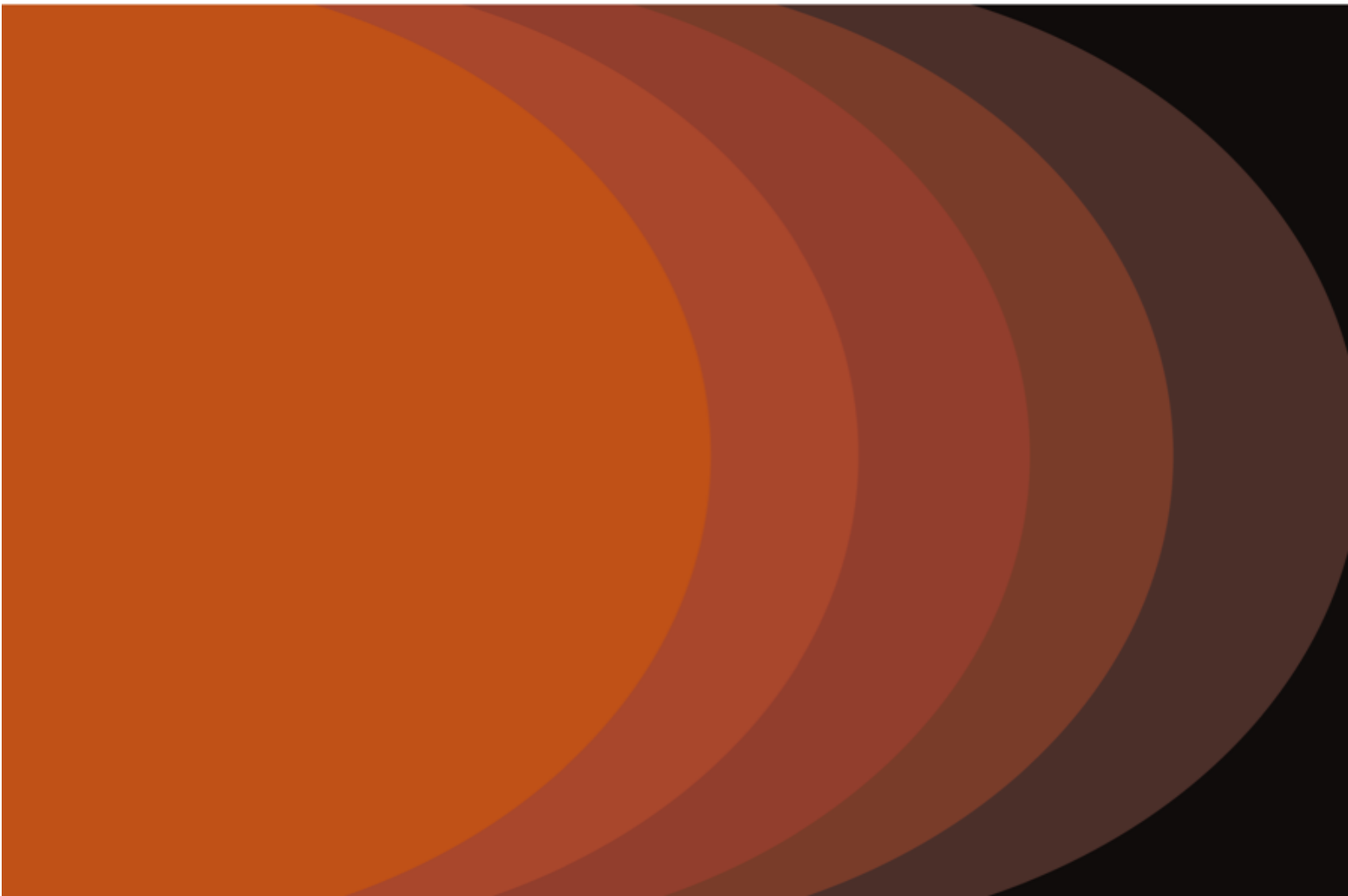




HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in
Knowsley

HM Inspectorate of Probation, May 2023



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Foreword

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

The YOS management board is clear about the vision for the service. A new board chair is in place, who demonstrates a depth of knowledge, and is committed to driving the performance of the board forward. The management board is supported by comprehensive performance reports and has appropriate links into other strategic forums. However, there are currently gaps in board membership regarding children's education, training and employment, and some board members do not have the appropriate level of seniority to make decisions which improve the quality of provision for all YOS children. We found that too many children, across the age ranges, are not receiving high-quality education, training and employment services matched to their needs and the board has yet to successfully tackle these issues.

