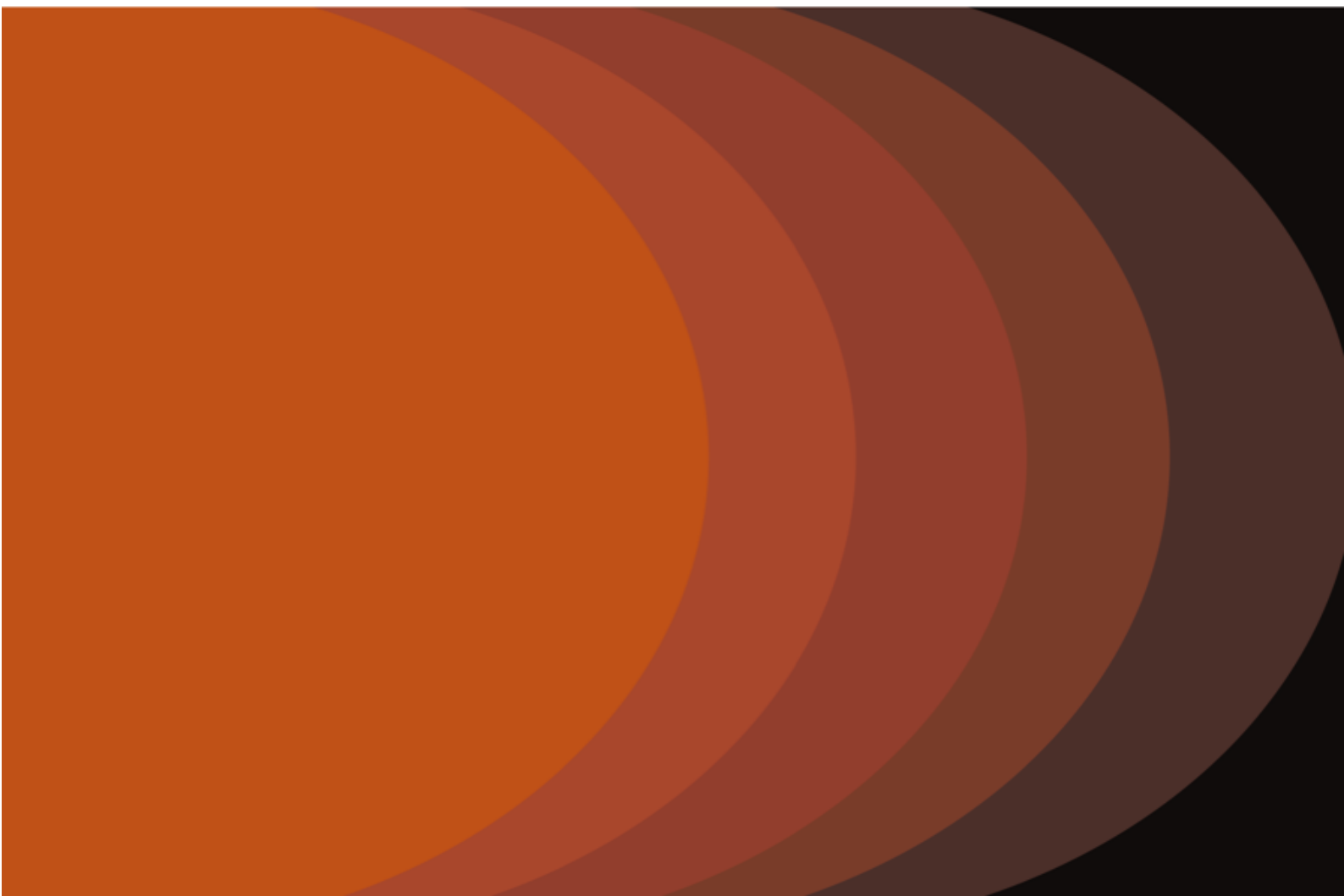




HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in
Wokingham PYJS

HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2024



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Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

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Foreword

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

Children receive a positive response from the PYJS if they offend in Wokingham. The service delivers a 'universal offer' to all children it works with, ensuring a focus on the needs of the child and not the intervention type. The approach is 'child first' and there is a genuine desire to develop and deliver positive outcomes for children and their parents or carers.

These ambitions are assisted by a well-resourced, motivated, and enthusiastic staff group. They, in turn, are supported by a knowledgeable and tenacious team manager who has been critical in driving forward improvements to service delivery. We also found a board motivated and committed to understanding and addressing the needs of youth justice children, with evidence that strategic decisions were feeding through to front line delivery. The collegiate approach to addressing the health and education needs of children was particularly noteworthy.

