full account of the family's needs as well as the child's aspirations and interests. The involvement of children and their parent or carers in plans was excellent, while the response to the child's diversity needs was sufficient in a majority of the inspected cases. The work planned was proportionate, could be achieved within the timescale of the out-of-court disposal, and considered the child's levels of maturity, ability, and motivation to change in every case. The main desistance factors identified included education, training and employment, self-identity, lifestyle, and speech, language, and communication. In all cases, planning focused on supporting access to universal services to promote community integration. We saw instances where children continued to be supported by the wider early help service, third sector organisations, and other mainstream, targeted, and specialist services after their out-of-court disposal ended.

In all relevant cases, there was sufficient planning to keep children safe. Inspectors found strong multiagency working, and the YJS plan was aligned with other plans, such as social care and early help. We recognise the need for proportionate planning in out-of-court disposals, where interventions may be brief, and were pleased to see sufficiently detailed contingency planning in all the relevant cases we inspected.

Planning to keep others safe was a strength. In every relevant case, planning focused sufficiently on keeping people safe, and case managers involved other agencies in their planning processes in every instance. Similarly, in all of these cases, planning addressed specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims. As with safety and wellbeing, contingency planning to manage public protection is important, and there should be a clear plan of action in the event of the child's risk of harm to others either increasing or decreasing. Inspectors found contingency planning for risk of harm to others to be sufficient in every relevant case.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

Our rating⁸ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

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

The involvement of other agencies across the wider statutory and third sector partnership was evident and well-coordinated. Delivery of services to support children's desistance was strong and built on the assessments and plans made. There was a high level of engagement and compliance with interventions, which were mainly voluntary. Case managers were persistent in gaining the trust of children and their parents or carers. We saw consistent evidence of work undertaken by a broad range of staff from mainstream, targeted, and specialist services, which led to positive outcomes for many YJS children. Practitioners matched interventions to children's needs and learning, and took account of their diversity and other commitments in a large majority of inspected cases.

Where there were issues concerning safety and wellbeing, we found clear multiagency arrangements to support children who were looked after, open to social care, or criminally exploited, or who had emotional wellbeing or substance misuse issues. The YJS consistently worked with a range of agencies and organisations to deliver well-coordinated packages of support. We saw good work by the case managers and other specialist workers in the YJS. Case managers advocated on behalf of children and made timely referrals to specialist and mainstream services, such as social care, substance misuse, and mental health liaison and diversion. The provision of a part-time specialist therapist from Barnardo's supports with interventions and case formulation work for those more complex children within the cohort, which in turn enhances the quality of work delivered.

Services were sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm in all relevant cases. Managing risk of harm often involved developing a better understanding of the victim's perspective, using a number of restorative justice techniques, as well as intelligence from police and other community projects and professionals. We were particularly impressed by the strong interface between the YJS and the antisocial behaviour team and their outreach workers. Inspectors judged that the case manager paid attention to the protection of actual and potential victims in all relevant cases.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Outstanding

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:

- There is a clear out-of-court disposal policy, which sets out regional and local arrangements for decision-making, provision, and delivery.
- A full range of disposals was considered; there was a graduated response, which meant that children could be diverted from prosecution where appropriate.
- Referrals to the joint decision-making panel are timely. The panel includes representatives from children's social care and early help services; this ensures that all options for addressing the children's safety and wellbeing are considered.
- There are clear arrangements for escalating and resolving differences when these occurred.
- There is a strong and varied prevention offer, which has enabled positive outcomes for children. The YJS is proactive in engaging children and families before they receive an out-of-court disposal.
- All interventions and services available to children on statutory orders are available to those who receive an out-of-court disposal.
- There is a Merseyside out-of-court disposal scrutiny panel that the YJS Head of Service attends, in her role as the regional YJS representative.
- YJS staff consistently provided children with opportunities for community integration and access to partnership services once they had completed the out-of-court disposal work.
- Policy and provision have been evaluated through pilots and subsequent themed audits, which have led to changes and improvements in practice.
- There is a bespoke assessment tool, which has been developed and refined to include a 'signs of safety' approach to assessment, but still addresses risk of harm issues.
- Arrangements are in place to capture and collate the views of children completing an out-of-court-disposal.

Areas for improvement:

- The policy does not explicitly refer to the whole range of protected characteristics across children's diversity. However, this was clearly evident across the out-of-court-disposal casework.
- Further analysis of quantitative data across the full sphere of prevention and out-of-court-disposal work would enable the YJS to demonstrate any additional impact.

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 written resettlement policy that formalises the resettlement procedures and processes. This is also accompanied by practice guidance which ensures staff and partners have a thorough understanding of their role in resettlement work with YJS children.
- The YJS operates a resettlement tracker to monitor key stages of resettlement children's sentence and the subsequent activities required.
- There are clear and accessible referral and intervention pathways in relation to key areas such as accommodation, ETE, and health.
- Information-sharing and communication between the YJS and the secure estate is strong, reciprocal, and swift.
- Joint working and relationships between the YJS and key partner agencies (such as social care) are mature and collaborative, which ensures best outcomes for resettlement children.
- YJS partner staff (such as the substance misuse worker and post-16 ETE worker) work well with their counterparts in the secure estate, which leads to continuity of relationships and interventions for children.
- The YJS operates a resettlement panel, chaired by a YJS operational manager. This consists of a range of professionals and allows discussion, joint planning, and review of individual resettlement cases to ensure that the children's needs are met.
- There was good management of children's safety and wellbeing, and the risk that they posed to others, through additional internal and multiagency risk management meetings.
- We saw some individual case study evidence of the voices of children and their parents being sought to evaluate resettlement provision.

Areas for improvement:

- Not all staff have received specific resettlement training.
- The resettlement policy would be further enhanced by addressing more fully the whole range of protected characteristics across children's diversity.
- Further audit work is needed to scrutinise the quality of practice and draw together some more quantitative analysis around YJS work with resettlement cases.

Further information

The following can be found on our website:

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