We found the service manager to be an inspirational leader who has prioritised the wellbeing of staff during a period of organisational change. Staff and volunteers feel valued by managers and their peers, and we saw that the service promotes a culture of care and compassion both for its staff and for the children and families that it works with.

Inspectors also found good quality in service delivery in the individual cases we inspected. The assessment of children on court and out-of-court disposals was of a consistently high standard and the YOS has an excellent understanding of what is required to assess and engage children and families. However, it needs to improve the consistency of planning and delivery of services to promote children's safety and wellbeing in work undertaken on out-of-court disposals.

Health services provided to the YOS are of a high standard and include a psychologist, nurse, and speech and language therapist. The service also has specialist staff to work with families and victims. We found the service to be well supported by Merseyside police and appropriately integrated with local authority departments. Practitioners are creative when delivering interventions and use language and techniques that support the trauma-informed approach promoted by the YOS.

The partnership needs to better understand the reasons for the over-representation of care-experienced children known to the YOS, and review the policies and practices of all agencies, to minimise the possibility of children entering the criminal justice system unnecessarily.

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



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Knowsley Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started January 2023

Score 29/36

Overall rating

Good



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Good



1.2 Staff

Outstanding



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

Good



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Good



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Good



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 offending services in Knowsley. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth offending services, and better protect the public.

The Chair of the Knowsley Youth Justice Management Board should:

1. review the membership of the board and ensure that it is attended by representatives with the right level of seniority to be able to drive improvements to meet the needs of YOS children.

The Knowsley Youth Justice Management Board should:

2. continue to challenge schools to reduce school exclusions and make sure that YOS children receive their full entitlement to education provision in a setting that best meets their needs
3. work with partners to ensure that YOS children aged over 16 can access high-quality education, training and employment opportunities
4. make sure that the partnership understands the reasons for the over-representation of care-experienced children known to the YOS, and review the policies and practices of all agencies, to minimise the possibility of children entering the criminal justice system unnecessarily.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Knowsley YOS over a period of a week, beginning on 09 January 2023. We inspected cases where the sentence, licence or out-of-court disposal began between 10 January 2022 and 04 November 2022. There were no resettlement cases. We interviewed six case managers.

The Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley sits within the county of Merseyside and has 15 wards that are split into the townships of Huyton, Kirkby, Halewood, Prescott, Whiston and Cronton.

Knowsley YOS is part of children's services, within children's early help and children's social care. The line management of the YOS service manager sits with the head of service for children looked after and regulated services. In November 2022 the YOS set up a prevention service, with an investment of £650,000 from the local authority. This demonstrated the borough-wide commitment to intervening at the earliest opportunity to support children who are on the cusp of criminality and exploitation. The time frame for inspected cases coincided with a significant period of change in the YOS which impacted on managers' capacity and oversight of cases. It is to the management teams credit the situation was quickly rectified when the staffing structure became more stable.

At the time of the inspection there were 39 staff in the YOS. In January 2023, 32 post-court interventions were open, and 116 out-of-court disposals.

The YOS has access to a comprehensive suite of data across post-court orders and out-of-court disposals, analysis of which has led to deep-dive reports. These have included reports on serious youth violence, girls in the youth justice system, disproportionality and children with special educational needs.

Recent analysis of performance data shows that the number of first-time entrants for Knowsley YOS is higher than the average for the region and for England and Wales, although it is the lowest it has ever been. For reoffending, both the proportion of children who reoffend and how frequently they reoffend, performance is worse than the average for England and Wales.

The YOS's analysis of these figures shows that both the first-time entrant and custody rates were affected by a number of serious offences that occurred within a short space of time by children who were not previously known to the service. The YOS accepts, however, that it needs to do more work to understand the reoffending rates.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have ended, Knowsley YOS has continued to work within a 'hybrid' model of delivery. It invested in hybrid equipment, such as interactive TVs, replacement laptops that can also be used as tablets, and virtual resources. It continues to be creative in its approach to interventions and reparation, through the offer of virtual sessions and projects or work that can be done in the home. The YOS prioritised encouraging and supporting children and families to return safely to face-to-face contact as it exited periods of lockdown or isolation.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YOS and conducted 11 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.