We found a strength in provision for children subject to out-of-court disposals. Assessment activity was thorough, analytical, and co-produced with children, their families or carers, and other professionals. This provided a perfect springboard for service delivery to focus on children's relevant needs and we saw interventions that were delivered consistently well.

In contrast we saw some variability in the quality of work delivered to children post-court. Whilst planning activity was thorough, the plans themselves could sometimes lack the fluidity and personalisation required for this cohort of children and this impacted on service delivery.

Overall, we have seen significant developments since our pilot inspection, completed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and found a service that has been on a considerable journey to improve the quality of its operational delivery. This is a responsive service, who should feel rightly proud of their progress to date and if the recommendations made in this report are taken on and addressed, we have no doubt that the delivery of youth justice services will continue to develop positively.



Martin Jones CBE

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Wokingham Prevention and Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started June 2024

Score 27/36

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

Good



2.2 Planning

Good



2.3 Implementation and delivery

Requires improvement



2.4 Reviewing

Good



3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Outstanding



3.2 Planning

Outstanding



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Outstanding



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Good



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Not rated

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

Recommendations

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

The Wokingham PYJS manager should:

1. ensure that planning activity for children is always child friendly, specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (SMART) and meets the needs of the child
2. ensure that practitioners working with children who have been to court are consistently providing them with access to high-quality, targeted interventions that recognise and respond to changes in need during their intervention.

The Wokingham PYJS management board should:

3. develop its understanding of the work undertaken with victims and the data required to determine the efficacy of current activity
4. review and update the cross-partnership equity, inclusion, and diversity action plan to develop strategic oversight of activity being undertaken to tackle disproportionality.

The South-Central Regional Probation Service should:

5. develop guidance with all YJSs in Berkshire, outlining expectations for attendance and participation at management boards and ensure that there is a standard offer of provision and accompanying expectations for probation link workers in the absence of seconded probation officers.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Wokingham PYJS over a period of a week, beginning 24 June 2024. We inspected cases where the community sentence began between 26 June 2023 and 19 April 2024, and the out-of-court disposal was delivered between 26 June 2023 and 19 April 2024. The service had no resettlement cases within our timeframes for inspection. We also conducted 12 interviews with case managers.

The Borough of Wokingham is one of six unitary authority areas within Berkshire, in Thames Valley. The borough includes the town of Wokingham and a number of rural districts. The PYJS provides interventions throughout the borough. The population of Wokingham is 180,967, with a 10–17-year-old population of 20,286. The 10–17-year-olds make up 11.2 per cent of the overall population, compared with 9.6 per cent across England and Wales.

The percentage of Wokingham children (under 16 years of age) living in low-income families is 6.3 per cent – significantly lower than the England (15.1 per cent) and the South-East region average (11.6 per cent). However, the number of children living in relatively low-income households is on the rise locally, with 3,571 recorded in 2021/2022, up from 3,101 in 2019/2020. Wokingham has fewer secondary school children with special educational needs (7.2 per cent), when compared with both national (11.9 per cent) and South-East region averages (11.7 per cent). Since 2011, the borough has become much more ethnically diverse, with latest census data indicating that just over 30 per cent of children are now from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groupings.

Offending rates in the borough (3.5 offences per 1,000 of the 10–17 population) are significantly lower than the regional and national averages, which sit at 5.6 and 6.0 per 1,000 of the 10–17 population, respectively.²

The PYJS is overseen by a Service Manager who has a portfolio which encompasses several other targeted services, including children with disabilities and early help.

The PYJS has a dedicated Head Of Service and the service itself is responsible for the delivery of prevention services, diversion activity, and out-of-court and statutory post-court work. Caseload trends show that all post-court sentence outcomes have decreased between 2019 and 2023, while out-of-court activity has risen. Governance arrangements for the service are overseen by a management board, chaired by the assistant director for children's services (social care and early help).

The PYJS shares police, probation, and local criminal justice board areas with the eight other Thames Valley YJSs, and this has led to a collaborative approach to youth justice overall in the area. The local youth court is in Reading.

² The rate of offences is NOT published and is calculated by HM Inspectorate of Probation using data from (*January 2024*). *Youth Justice annual statistics: 2022 to 2023* and *Office for National Statistics*. (*November 2023*). *UK Population estimates, mid-2022*.

