

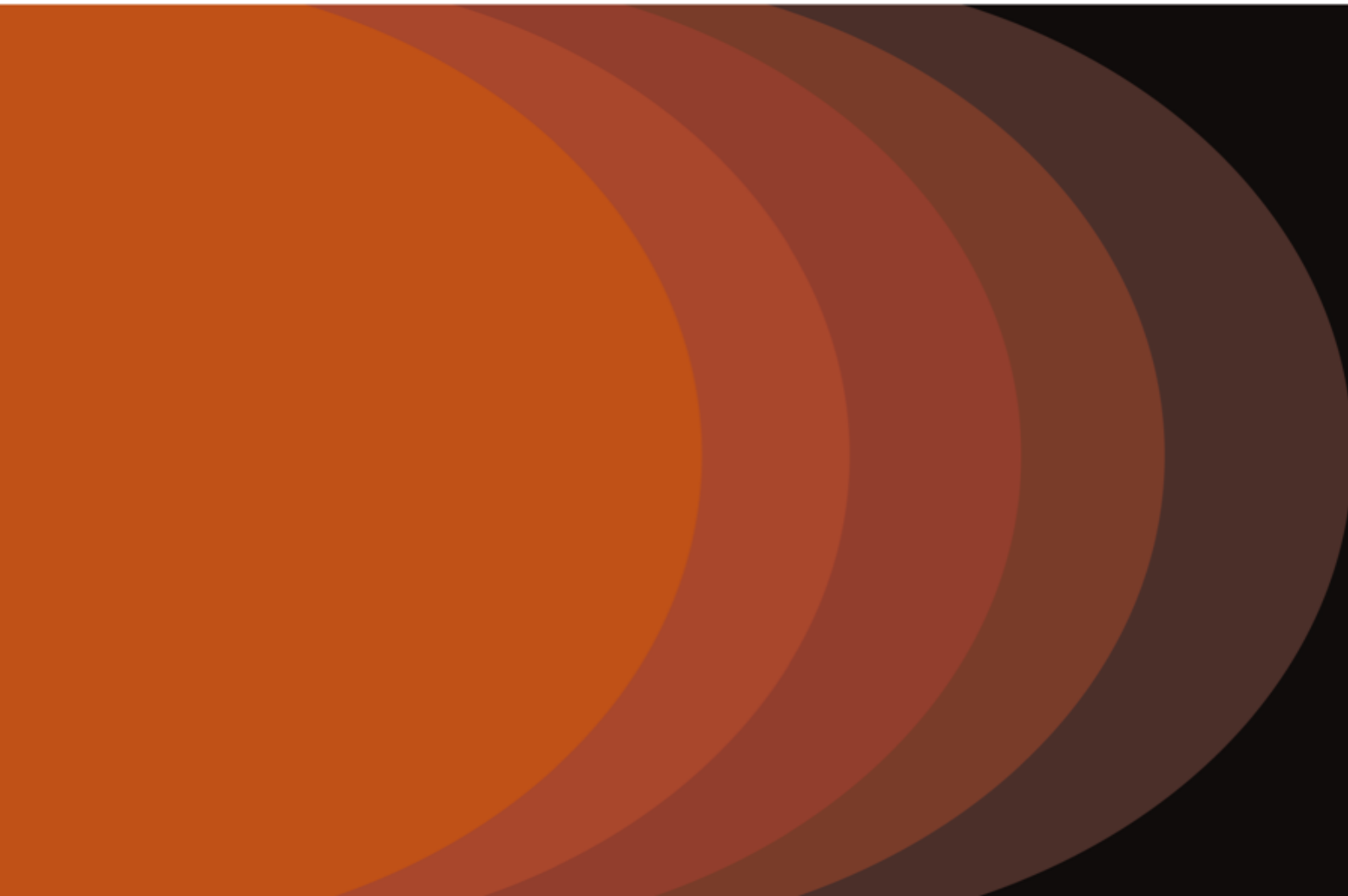


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Cumberland

HM Inspectorate of Probation, October 2024



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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Cumberland YJS across three broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Cumberland YJS was rated as 'Requires improvement'. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Requires improvement'.