Good

Strengths:

- There is a new chair of the Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB), who has been a member for several years and has the knowledge to drive the board forward.
- YJMB members sit on several strategic boards that have oversight of and scrutiny across the wider partnerships.
- Board members are clear about the vision for the service.
- There is a comprehensive board induction pack, which is supported by a meeting with the service manager.
- There is a youth justice plan in place and board members, staff, children and families were consulted as part of its development.
- The board receives high-quality information on the service's performance, progress on past plans, and learning from case reviews and inspection reports, as well as other deep-dive thematic reports and national performance.
- There were examples of board members holding each other to account and challenging partner agencies about the resources provided to the service.
- A networking event was held in 2022, which gave staff and board members the opportunity to meet and gain an understanding of each other's roles.
- The service manager is an inspirational leader who has prioritised the wellbeing of staff during a period of significant organisational change. Staff, managers and partners feel supported and are confident in the way the service is developing its priorities. This has had a positive impact on raising the profile of the YOS across the local authority and partner agencies.

Areas for improvement:

- There are gaps in relation to board membership regarding the quality of education, training and employment. Board members do not have the level of seniority to make decisions to improve the quality of education provision for school-age YOS children and there is no representative for education, training, and employment provision for YOS children who are over 16 years old.

- Additionally, the YOS is not involved with the relevant strategic forums to improve and influence education, training and employment provision for YOS children.
- Board members used to have lead areas of responsibility to help drive the work of the YOS, but with the changes in personnel this has not been happening and needs to be reviewed.
- Although the youth justice plan references work that is taking place to look at disproportionality, the service does not consider diversity and disproportionality information cohesively. A holistic framework would guide staff and support them in asking appropriate questions about a child's heritage and their lived experiences.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- The service has experienced a period of change as a consequence of establishing a prevention team. This has resulted in internal promotions and role changes. The service manager has ensured that this period of instability has been managed positively and has proactively included all staff in the change process.
- The inspection found staff to be happy, positive and motivated in their work.
- There was evidence that the management team work well together to support the team, and staff felt confident approaching managers for advice and guidance.
- Staff recognised and welcomed the emphasis that the YOS has put on supporting their emotional mental health and wellbeing, and the services they can access. Staff reported feeling safe, cared about and valued by the organisation, managers and their peers. When allocating cases, managers consider which staff have previously been involved with the family so that they can prioritise consistency of case manager.
- Staff and managers take a 'child first' approach and know their children well. They do all they can to encourage good engagement with children and their families.
- Staff receive regular and purposeful monthly supervision; clinical supervision is also provided when needed. Seconded staff receive supervision and support from both their home agency and their YOS line manager.
- There is a comprehensive induction process in place for new staff, and procedures for addressing staff competency.
- There is a Greater Merseyside YOT training plan, which encourages collaborative learning across the Merseyside YOTs. The YOS also has its own local training plan and keeps comprehensive training records.
- All volunteers receive a thorough induction, are appropriately supervised and supported, and feel part of the team.
- All staff and volunteers can access various commissioned and in-house training courses, as well as core training, which is mandatory for staff. They reported feeling encouraged to take up training opportunities.
- The YOS uses staff task groups to help develop practice. The service actively encourages staff development through offering management opportunities within the service and supporting staff to complete external qualifications.
- The head of service holds regular 'keep in touch' meetings so that they can hear directly from staff. All 18 staff members who responded to the staff survey said that their views on working for the YOS were listened to and acted on either 'quite well' or 'very well' and that exceptional work is 'sometimes' or 'always' recognised.

- Team meetings encourage the sharing of positive information and recognition of good practice, and the daily update email circulated by the duty manager also includes good news.
- Staff receive praise and appreciation emails from senior leaders and through supervision with their line managers, and the chief executive writes a regular blog that includes positive work by staff.

Areas for improvement:

- The YOS has always recruited qualified social workers to the role of case manager. The service manager is reviewing this approach, as they recognise that it does not consider the skills and knowledge of youth justice workers who are not qualified social workers.