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 YJS supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Good

Strengths:

- The management board supports an approach to the delivery of youth justice services that recognises the complex needs of children, within a broader ambition to intervene early and prevent children's behaviour from escalating.
- A previous pilot HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection identified that strategic oversight needed to develop, and the board has made significant progress in increasing its efficacy since then.
- The board comprises all statutory agencies, with appropriate links to relevant strategic forums. Non-statutory members add value.
- The focus on health and education in Wokingham is particularly strong. There is a broader ambition within the authority to become a 'Marmot borough'.³
- There is evidence that strategic decisions made at the board are operationalised well, and we saw the impact of this in the cases we inspected. For example, we saw evidence that when resource was required to increase support for children's speech, language, and communication needs, this was reviewed, and additional resource agreed.
- There is evidence of effective challenge between board members. This has resulted in changes to operational resourcing, and actions taken to review barriers to service delivery.
- The board has access to appropriate data and performance reports, with an accompanying detailed narrative prepared by the PYJS manager.
- The board's links with the community safety partnership are strong and reflect a clear strategic response to serious violence and exploitation.
- The PYJS manager has been central to developing more effective leadership and governance arrangements.
- There is an induction process for new board members.

³ The Marmot Review into health inequalities in England was published on 11 February 2010. It proposes an evidence-based strategy to address the social determinants of health, the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, and which can lead to health inequalities.

- The management team provides an effective link between practitioners and the board. Practitioners have a strong understanding of the role that the board plays, and this has had a positive impact on operationalising the strategy. We saw evidence that staff attend the Board where appropriate.

Areas for improvement:

- Consistent attendance at the board by all key partners has stabilised. However, there have been a number of police representatives attending board meetings previously, and more consistent attendance would enhance police connectivity to the board.
- Probation Service representation at the board is not of sufficient seniority and this hampers its understanding of the operational impact caused by arrangements put in place locally, in the absence of a seconded probation officer. These concerns apply across the probation region and are not restricted to Wokingham.
- The board reviews performance information proactively, but there is sometimes an overreliance on the PYJS to produce data. A more collaborative and proactive approach to developing data sets and understanding challenges would enhance the partnership's awareness of trends and enable it to act more swiftly.
- The board's understanding of the needs of victims, many of whom are children, needs to improve. There is not sufficient understanding of relevant data and the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Risks to service delivery are understood and responded to, but there needs to be a more systematic approach to evaluating activity put in place to mitigate risks.
- An updated disproportionality action plan would help the board to oversee and coordinate the numerous examples of effective diversity practice more efficiently.

1.2. Staff



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

Outstanding

Strengths:

- Staff are well motivated, skilled, and keen to do a good job. There has been some staff turnover in the last two years, but this has not impacted service delivery.
- Assistant team managers are knowledgeable and work well together. This resource has been increased to develop staff skill and ensure that a child-first approach is always delivered.
- Workloads are manageable and there is a structured and considered approach to allocation. Managers meet regularly to ensure that cases are allocated to staff with appropriate skill sets and that capacity is not exceeded.
- Although overall sickness rates in the service have been high, this has been because of specific factors. Absence has been managed well by the service and there has been no visible impact on the quality of service delivery.
- There is a small but committed group of experienced volunteers in place. Consideration is being given to regional recruitment with other YJSs to increase resilience within this group.
- There has been a recognition that previous restorative justice arrangements required development, and these have been reviewed. The changes are still embedding, but the new worker is knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- There is a strong emphasis on learning and development within the service, and training needs are being met. The manager takes a 'grow your own' approach and we saw evidence that this has resulted in staff promotions and access to appropriate training.
- All staff who had highlighted a personal diverse need said that the service had supported them.
- Supervision arrangements are strong, and this was visible in case records. Staff feel that support is strong, and appraisals are meaningful. There is a clear emphasis on staff wellbeing within these arrangements, which also extends to volunteers.
- Staff, including volunteers, can access clinical supervision and other support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) colleagues.
- For domain two cases, management oversight was sufficient in four out of six cases we inspected, and for domain three it met requirements in five out of six.
- Good practice is recognised by managers, and staff feel valued.
- Staff believe that they have influence over decisions on service delivery. They feel empowered to feed back to managers and there is a collegiate feel to arrangements.

Areas for improvement:

- All practitioners are women. If a child needs a practitioner who is a man, there is a reliance on other agencies to provide this support. Attempts to recruit workers who are men have not been successful to date.