This is the first-ever inspection of Cumberland YJS, undertaken following local government reorganisation and the establishment of Cumberland as unitary authority in April 2023. The significance and depth of this reorganisation was vast, with the YJS and its newly formed board having to establish and navigate new partnership arrangements and pathways at both local and regional levels. Moving forward, the challenge is for the YJS management board to establish a consistent, cohesive membership and set of arrangements, to allow all members to communicate a clear vision across the partnership and to understand and advocate for the YJS cohort of children, and effectively translate strategy into delivery.

Cumberland YJS staff are motivated, experienced and child-centred. They have been consulted, supported and reassured throughout the broader strategic and operational changes. The YJS head of service and management team are impressive, knowledgeable and well respected and have led with emotional intelligence, visibility, and resilience. This has created a positive culture in which staff feel valued.

While there are some strengths within the partnership, specifically the police, probation and substance misuse services, there remain some areas that need development and additional resources to improve the service provided to YJS children. We found insufficient partnership provision of, or access to, services, for emotional wellbeing, mental health, post-16 education, training and employment (ETE) provision and specialist services to address harmful sexual behaviour.

In the court disposal cases we inspected, supporting desistance was the strongest area of work. Of note was the consistent strengths-based approach and the effective relationships practitioners developed to engage children. However, our inspection highlighted shortfalls in the quality of work undertaken to address the safety of the child and safety to others. This was mirrored in out-of-court disposal casework for assessment and planning. Overall, management oversight of both court disposal and out-of-court disposals did not consistently promote high-quality casework, and this requires further development. However, we were pleased to see that the YJS had taken steps to address this, with recent additional management capacity.

There is much to commend Cumberland YJS, as it seeks to embed the stable foundations on which to continue to build a high-quality service, following the significant changes it has experienced. We were encouraged by senior leaders' commitment and their awareness of the issues to be addressed, and make several recommendations that will enable the YJS to improve further.

















Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Cumberland Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started July 2024

Score 12/36

Overall rating	Requires improvement	
1. Organisational delivery		
1.1	Governance and leadership	Requires improvement 
1.2	Staff	Good 
1.3	Partnerships and services	Requires improvement 
1.4	Information and facilities	Good 
2. Court disposals		
2.1	Assessment	Requires improvement 
2.2	Planning	Inadequate 
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Requires improvement 
2.4	Reviewing	Inadequate 
3. Out-of-court disposals		
3.1	Assessment	Inadequate 
3.2	Planning	Requires improvement 
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good 
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	Requires improvement 
4. Resettlement¹		
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	Requires improvement 

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

Recommendations

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made 10 recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice services in Cumberland. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The Cumberland Youth Justice Service management board should:

1. review its board membership, role and function to make sure that all representatives have the seniority to make decisions and commit necessary resources
2. develop individual and collective knowledge and understanding of board members' roles and the service's work and provide effective challenge to partners
3. make sure that all members of the YJS partnership and other partner agencies provide appropriate support, resources and services to prioritise YJS children
4. take responsibility and ownership for resettlement across the whole YJS partnership as a key strategic priority.

The Cumberland Youth Justice Service should:

5. improve the quality of court disposal casework, focusing on keeping the child safe and managing the risk of harm to others
6. ensure that out-of-court-disposal panel members include standing representatives from social care, education and health, so that all partners are visible, accountable and able to fully understand the risks and needs of the YJS cohort
7. review out-of-court disposal arrangements to ensure that, in all cases, out-of-court disposal decisions are made after a comprehensive assessment is completed with the child
8. Improve the quality of assessment and planning activity to reduce the risk of harm to others in out-of-court disposal casework
9. ensure that YJS managers have the capacity to provide consistent and effective management oversight and quality assurance of practice.

The NHS North East & North Cumbria ICB should:

10. ensure that its statutory duty to provide relevant and timely physical, sexual, emotional and mental health services to YJS children is fulfilled, across the full range of mainstream and specialist health pathways.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Cumberland YJS over a period of a week, beginning 08 July 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 10 July 2023 and 03 May 2024; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 10 July 2023 and 03 May 2024; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 10 July 2023 and 03 May 2024. We also conducted 21 interviews with case managers.

On 01 April 2023 local government in Cumbria changed. The previous six district councils and Cumbria County Council were replaced by two new unitary authorities, Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. Cumberland covers the north and west of the county, while Westmorland and Furness covers Barrow and the South Lakes.