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 YOS has access to a comprehensive suite of data across post-court orders and out-of-court disposals, analysis of which has led to deep-dive reports.
- The YOS has a multi-agency risk management meeting for children who are assessed as high or very high risk in respect of reoffending, safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others.
- The YOS is involved in the local authority's strategic and operational multi-agency meetings to monitor children who are at risk of, or experiencing, criminal exploitation. For example, the service manager proactively advocated with local and national agencies to ensure the safety and wellbeing of a child who was arrested abroad through being exploited by older peers.
- The YOS has seen an increase in the number of children receiving community resolutions for possession of cannabis offences. It has worked alongside partners to secure additional funding to review the early substance misuse offer to children. It has a full-time integrated substance use worker, who provides a range of substance use assessments and interventions, as well as a Change Grow Live substance use worker who works specifically with children who receive their first disposal for cannabis use.
- The YOS is developing its trauma recovery model, and staff have been trained in key psychological principles and approaches. Alongside other specialists, the education psychologist is leading the complex case consultations and working towards an 'enhanced case management' process.
- Feedback from the court stated that YOS staff who work in court are knowledgeable, effective and proactive. Reports are always comprehensive and include detailed recommendations on disposals.
- The YOS families and victim engagement officers provide interventions for victims and parents and carers of children who are known to the YOS. The role was developed in recognition that providing interventions to families and victims required similar skill sets and knowledge about restorative approaches.
- The YOS employs an education officer and an education psychologist who offer support to schools and education providers to meet the needs of YOS children across the age ranges. For older YOS children there is additional support from Career Connect.
- The YOS works closely with early help and children's social care teams, in particular the Shield (exploitation) team. A number of YOS staff are trained in Assessment, Intervention and Moving On (AIM3), to work with children who display harmful sexual behaviour.

- There is an integrated health and wellbeing team, managed by the YOS health and wellbeing coordinator. It includes a YOS nurse, a speech and language therapist, and an assistant psychologist. A full health assessment is completed for every child who enters the service. At the end of their involvement with the YOS, children are fast-tracked into appropriate neurodiversity, emotional mental health, and wellbeing services.
- The YOS has a seconded police officer and a police sergeant who will cover in their absence. They have a good knowledge of the children managed by the YOS and intelligence is routinely shared both by the police and by case managers.
- Effective transition arrangements are in place with the YOS and the probation service and these are supported by a Merseyside protocol. The YOS is also well engaged with the multi-agency public protection arrangement process.

Areas for improvement:

- The YOS has analysed the reasons for its high first-time entrant and custody rates, and accepts that more work is needed to understand its high reoffending rates.
- The YOS needs to take a more strategic approach to improving the education, training and employment opportunities for its children. Senior managers need to review and challenge all potential school exclusions, communicating a clear message about keeping children in learning and the risks to the child associated with non-attendance.
- The YOS, in conjunction with partners, needs to provide bespoke support for children aged over 16, to ensure there is sufficient volume, range and flexibility of options across the locality to meet their needs.
- A high number of care-experienced children are known to the YOS, and work is being done across the partnership to tackle this concern. The lived experiences of these children need to be explored and reviewed, so partners can ensure that the services provided enable early diversion from the youth justice system.
- There have been ongoing issues in recruiting a seconded probation officer. The current postholder has been on maternity leave since September 2022. Although there has been an agreement to fund an agency worker, at the time of the inspection the YOS lacked the skills and experience of a probation officer.

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:

- Merseyside YOTs meet bi-monthly to develop pan-Merseyside protocols, collaboration, training and integrated working.
- The YOS has its own local policies and guidance in place, which are reviewed regularly and are accessible to staff.
- Information-sharing protocols are in place and understood across the partnership.
- There is an escalation process for all partners to help in challenging another agency. Staff feel supported by managers when they raise concerns.
- The YOS is based in Huyton town centre and is co-located with other children's services. The building is a safe space for staff and is accessible for children and families.
- Staff also access a range of community-based facilities across the geographical area, including children's centres and schools, and will visit children at home.
- Staff are aware of children's safety and ability to travel around the area and will visit them in their locality as well as transport them to venues.
- The YOS case management system enables the service to produce detailed data on performance.
- The YOS has access to children's social care systems, and relevant partners have their own access to the YOS case management system.
- As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the YOS invested in various forms of IT for staff to use, both for themselves, and with children and families.
- There is a strategic and planned approach to quality assurance, which includes the collation and analysis of findings. This is driving improvements in the quality of work.
- There is evidence that the YOS reviews cases when serious incidents occur. It also utilises learning from other area inspections and thematic inspections to help improve practice.