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 reasonable understanding of the profile of PYJS children among the partnership. There is a shared understanding of both the needs and the demographics of this cohort.
- The partnership's understanding of sentencing trends is strong, and resources have been targeted towards ensuring that the offer of support for children receiving out-of-court disposals is robust.
- Although there is no standalone health needs assessment of PYJS children specifically, the partnership's understanding of their health needs is impressive. Support has been appropriately targeted and there have been tangible positive impacts as a consequence.
- Speech and language therapy (SALT) provision has increased following the presentation of evidence that additional resource was required. The support on offer ensures that the speech, language, and communication needs of children are well understood and catered for.
- Mental health support is strong. We were not aware of significant CAMHS waiting lists, and mental health practitioners work closely with the PYJS to ensure that children's needs are met. Case formulation activity is regularly undertaken. Where gaps in support were noted, this was due to outcomes not being clearly recorded and subsequently clarified during interview with inspectors, rather than an absence of provision.
- Work is being undertaken to address proactively the barriers that schoolchildren face in accessing education. The PYJS has developed good relationships with schools and this approach is starting to result in positive outcomes for children.
- Children at risk of exploitation receive an appropriate multi-agency response to manage risks.
- There is a commensurate and strong offer of support from the third sector. The YJS was able to evidence consistent levels of referral over the last 12 months.
- Partnership arrangements are evaluated regularly at a well-established partnership evaluation meeting. Discussions here feed into reviews of overall provision.

Areas for improvement:

- Partners participate in collating and scrutinising data when asked, but a more proactive approach to initiating this scrutiny would develop a greater understanding of this complex group of children.
- There is evaluation of the substance misuse intervention offered to children receiving street community resolutions. This needs to be developed across all

disposals, so that the referral rates, delivery, and effectiveness of substance misuse interventions are better understood and evaluated.

- Probation arrangements are not always effective and there would be benefit in reviewing the role of the link worker to develop links with the Probation Service further.
- The absence of an 'Elevate' post-16 NEET (not in work, education, or training) worker appeared to have impacted on outcomes. This role has now been filled.
- Thames Valley police need to ensure that the seconded police officer resource is proportionately distributed across the local authority areas that it is intended to serve, to maximise the secondment arrangements, including effective communication, information sharing, and impactful joint working.
- There is a good understanding of the diversity needs of the PYJS cohort, but more work is needed on developing bespoke interventions for some groups, such as girls.

1.4. Information and facilities



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

Good

Strengths:

- The service has an appropriate range of policies and guidance in place. It is regularly reviewed, accessible via the intranet, and well understood. There is evidence that staff have played a proactive part in policy development at team meetings.
- The service relocated to a new purpose designed office following negative feedback about premises in a previous pilot inspection. Children's views have been sought regarding décor and layout, and changes are continually being made.
- There is a suite of satellite venues in the community, facilitating attendance for children having difficulty with public transport or who may feel unsafe when visiting the central office.
- Basic risk assessments are in place for reparation placements.
- Information and communications technology provision is sufficient. Staff report no issues in accessing information remotely. They also have access to the social care case management system.
- The service has a dedicated data analyst, who interrogates the case management system to develop a sufficient suite of management information. This information is used by the PYJS manager and the board to identify trends and areas requiring resource.
- There is a strong focus on quality assurance and performance monitoring in the service. There was a clear sense that this activity is used to review practice.
- Some activity to capture the voice of the child, such as the 'Children Speak Freely' panels, is still at a relatively early stage of development. There are also ambitions to evaluate children's engagement in voluntary interventions via Brunel University. Given that feedback is routinely sought from children and their parents or carers in exit interviews, we saw significant evidence of a real desire to evidence a 'you said/we did' approach.

Areas for improvement:

- All policies and guidance consider the impact of equity, inclusion, and diversity factors, but need to be more explicit regarding how the application will avoid the chance of disproportionality.
- There is no direct access for wheelchairs at the PYJS office, which is located on the first floor of the building. Sufficient workarounds are in place to allow access via another adjoining office or for children with mobility issues to see workers at the nearby early help service or in a satellite office.

- The challenge for the service is to ensure that the data it has is always analysed in a timely and effective manner, including utilising partnership information and analysis. The ongoing analysis of data relating to girls offending was taking place and entirely appropriate. However, this had taken some considerable time, given the low number of children involved.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

There is a systematic approach utilised by the PYJS to hearing the voice of children and their parents or carers and using it to help inform and shape service delivery. All children who have engaged with interventions participate in a structured exit interview and this is used to identify what worked well and what they learnt from their engagement with their case manager. In addition to this, parental feedback is sought, with a view to determining what changes they have seen in their children and how the PYJS could improve. We saw genuine attempts to use this feedback, evidenced by changes to the office to make it feel more inclusive and sharing more information with parents about the work being completed by their children.