As part of this reorganisation, there was a decision to split the existing Cumbria-wide YJS into two separate youth justice services. It has had, and continues to have, a significant effect on all aspects of service delivery. Consequently, since summer 2022, work has been ongoing to prepare for, and implement, the disaggregation of Cumbria YJS into two new services, and ensure the right resources and staff are in place. This has meant splitting one youth justice service management board into two, with significant challenges in ensuring the right partners attend, while being mindful of the extra burden this would place on partners who still operate Cumbria-wide.

The integrated health boards dissect the two new councils. The police force has remained as it was, with Cumbria Constabulary covering both council areas. Likewise, from a probation perspective, both newly formed YJSs (Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness) are covered by the Cumbria Probation Delivery Unit. The significance and depth of organisational change is vast, with the YJS and its newly formed board having to establish and navigate new partnership arrangements and pathways at both local and regional levels.

The geographical split now sees Cumberland covering the principal towns of Carlisle, Whitehaven and Workington. Cumberland YJS retained the head of service, although she provided oversight for the Westmorland and Furness team between April 2023 and July 2023, while a new head was appointed. The formation of the staff teams was more straightforward, as most Cumberland staff were mainly based in one of the principal towns.

The Cumberland YJS team has had to manage a range of issues, including moving premises and implementing all new support and back-office functions, such as human resources (HR) and information technology (IT) services.

Data-gathering has been a significant issue. The previous Cumbria case management system required upgrade and work to disaggregate cases into those for Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness respectively. This occurred in April 2024 and, consequently, the YJS has had to gather and process its data manually. This means there is only Cumberland-specific data for the first quarter of 2024 and therefore there will be no directly comparable YJS data until the end of March 2025 (as all data before April 2024 was Cumbria-wide). In light of this, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) has been unable to allocate a family group and not yet been able provide Cumberland-specific trend data as part of its quarterly summaries. Likewise, longer-term Police National Computer (PNC) reoffending data will not be comparable.

It is to the YJS's credit that it has developed its own proxy data-gathering and performance-monitoring, but this will take time to consolidate.

Almost all other council departments are newly formed, including children's services, social care, early help, and education. These arrangements are still embedding.

It is worth noting that there have been changes and a lack of consistency in some of the wider local authority senior leadership roles, with some (including the director and the assistant director of children's services) relatively new in post. It is in this overall context that our inspection of Cumberland YJS took place.

Domain one: Organisational delivery

To inspect organisational delivery, we reviewed written evidence submitted in advance by the YJS and conducted 13 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.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- There is a current strategic plan, which sets out the YJS partnership board's vision and strategic priorities.
- The new board chair (since April 2024) is the head of Cumbria Probation Delivery Unit. She has previous experience as a long-standing YJS board member. She understands the risks and challenges faced by the YJS and the wider partnership, and expressed a clear commitment to using this inspection, and its findings, to support priorities and improvements.
- All board members have received an appropriate induction. There are terms of reference for the YJS management board, which set the expectations of board members' roles and responsibilities.
- The board chair and some board members are connected with other strategic boards, including the Safer Cumbria Partnership and the Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- During our inspection fieldwork meetings, we were assured that those board members representing the police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the courts were able to demonstrate strategic thinking and links to wider criminal justice and safeguarding priorities.
- The YJS head of service is a passionate and committed leader, with significant experience in youth justice work at all levels. She is well respected across the partnership and has links with a range of local, regional and national strategic groups and forums. She leads with emotional intelligence and integrity, remaining visible to staff and managers. She is well-sighted on the YJS's strengths, challenges and the impact of gaps within partnership arrangements.
- YJS leaders had recognised that the team manager's span of control was unmanageable. We were pleased to see that they had recently created an interim assistant team manager role to address this.
- YJS managers are honest, transparent and well respected and trusted by the staff team. They are candid about the strategic and operational challenges and are connected to relevant multi-agency operational groups. YJS

managers know where improvements are required, whilst ensuring innovation continues, with the piloting, implementation and evaluation of enhanced case management as a strong example.