Areas for improvement:

- Recent changes to the office building mean that the reception and meeting rooms are now used by various agencies and are less child friendly.
- The YOS has previously been involved in multi-agency audits but these have not taken place for a few years.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YOS has an operational manager who leads on engagement and participation. Feedback from children, parents, carers and victims is gathered in various ways. The findings are collated in a report, and are monitored at the managers' planning and performance meeting. The service has also developed, in liaison with the speech, language and communication therapist, some 'easy read' letters and forms. This is an ongoing process, and they are obtaining feedback on the products from children. However, the YOS recognises that, although it gathers feedback, it needs to make sure there is an effective process in place which utilises what is said by children, parents, carers and victims and influences the way that services are delivered.

The YOS 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 nine children who consented, and four children replied. When asked how they rated the service they had received from the YOS, three responded, with a score of 10 out of 10. One child said:

"They have helped and supported the whole family and answered the questions that we have."

When asked how the YOS had helped them stay out of trouble, one child said:

"Helped me to understand more and now I am on a construction course."

Inspectors also spoke to three children and two parents. All felt that their YOS workers had the right skills to do the work, and all but one said that they had been able to access the right services and support to help them stay out of trouble.

One child, talking about their case manager, said:

"I reckon they have helped. I can't even lie. I have taken on what they were telling me, and I am more like staying in and not going out as much as before where I was getting into bother."

Another child when asked about what they like most about the YOS said:

"They helped me to think, and I find it funny how different I am now. I'm not the same person in only a year."

One parent commented:

"They are a good service and good that they have the 'out-reach' as well. My child doesn't really know what they want to do, so they are helping them with options. They're not on a YOS order anymore but they are still helping them and that's good as well."

Resettlement

The YOS did not have any relevant cases for us to rate against our resettlement standard and we therefore looked at provision arrangements. The YOS has introduced a resettlement policy and good practice guide, the aim of which is to provide direction to staff in effective resettlement practice, in line with relevant research recommendations. This has been disseminated to staff. It will be monitored to measure its effectiveness and whether it results in better outcomes for children leaving the secure estate.

YOS staff who have managed custodial cases described communication with the secure estate as very good. Each child is allocated a resettlement worker and there are weekly conversations between the YOS and the establishment. Information exchange with the secure establishment is timely, and any adjudication outcomes are usually received within 24 hours. YOS staff are encouraged to attend all initial planning meetings, remand review meetings and sentence review meetings in person, as well as undertake welfare visits to maintain and develop their working relationships. The family and victim engagement officers support the child's family through the resettlement process and help them to visit their child. They also keep the victim updated and continue with any restorative process as appropriate.

Both education staff and the health and wellbeing team liaise with community providers, share assessments and ensure access to the right provision, in order to assist in the continuity of education and health care during and after custody. Where services are not available in custody, seconded YOS staff will provide support and deliver the work required.

Finding the appropriate accommodation in a timely manner for a child leaving custody can be difficult. However, where there are concerns, YOS managers discuss these at the regular meeting they have with children's social care managers.

When a child is sentenced to custody, the management team review the case and the sentence given. In their responses to the staff survey, more than half of the staff who work with children in custody said that they had not received specific training in resettlement work. However, they have received training in other areas of practice, which enables them to support resettlement.

The board does not monitor children in custody and is not sighted on the timeliness of release arrangements and the plans in place for children being released, including the availability of accommodation, education or training or access to necessary healthcare. However, matters are escalated by the service manager to relevant partners if needed.

Diversity

The population of Knowsley is mostly white British. The largest non-white group describe themselves as being of 'mixed ethnic' origin. Staff were aware of the profile of the children and families they were working with. They were alert to issues around ingrained racism and unconscious bias.