In addition to this, the PYJS has recently introduced a 'Children Speak Freely' panel to gain a greater understanding of the impact of its work on children. Brunel University has been approached to evaluate the efficacy of work to evaluate engagement with voluntary interventions. All this activity has produced an environment which genuinely places value on hearing the voices of children and their families.

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 eight children who consented, and four children replied. Of those who replied, all rated the PYJS eight out of 10 or above and all said that the PYJS had helped them to stay out of trouble.

We also spoke to four children and five parents during the fieldwork. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and all agreed that practitioners had the right skills to do the job, with one parent noting:

"My daughter is difficult to connect with. She has major trust issues, but she instantly clicked with the practitioner. She was able to feel confident to speak and felt supported. My child felt she had been treated badly by the police so was very guarded, but the practitioner made her feel safe".

All who responded felt that appointments were safe and easy to get to, with one child remarking that:

"My practitioner or mentor will pick me up and bring me here which makes it easy for me. I feel safe".

All also agreed that there was access to appropriate services, with one parent noting:

"Substance misuse was offered, but was not a concern, so she did not take it up. She met the nurse and as she had not had all her jabs as she had refused needles, they got them all sorted for her".

There was little negative feedback about the PYJS, although two children did reflect that they had had a number of case managers working with them at the start of their orders, reflecting perhaps the turnover of staff noted in the domain one 'staff' standard. Nonetheless, both noted that this did not affect relationships with their workers, which they viewed as a strength. This was reflected by one parent, who noted that she had:

"...witnessed my son welcomed by all members of staff. This is a friendly environment and there is a positive atmosphere here".

Diversity

- In Wokingham, the most recent youth justice board (YJB) annual data (2022/2023) indicates that when comparing the offending population with the general population of those aged 10–17, ethnic minority children are not overrepresented; 28.8 per cent of the youth population are from an ethnic minority background, whereas only 24 per cent of the caseload are from this background. However, this masks individual pockets of overrepresentation, and the PYJS's analysis has identified overrepresentation of mixed heritage and traveller children. As a result of data analysis highlighting this disproportionality, the service commissioned anti-racist and allyship training, and has recently delivered Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller training. There is some evidence that this training has had an impact; anti-discriminatory practice is a clear ambition within the youth justice plan, and staff told us about the changes in the language they used with children.
- Wokingham has fewer secondary school children with special educational needs (7.2 per cent), when compared with both national (11.9 per cent) and South-East region (11.7 per cent) averages. At the point of inspection announcement, quarterly data submitted to the YJB indicated that no child finishing their intervention during this quarter had a learning disability or learning difficulty, although for the quarter before, the figure stood at 60 per cent of cases closed. In a service such as Wokingham, the very small caseloads mean that there is potential for volatility between quarters which could impact upon the capability to take swift action to tackle emerging disproportionality. However, the PYJS responds appropriately to emerging trends even when not always immediately visible.
- There is visible ethnic minority representation within the staff group (35 per cent), although this representation is not reflective of the specific children disproportionately represented on the PYJS caseload. However, staff demonstrated sufficient understanding of the needs of these cohorts.
- As a result of data analysis, a thematic audit has been started, to review the recent overrepresentation of girls on the caseload, and the service has joined the national 'Girls in Youth Justice' working group.
- As a result of data analysis highlighting disproportionality of children with SEND needs, staff have accessed training and joint forums have been established with education colleagues to review children's needs, such as a recently introduced education partnership meeting. This approach seemed to be having an impact on the work we saw; inspectors noted that work to support children with learning needs was strong in the cases inspected. The role of the SALT has also been crucial.
- Overall, the service has a good understanding of the diverse needs of the children it works with, and we saw several individual instances of good practice by staff making interventions bespoke for children's needs. However, the approach is not always systematic and some of the strategic activity to address these issues needs to be delivered more quickly. In addition, more explicit guidance is needed in some policy documents. The absence of an up-to-date multi-agency disproportionality action plan, covering all relevant protected characteristics and coordinating activity among the partnership delivering youth justice services, was notable.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Good

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	100%
how to keep the child safe?	100%
how to keep other people safe?	67%

Assessment of how to support the child's desistance were undertaken well. A timely, well-informed record was available for every child we inspected. Assessment activity was analytical in content, and appropriately considered links and patterns between the index offence and previous behaviours impacting on the child's desistance. Assessment drew upon a range of sources, including records held by partner agencies such as children's social care. Both the child's and parent or carer's voices were evident throughout. We saw evidence that learning needs were considered by practitioners undertaking assessment activity. We also found that consideration was consistently given to victim impact.