- The YJS head of service attends the management board, as does the YJS team manager when required. Various staff have had the opportunity to attend the management board and deliver inputs or presentations.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS management board relies too much on the experienced YJS head of service. The management board as a collective need to ensure greater ownership of the vision and strategy. Some board members had a limited understanding of the profile of YJS children and need to demonstrate greater ambition for the service.
- Board chairing arrangements have lacked consistency in the past 12 months and the frequency of board attendance is not consistent across all members. There is limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities that board membership brings. Therefore, the board needs to evolve and mature further.
- The board membership should be reviewed, as some members do not have sufficient seniority to set the strategic direction or ensure consistently effective partnership working. A suitable representative from public health is a priority and, given the newness of the wider senior leadership teams in Cumberland local authority, the YJS management board would benefit from ongoing local authority senior representation as a minimum, such as the assistant director of social care.
- There is inconsistent advocacy for children at strategic level. This leads to a lack of clarity and limited, piecemeal, service provision across some aspects of the partnership – particularly in relation to health (including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and speech and language therapy); ETE; harmful sexual behaviour; and accommodation. A systemic approach to prioritising and meeting the needs of the YJS cohort is required.
- The recent launch of a partnership ETE strategy is welcome, but still in its infancy. It has not yet had an impact on the significant over-representation of children within the YJS cohort who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- There is some awareness of the make-up of diversity in the area, but further work is needed to further understand this through strategic analysis, planning and understanding across the whole partnership.
- Although the chair and the YJS head of service are well sighted on the full range of risks to the service, not all board members sufficiently understand them.
- The YJS operational management team are experienced individuals, but relatively new as a team. The YJS head of service recognises that they will need assistance to further embed effective relationships with partners to support YJS work.

1.2. Staff



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

Good

Strengths:

- The challenges of the local government reorganisation cannot be underestimated. YJS managers have had to take responsibility for HR issues, office moves, building passes, rebranding, IT and case management system challenges, TUPE of some staff, and managing changing partnerships. They have shielded practitioners from these challenges, which has enabled them to prioritise work with children.
- Staff stated that they had been consulted, supported and reassured throughout change management activity. There is a positive culture, which is evident at all levels of the service.
- The operational staff in the YJS are the organisation's biggest asset. Staff are motivated, experienced, and resilient. They build positive relationships with children to engage them effectively. Staff work together collaboratively and there are strong peer support networks across the service.
- Overall, workloads are felt to be manageable. Operational staff say there is a mature and considered approach to allocation, which takes account of a range of personal, organisational and work factors. There are clear arrangements in place to ensure resilience across a large local authority area. Managers are flexible, to ensure that each of the two operational teams has a broadly equitable workload.
- YJS managers have supported new staff well. There is a focused and structured induction, consisting of a breadth of formal and informal activities. Staff are given a locally developed 'practitioner handbook', which provides case management guidance and a reference point to consolidate learning and practice development.
- Supervision is regular and deemed to be good quality by staff. It consists of monthly formal supervision and daily 'open door' informal mechanisms, which staff welcome.
- The YJS has a comprehensive training offer and has funded staff to undertake additional qualifications, such as the Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate. Staff state that managers take a holistic approach in supporting training, which recognises professional and personal interests.
- The YJS currently has 13 volunteers. These volunteers vary in age and have a valuable mixture of skills and experience. Volunteer staff were enthusiastic, motivated and very complimentary about the balance of work and the support from YJS managers and colleagues.
- Volunteers can access the same training opportunities as paid staff, which makes them feel valued and fully integrated within the YJS. They also attend YJS celebration events, as well as 'thank you' events during national volunteer week.

- YJS managers operate with high levels of emotional intelligence. We saw numerous examples of reasonable adjustments and measures (financial and practical) taken to support staff through a range of work and personal issues. There are also robust practical and logistical arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff.
- Managers use formal and informal reward and recognition systems. Staff feel that their welfare is prioritised. They said that activities such as team building days are used to support cohesiveness and positive working relationships.
- Succession planning was evident throughout the YJS. Several staff had progressed through various YJS roles, and from practitioner to management roles.

Areas for improvement:

- Management capacity has been stretched to deal with some of the significant project management tasks associated with the disaggregation of Cumbria YJS. The impact of this was evident in the variable oversight and quality assurance of some of the cases assessed during the period of our inspection.
- The role of senior practitioner has been affected by the competing demands of balancing the case management of complex children against other tasks, such as quality assurance, change management, development activity and the delivery of training.
- Not all staff have had a recent appraisal. This is due to a directive from the local authority, which first requires senior leaders to have their appraisals and then filter down to operational staff. Nonetheless, completing these remains a priority.