The service had used an 'ethnic disparity tool', which showed that white children are over-represented and ethnic minority groups under-represented within Knowsley YOS. Children from a white ethnic background accounted for 96 per cent of all children receiving a youth caution or court sentence in the year ending March 2021. Children from a Black ethnic background accounted for two per cent of the YOS caseload.

At the time of inspection, one per cent of those on the YOS caseload were Black, Asian or minority ethnic children, and 10 per cent were female. The YOS identified that three per cent of its workforce are Black, Asian or minority ethnic and 82 per cent are female.

The inspected cases showed that, in most post-court and out-of-court cases, the case manager considered the child's diversity. However, there was limited evidence that staff had conversations with children about their heritage and how their lived experience was affecting them. Although the YOS recognises the importance of understanding disproportionality within its youth justice plan, it would benefit from developing specific guidance to help staff engage with children in discussing their heritage and lived experience to ensure work is being taken forward.

Knowsley has a higher proportion of care-experienced children than the national figure: 91 per 10,000 children are looked after compared with 64 per 10,000 nationally, and 25 per cent of children live in poverty compared with 17 per cent nationally. At the time of the inspection, the YOS had 148 open interventions. Of these, 65 per cent of the children had substance misuse issues, 33 per cent had emotional, mental health and wellbeing concerns, 45 per cent had a learning disability, learning difficulty or were subject to an education, health and care plan, and 10 per cent were care-experienced children living in the YOS area.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

Our rating¹ 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 activity was consistently strong across children's desistance, their safety and wellbeing, and the risk they posed to others. In assessing desistance, case managers showed a suitable understanding of the trauma that children had experienced and its impact on their behaviour and engagement. Assessments were strengths-based and robust. Practitioners collated information from other agencies and appropriately analysed children's factors for and against desistance. Case managers considered children's attitude to and motivation for offending. Children's diversity needs were explored, although a better understanding of the child's lived experiences and heritage would lead to an improved understanding of the child and their family. Parents' views were prioritised, and case managers appropriately recognised children's levels of maturity. Case managers had considered the wishes and needs of victims in most cases, allowing restorative opportunities to be offered.

Case managers appropriately identified the potential risks to children's safety and wellbeing and included information from other agencies; for example, health staff did an assessment of every child. Practitioners considered the external factors that could be put in place to support children's safety.

In assessing children's risk of harm to others, information from other agencies informed the assessment. This included information from the police that was used to help analyse the internal and external controls. Case managers identified their concerns for children who were carrying knives, and there were clear rationales for the interventions needed to manage the risks that children presented to others. There was evidence that case managers consistently considered who was at risk, and the nature of that risk.

¹ 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 on our website.](#)

2.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating² 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?	88%

The service prioritised allocating cases to practitioners who had already worked with the child and their family. Planning for the child's interventions evidenced that the case manager knew the child well, considered their personal circumstances and understood their motivation and their strengths.

Planning was linked to the child's assessed desistance factors and took account of their learning needs. Case managers considered the child's ability to be involved in education, training and employment opportunities, although a consistent approach to understanding the child's motivation to engage is needed. Both the YOS education workers and substance misuse workers were part of the planning process and built relationships with the children and their families. When relevant, planning took account of the wishes of victims and the YOS police officer gave the victims' account to children who had been involved in assaults on emergency workers. The YOS families and victim engagement officers worked well with victims and kept them up to date with children's progress.

Planning to keep children safe was strong in all the cases inspected. Other agencies were involved in the planning process, which was helped by the co-location of other professionals, including social workers and the 'Shield' exploitation team. Multi-agency meetings were regularly used to make sure information was being shared and all agencies were up to date with the child's circumstances. Case managers planned for the interventions that were needed to support children and managed the risk to their safety and wellbeing.

Planning to manage a child's risk of harm to others was another strong area of practice. Planning promoted the safety of other people and addressed the safety of specific victims in most cases. Case managers used the YOS multi-agency risk management meeting and, where appropriate, multi-agency public protection arrangement meetings to help inform the planning process. Although contingency planning was not evident in half of the relevant cases, the necessary controls and interventions were in place to promote the safety of other people.