Assessment activity to achieve safety for the child was undertaken consistently well. Assessments identified relevant adverse childhood experiences that could have had an impact on the child and the immediate risks affecting the child's safety. Crucially, assessment activity had the capacity to be dynamic in nature. For example, when a child was assessed to be at very high risk in terms of their safety and wellbeing, this was done with the expectation that if the protective factors identified were found to have an impact, this classification could be quickly reviewed by both the PYJS and other agencies.

Although practice was strong overall in relation to keeping others safe, we did not always see practitioners identify and analyse potential risks to others and identified that greater emphasis needed to be placed upon assessing all relevant information that was available. In one instance assessing activity considered only the impact of convicted behaviours and did not utilise information relating to negative peer associations or concerning antisocial behaviour, and this highlighted the importance of ensuring that all information was rigorously evaluated before signing off assessing activity.

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

2.2. Planning



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

Good

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

Does planning focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	83%
keeping the child safe?	67%
keeping other people safe?	100%

Planning activity to support the child's desistance focused on the consideration of crucial factors, such as the wider familial and social context of the child. However, we saw some instances of generic objectives and a lack of specificity for the child involved and this raised concerns about applicability of planning activity if circumstances changed. For example, one child was very resistant to engaging with his case manager, but, despite this, the plan was constructed with a disproportionate number of actions and interventions that did not consider his ability to engage or prioritise his need. Overall, though, in the majority of cases, there was evidence of appropriate planning and an acknowledgement of relevant concerns. In one instance a case manager used bespoke methods to ensure there was good consideration of time within the plan, meaning that a child with autism had sufficient time and did not feel overwhelmed.

While planning identified appropriate objectives and interventions to support the child's safety, there was limited consideration of contingency planning to deal with changes to the child's vulnerability. For example, one child's plan focused primarily on the risks they posed to others, without considering and tackling the impact of substance misuse, trauma, and mental health upon their own safety and wellbeing. The focus on other areas in the plan meant that it was insufficiently bespoke for the needs of the child and showed limited consideration of the intersectionality of risks both to and from other children. Where practice was positive, we saw congruence with children's services' safeguarding plans and there was evidence that consideration of referral for additional health support and therapeutic intervention was considered.

Planning to keep others safe was done well and demonstrated that practitioners had a good understanding of the actions required to sustain this safety. There was an acknowledgement of victims in all the plans we inspected and a clear understanding that interventions focusing on areas such as emotional regulation, anger management, and weapons awareness were likely to have success. There were clearly recorded plans on file which outlined relevant services and how each would work together to monitor risk.

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

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Requires improvement

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

Does the implementation and delivery of services:	% 'Yes'
effectively support the child's desistance?	83%
effectively support the safety of the child?	50%
effectively support the safety of other people?	67%

Work to support the child's desistance was delivered effectively and we found the PYJS could access a range of appropriate services and multi-agency forums. However, because planning activity was sometimes generic, rather than individualised and tailored, we found instances where intervention and delivery then lacked some responsiveness to changes in children's needs or circumstances, and this was particularly noticeable in implementation to support the safety of the child. For example, when one child ceased engaging with multiple services, there needed to be a greater focus on exploring why this had happened, and interventions needed greater capacity to adapt and change to fluctuations in the child's behaviour.

Given the strong partnership approach that we had seen evidenced within assessment and planning, it was notable that effective use of the specialisms within the team was not always apparent within service delivery. For example, we did not always see the footprint of the seconded police officer within case records proactively feeding back relevant intelligence to determine whether risks were being managed effectively. In another instance, despite access to an effective in-house health justice team, there was unclear evidence within case records and subsequent interview with the inspector about how referrals for medical support to assist a child with clear emotional and mental health needs and sleeping difficulties were progressed and what activity subsequently took place.

Where we saw services delivered well there was evidence of tenacious relationship building activity by practitioners to facilitate engagement. For example, in one instance a case manager took a decision in the early stage of the order to pause the intervention plan and focus on reparation activity due to the child's behaviour within appointments at the office. This was a good strategy to employ and highlighted the efficacy of taking a personalised approach and changing the focus of the plan to foster more positive outcomes.

In addition, where services were well delivered to support the safety of the child and others we saw evidence of regular interaction with partners via information sharing, attendance at multi agency meetings and utilising a commonly agreed approach to trauma informed practice.

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

2.4. Reviewing



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

Good

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

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

Reviewing activity to support the child's desistance was done well. This was facilitated by the relationship-based approach evident in the service. Practitioners used the knowledge developed through their relationships to focus on the child's strengths when undertaking reviews. In one instance, this approach enabled the practitioner to recognise very swiftly that a child missing their appointments required additional support and a mentor was utilised to support the child's attendance. This approach was successful.