1.3. Partnerships and services



A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- There is a sufficient understanding of the characteristics of the cohort of YJS children internally within the YJS and externally by operational partners such as police, probation and the PCC.
- The YJS has two full-time police officers, a part-time (0.5 full-time equivalent) probation officer, and a range of seconded and commissioned staff – including an education, training and employment adviser, targeted youth work staff, a parenting worker and a substance misuse worker.
- Provision to address substance misuse for YJS children is a strength. There is no waiting list, and the specialist worker is well embedded in the team.
- Health support (in the form of assessment and intervention from a physical health nurse) is provided from the 0–19 Strengthening Families team. They provide health support to families where children are subject to statutory processes.
- The YJS has used elements of Turnaround funding to commission therapeutic counselling services. This enables low-level emotional wellbeing work to be delivered by a specialist practitioner.
- In the inspected cases, YJS staff often showed tenacity and resourcefulness to fill gaps in provision, or navigate complex partnership arrangements, to get good outcomes for children.
- The child-centred policing approach adopted by Cumbria Constabulary is a significant positive. It allows seconded YJS police officers to be creative and ensures that every child involved with, or on the cusp of, the criminal justice system is identified, assessed, flagged and signposted for intervention and support at the lowest appropriate level. This also allows a reach into supporting child exploitation work.
- Barriers to joint working with social care that existed in previous years are being overcome, including clarity on the nature of working together. Social care professionals reflected that co-location allows YJS staff to be proactive in attending child protection conferences, child in need meetings and core groups.
- The YJS contributes to a variety of internal and external multi-agency operational groups and panels for YJS children deemed to present a high risk of harm to others (such as MAPPAs) or a high level of safety and wellbeing concerns (such as the multi-agency child exploitation panel).
- Where case formulation (through the enhanced case management approach) is used, we saw examples of good-quality assessment and planning for complex children subject to both court disposals and out-of-court-disposals.
- For YJS children that already have (or have had) an education, health and care plan (EHP) but are awaiting reassessment, processes are in place for

matters to be escalated and prioritised for assessment by a designated clinical psychologist.

- Reparation is delivered across a breadth of community projects, and the YJS has developed links with a number of local third-sector organisations to deliver interventions, such as community centres, local foodbanks, work on a nature reserve, allotment projects and sports clubs.
- The YJS has developed partnerships with NOCN (National Open College Network) and the AQA-accredited award scheme, which has enabled some YJS children to obtain qualifications following work completed with the YJS.
- The seconded probation officer role is used well and having a positive impact on operations.
- Arrangements to support victims and deliver restorative justice work have resulted in positive outcomes.
- Sentencers expressed confidence in the quality of YJS court work, and the relationships between YJS court staff and children.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS partnership needs a consistent focus on developing some aspects of joint work, both strategically and operationally. YJS staff often have to rely on relationships or their own resourcefulness to fill the gaps where there are shortfalls in partnership provision or access to services.
- YJS and partnership staff and managers identified gaps in service provision, particularly emotional wellbeing, mental health and CAMHS, post-16 ETE provision and access to specific provision to address harmful sexual behaviour. We found that many of the children in our sample could not access these services.
- Working protocols and processes with children's social care need to be reviewed and, in some instances established, to support relationship-based working. This will ensure there is a clear understanding within children's social care of the nuanced role of the YJS and facilitate meeting the needs of children known to both services.
- The YJS has no speech and language therapist provision and pathways for YJS children are not clear nor prioritised.
- The YJS has no specialist CAMHS worker and there is a lack of clarity of pathways in relation to YJS children accessing mainstream CAMHS.
- Some of the partnerships had insufficient performance data on the numbers of YJS children accessing services.
- Two to three years ago, specialist NSPCC services were decommissioned by partners on a whole county-wide basis. The wider partnership needs to address this gap in provision as a priority, given the demand on the YJS and the increasing numbers of children displaying harmful sexual behaviour within the YJS and social care cohort.
- Although the YJS and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) team try to work proactively together, there are big demographic challenges in Cumberland due to a limited set of providers, which results in a greater use of unregistered SEND provision.