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 in the data annexe 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 rating³ 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?	88%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	88%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	88%

Case managers had built strong relationships with the children and their families, and this was evident in the children's engagement. Most cases demonstrated the priority that case managers gave to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents and carers, to help support desistance. The interventions delivered built on the case manager's understanding of the child, their strengths, and their ability to engage. Case managers were involved in multi-agency discussions and meetings to ensure that provision was in place for the child when their involvement with the YOS ended. There were, however, limited community reparation opportunities for children, to help them build relationships in their local areas.

Interventions were identified to manage the child's safety and wellbeing. There was evidence of joint working with specialist staff, including the nurse and the psychologist, as well as the speech and language therapist, substance misuse workers, and 'Shield', the exploitation team. There were examples of case managers working in a trauma-informed way and using case consultations with health professionals to help them deliver sessions that would meet the child's needs. Inspectors noted some good work with parents from the families and victim engagement officers, who engaged parents and carers and ensured that they were receiving appropriate provision as a family.

The delivery of services and interventions that considered a child's risk of harm to others was strong and there was good multi-agency coordination to monitor the risks. The protection of actual and potential victims was consistently considered in all cases. Communication and information-sharing between the YOS police officers and case managers was timely and effective in ensuring that all professionals were updated, and the child's risk was being well managed.

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 in the data annexe on our website.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	75%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	75%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	88%

Reviews were completed at key points in the order, and many cases showed ongoing reviewing of desistance factors as the order progressed. It was pleasing that case managers continued to build on children's strengths and considered the changes in their personal circumstances, although more consideration should be given to consistently responding to children's diversity needs. There was evidence that the focus of interventions changed if needed and the child's ongoing plan was adjusted when necessary. The reviews considered children's motivation appropriately as the order progressed, and the child and their parents and carers continued to be involved in the reviewing process.

Reviews of children's safety and wellbeing needed strengthening in the post-court cases inspected. Reviews did not consistently detail the changes in children's circumstances. Where this occurred, it was due to changes in the case manager, resulting in some drift and delay in cases. There were, however, examples of professional discussions and meetings with education, health, and children's social care workers. Case managers also used the multi-agency risk management meetings to help them manage any changing concerns or escalations in the risk to children's safety and wellbeing.

When reviewing children's risk of harm to others, case managers recognised and responded to changes in the child's circumstances, and the reviewing process included information from, and meetings with, other agencies. In most cases, reviews consistently lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan, and work to manage the risk of harm to others was addressed and managed effectively.

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 on our website.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 12 cases managed by the YOS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of four youth cautions, four community resolutions and four other disposals. There were no youth conditional cautions. We interviewed the case managers in nine cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

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

	% 'Yes'
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	92%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	83%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	92%

The YOS was aware that, due to a time of change in the staffing structure, there had been some drift and delay in out-of-court disposals during the period of the inspected cases. This had not, however, affected the quality of assessment activity and this was a consistently strong area of practice.

To help identify children's desistance factors, case managers had accessed a range of sources from partner agencies and offered an appropriate analysis of children's attitudes towards, or reasons for, their offending. They focused on children's strengths and their motivation to change. Case managers involved children and their parents or carers in the assessment, and in all relevant cases they considered the needs and wishes of victims. Assessments took account of children's diversity requirements and outlined any barriers to provision meeting the child's needs.

Nearly all of the cases identified and sufficiently analysed the potential risks to children's safety and wellbeing. Case managers used information from other agencies to inform their assessments, including health and speech, language and communication screenings. There was a clear written record of children's wellbeing and how to keep them safe.

In most cases, the risks to others were identified and analysed, and information from other agencies was used to inform the assessment. Practitioners recognised wider risks to other people and analysed appropriately children's potential future harmful behaviour.

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 on our website.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Good

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

	% 'Yes'
Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	92%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	67%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	83%

In some cases, there was evidence of planning not taking place in a timely manner due to case managers changing roles and cases being reallocated.

Plans addressed the child's desistance factors, and case managers took account of children's diversity needs. Practitioners included children and their parents and carers and made plans proportionate to the type of disposal. They also ensured that plans reflected the wishes and needs of victims, and cases showed good examples of restorative justice work being completed. As some of the interventions were delivered within a short period, case managers needed to be more focused on children's access to mainstream services and opportunities for community integration after the disposal had ended.