In practice, this focus on the child's strengths meant that referral order panel members generally received positive updates on children's engagement and there was always a consideration of what was working well for the child.

Written reviews of children's desistance were meaningful, and, when completed well, were done thoroughly. They evidenced appropriate changes to aims and objectives for the child and showed a responsiveness to what was happening in a child's life.

The service's strong links with education providers was reflected in reviewing activity and there was evidence that NEET support was consistently considered by practitioners.

We saw some good examples of reviewing activity to keep children and the community safe with changes being made where necessary, particularly in instances where the child was also open to social care. For example, we saw an instance where reviewing was informed by information from social care following a step down to 'child in need', and then closure. In another case we saw strong collaboration with social care when completing a child exploitation screening tool which was then followed up with information sharing at the local multi-agency child exploitation panel and during peer mapping activity. However, some reviewing activity to keep the child and the community safe could be strengthened, and we found some instances where changes in risk were identified, but this did not result in action being taken to consider or address these, illustrating a rigidity rather than a responsive approach.

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

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

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

3.1. Assessment



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

Outstanding

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	100%
how to keep the child safe?	100%
how to keep other people safe?	83%

Assessment activity was prioritised by the PYJS for all children, including those who had received a street-delivered community resolution outside of joint decision-making panels. Consequently, the application of all disposals was swift and timely, and there was always a rapid and proactive understanding of children's needs.

All activity was supported by well-analysed written documents that had been co-produced with the children. Inspectors felt that this collegiate approach ensured that the needs of the child were fully understood and provided a clear picture of areas of strength and of challenge.

Diversity needs were understood well by practitioners, particularly for children who had learning disabilities. This reflected the good strategic and operational links with health and education colleagues seen throughout fieldwork, providing assurance that a holistic, multi-agency approach to assessment was being well operationalised.

There was clear evidence that practitioners had considered all possible adverse outcomes when considering children's vulnerability, safety, and wellbeing. Assessing activity considered context, likelihood, and impact of potential risks appropriately in all cases. Assessing activity to keep people safe was undertaken well. Classifications were generally well considered by practitioners and reflected all relevant factors. For example, one child's risk was correctly classified based on concerns around drug dealing and weapons carrying. However, there was also an acknowledgement that unrelated potentially harmful sexual behaviours needed to be considered when formulating an assessment of how best to keep other's safe. This ensured a far greater understanding of risks than would have been available had just the index offence been analysed.

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

3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

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

Does planning focus on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	83%
keeping the child safe?	100%
keeping other people safe?	83%

Planning activity for children subject to out-of-court disposals was positively impacted by the 'universal offer' of support in place, designed to ensure that children received a robust and targeted response from the PYJS that met their need. Planning reflected the complexity of this cohort of children and included relevant objectives. It is important to note that inspectors considered that sometimes planning included too many objectives to be completed within the period available, and that they were not always tailored to children's individual needs. For example, we noted that the objectives were not bespoke for a child with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. However, in the large majority of instances, there was assurance that desistance needs were always carefully considered and catered for.

Planning to keep children safe was undertaken well. We saw appropriate liaison with relevant internal PYJS professionals, such as the SALT and CAMHS workers, to ensure that activity was targeted appropriately, as well as external colleagues such as school, social care, and third-sector agencies which had been identified as organisations that could bring value to planning. The cumulative impact of all this activity meant that the child's safety was consistently prioritised in all the out-of-court work that we inspected, and that key areas of potential intervention and support were well understood by all professionals working with the child.

We did not always see practitioners taking account of opportunities for ongoing community integration once the disposal had finished. More coherent sequencing of plans could have assisted in developing both the child's and practitioners' understanding of any outstanding activity at the end of interventions. More structured consideration of sequencing could also have improved plans to address potential risks to victims by ensuring that more specific activity was factored in to planning activity. However, overall planning activity to keep others safe was undertaken well with key areas linked to risk acknowledged by practitioners and key individuals in the child's life, such as parents and teaching staff usually being involved in this activity.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Outstanding

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

Does service delivery effectively support:	% 'Yes'
the child's desistance?	100%
the safety of the child?	100%
the safety of other people?	83%

The implementation and delivery of service for children subject to out-of-court intervention was done consistently well. We saw that interventions to achieve safety for the child and others were coordinated and implemented effectively, giving a real sense that planning activity was being delivered in practice and that children were engaging well.

Service delivery that effectively supported the child's desistance was done well. We saw a focus on ensuring that appropriate services were delivered at the right time. There was a clear priority placed upon relationship-based practice, and the strength of the rapport that practitioners developed with children supported them to engage in interventions. Practitioners also facilitated children's engagement with partner agencies, and we saw evidence that referrals for mentor support was factored into service delivery considerations. The sustainability of good relationships between professionals and children and their families is key and it was positive to see this was evident throughout the interventions being delivered.

Service delivery supporting the safety of the child was strong. Every question posed by inspectors when exploring this key question was answered positively. We saw that engagement with the broader partnership was always considered when developing interventions. For example, referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub, education partnership meetings, and complex case clinic arrangements meant that interventions benefited from the input of appropriate professionals.

Interventions to support the safety of other people were generally well delivered. For example, we saw a clear focus on victim awareness and police engagement within service delivery. This focus ensured that while the overall ambitions to intervene with children at the out-of-court disposal stage followed the principles of 'child first', there was an acknowledgement of the need to achieve safety for others in tandem with these ambitions.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Good

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

Strengths:

- Thames Valley Police had taken on previous HM Inspectorate of Probation recommendations, and their engagement with the PYJS in developing out-of-court disposal processes had increased, which had had a positive impact on arrangements.
- Although there was no overarching joint agency policy in place, the operational guidance had been developed collaboratively and set clear expectations for service delivery.
- The quality of inspected out-of-court disposal casework was impressive, suggesting that the policy was being effectively operationalised and that children were receiving good support from practitioners.
- The development of Outcome 22 over the previous six months was positive and provided evidence of consideration of the effective practice evidence base.
- Timeliness from initial referral for consideration for a disposal, through the decision-making process, and up to intervention delivery was effective. There was assurance that a child would receive rapid targeted input from a practitioner, in line with expectations laid out within guidance.
- The 'universal offer' that all children received enabled a strong level of consistency in service delivery and set out clear expectations for both children and practitioners.
- Data was routinely collected by the PYJS and there was evidence this was being used to develop service delivery.
- The structured exit interviews carried out at the end of interventions provided assurance that the voice of the child was considered when reviewing efficacy of provision.

Areas for improvement:

- Processes for reviewing the appropriateness of street-delivered community resolutions would benefit from additional evaluation by the partnership post-disposal. For example, there may be scope for consideration of pathways into the PYJS's prevention offer, rather than defaulting to community resolution in lieu of gravity matrix guidance.
- Equity, inclusion, and diversity considerations are apparent in guidance documents, but need to be more explicit regarding what this guidance entails in practice.

- While all relevant information required to decide on an intervention is available to decision makers at the panel, the absence of some agencies in person when a decision is made means that a robust discussion of which agency is best placed to intervene and allocate resource is not always apparent. Regular in-person attendance by children's social care and the practitioner who completed the screening would enhance the process further and provide assurance that decisions have been scrutinised thoroughly.
- Children who engage with Cranstoun as part of their community resolution offer invariably do not reoffend. The challenge for the partnership is to increase engagement levels so that more can benefit from this support.
- Although children's feedback is sought to inform the development of policy and provision, there was little evidence that it had been used specifically for out-of-court disposal development.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

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

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- Despite not having had a child eligible for resettlement support for some time, the PYJS had a sufficient resettlement policy in place, detailing pre- and post-release requirements. The policy detailed the appropriate pathways to be considered for a child in custody and referenced the concept of constructive resettlement.
- There was a strong focus on identity shift within the policy, and this had relevance to work with other complex children.
- The offer of support within the policy for acquitted children was positive and reflected a desire to address needs rather than focus on court outcomes.
- There was an implicit ambition within the policy to avoid resettlement in the first instance, by getting it right in court and avoiding custodial outcomes.
- Examples of previous practice provided to us for children who were not eligible for inspection indicated that resettlement pathways were being considered and utilised by staff.
- Although the service had no resettlement cases, there was regular discussion of relevant issues at team meetings. Additionally, an assistant team manager also attended relevant external forums, so there was assurance that good practice was discussed among the team, even when there were no relevant cases to review.

Areas for improvement:

- As the policy is untested, more explicit guidance for practitioners about how access to the resettlement pathways could be considered when the policy is next reviewed.
- A more explicit consideration of the potential impact of protected characteristics is needed. Reference to this within an updated multi-agency disproportionality action plan would be a good means of gaining engagement with strategies from relevant partners.
- When next reviewed, there should be consideration of more explicit guidance about the implications for social care responsibilities under the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012* if a child is remanded to youth detention accommodation.

- Some staff felt that additional training opportunities would enhance their understanding.
- There has been limited evaluation about why there are so few 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.](#)