Planning to address children's safety and wellbeing in out-of-court disposals was a weaker area of practice. Case managers worked alongside the YOS health team, substance misuse workers and the YOS parenting workers to implement the plans. They received information from other agencies, which was evident in the multi-agency risk management meetings as well as children's risks being discussed in other forums across the partnership. Due to changes in case manager in some cases, however, this information was not consistently followed up in a timely manner and included in the planning to keep the child safe.

Planning to address both a child's safety and wellbeing and their risk of harm to others requires contingency arrangements to be considered consistently. Case managers need to remain up to date with the child's circumstances and ensure that all information they receive is analysed so that their response to the child's needs is adapted accordingly.

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 on our website.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁷ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% 'Yes'
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	83%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	67%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	92%

As with planning, in a small number of cases, there was a delay in starting interventions with children and delivering services. Again, this was due to the movement of staff during the time frame of the inspected cases.

The delivery of services and interventions, in the main, built on the assessment and the plans. Case managers could access all the services and interventions available for children on court orders for those subject to an out-of-court disposal. The interventions delivered showed that the case manager had built a strong relationship with the child and their family, and this was evident in the child's engagement with their disposal.

To help support children's desistance, case managers matched interventions to their needs and learning styles, taking account of their diversity. They were also proportionate to the type of disposal. There was good engagement with interventions, which were mainly voluntary, and case managers worked hard to establish effective working relationships with both the children and their parents and carers. In most cases, practitioners had considered how children could be linked to mainstream services once their interventions had ended.

The delivery of interventions to support children's safety and wellbeing in out-of-court disposals was a weaker area of practice. In a small number of cases, opportunities were missed to engage children, due to the change in case managers. In most cases, however, there was evidence of case managers being creative in both where and how to deliver interventions to meet children's needs. In most of the cases inspected, service delivery and interventions supported children's safety effectively.

In nearly all cases, interventions with children to support the safety of other people were managing and minimising the risk of harm. Case managers considered the protection of potential and actual victims when delivering interventions. Overall, the interventions delivered had supported the safety of other people in the majority of the cases inspected.

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 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.

Good

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

Strengths:

- In November 2022 the YOS launched its prevention team, with funding from the local authority. The intention is the YOS will intervene early with children and families and provide interventions to help children stay out of the youth justice system.
- There is an out-of-court disposal joint Merseyside protocol in place between the five Merseyside YOTs and Merseyside police, which provides a consistent pan-Merseyside approach.
- Although Merseyside police can issue street restorative justice disposals, these are very rare, and every child is referred to the YOS for assessment and intervention.
- An assessment is completed for all children and the case manager will visit the child and family and make a proposal based on their assessment.
- Partnership agencies screen all children on receipt of the notification from the police to check whether they know the child or family.
- The police and YOS use the 'acceptance of responsibility' approach to enable children to receive an out-of-court disposal.
- The out-of-court disposal panel has access to the Inclusion programme, which is a deferred prosecution scheme. AssetPlus is completed and presented by the case manager to the Inclusion panel. If the child completes the programme, they will get an Outcome 22.
- All the interventions and services available to children on court orders can be used for children on an out-of-court disposal.
- Both the Inclusion programme panel and the out-of-court disposal panel monitor children's progress and deal with any concerns about non-engagement.
- YOS staff understand the process for out-of-court disposals and feel that their assessments influence the outcome for the child.
- There is evidence of joint decision-making, and the rationale for the disposal outcomes are clearly recorded. If there are any disagreements at the panel, there is a clear escalation process in place, although it is rarely used.
- The YOS completes a regular quality assurance scrutiny exercise, which looks at the out-of-court disposal decisions that have been made in terms of quality of assessment, timeliness, management oversight, and the outcome agreed.

- An annual report is produced by the Merseyside violence reduction programme about the performance of the Inclusion programme, including data specific to Knowsley children.
- There is a Merseyside scrutiny panel that reviews cases and looks at the consistency of decision-making and outcomes.

Areas for improvement:

- The YOS produces an out-of-court disposal quarterly performance report, but the out-of-court disposal panel does not use this analysis to help inform the decisions it makes.
- This information should be used to analyse the service's high rate of reoffending and is especially relevant to the high number of care-experienced children who are known to the YOS. The outcomes for these children need to continue to be monitored to ensure that they are offered every opportunity to be diverted away from the youth justice system.

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.](#)