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 YJS has a suite of policies and procedures, all of which are being updated as necessary.
- The YJS is supported by a full-time projects and evaluation officer. This business-critical post was specifically created by the YJS head of service, for the unique demands of YJS systems, data analysis and performance management.
- Significant work has been undertaken to gather performance data manually. YJS managers have worked hard to ensure that staff understand how data is drawn. This has supported ownership of data-gathering across the service and enabled an initial understanding of performance against key performance indicators. This data has been presented on a quarterly basis to the YJS management board in dashboard format.
- Data has been used to inform thematic audits and helped staff to understand the needs of the YJS cohort of children. The YJS has also used data to assist in securing funding for additional projects to develop the service, such as the enhanced case management pilot and evaluation.
- The YJS has two office locations. One is in Carlisle and is a new corporate building. The office base that covers Allerdale and Copeland (in the west of Cumberland) is the community library and a community café. The premises where YJS staff and volunteers undertake work are accessible to children and families, child-friendly, and provide a safe space for staff from all the different agencies. Work also takes place across Cumberland in community hubs and venues, alongside home visits to children.
- Processes for learning lessons are in place across the partnership. Critical learning reviews are shared at board level and disseminated to staff through team meetings, individual supervision and email.
- Staff describe information and communication technology systems as reliable and able to facilitate high-quality work and exchange of information with partners where required.
- During our inspection fieldwork, we noted that some YJS staff had read-only access to Integrated Children's System (ICS) social care and Early Help records. This was extended to all practitioners in the YJS, when raised as a factor that would enhance the quality of casework.
- Partnership staff in the YJS have access to both CorePlus YJS systems and their own respective agency systems.

Areas for improvement:

- The local authority needs to provide greater support to the YJS with data, performance, HR, and IT services.
- There is a clear audit framework, and quality assurance activity is in place, but these have been applied inconsistently due to workloads of senior practitioners and the team manager. The head of service has recognised this, and a new interim assistant team manager was introduced in July 2024 to address this.
- Some policies would benefit from further refining to reflect their impact on diverse groups.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

There is a strong commitment to child participation. At each YJS management board there is an agenda item where the voice of the child can be heard. This has involved a range of activity, such as direct feedback, children attending board meetings and sharing children's work through projects and presentations.

The YJS consults with children annually as part of the youth justice plan and gathers their views to inform service development. The YJS has developed a Survey Monkey questionnaire to be used at the end of a child or young person's involvement with the service and analyses their responses.

Between March 2023 and March 2024, the YJS obtained 24 responses from children, with the following findings: 96 per cent said that the YJS had given them excellent or good help; 100 per cent felt they were treated with respect by the case officer; 100 per cent felt listened to during their time with the YJS; 100 per cent felt involved in their intervention plan and 96 per cent said that things had changed for the better since they started working with the YJS.

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 44 children who consented, and 22 children replied. The responses showed that they were positive in describing their experience of receiving services from the YJS.

They were first asked to rate the YJS and then indicate how much it had helped them to stay out of trouble, on a scale of one to 10, with one being 'poor' and 10 being 'fantastic'. The majority of respondents rated the service between eight and 10, for both questions.

Many positive comments were expressed to inspectors through the text survey:

"They were kind and considerate, treat me like a normal child and not some criminal and showed me that they were actually there to help me."

"They've always been willing to offer help and advice wherever they can, and are really nice people, I never feel judged about why I'm getting the service."

"Very well-trained staff. They don't make you feel worthless and they are always there to help with any problems."

It was evident in the feedback from children and their parents or carers that they valued the kindness and trauma-informed way that YJS case managers worked with them, which supported the work undertaken. This in turn had led to some positive outcomes for many children and families:

"The help they have given has made my daughter turn her life around. It's fantastic –she's a totally different child from where we were when she started."

However, some of the responses from a small number of children who fed back during our inspection were more mixed, particularly with regard to shortfalls in the provision of some services across the broader partnership. This drew attention to their experience of gaps in some interventions and services (such as mental health). Given that some of these partnership insufficiencies have been identified through different sources of evidence in our inspection fieldwork, the YJS management board should use this feedback to develop a clear plan to prioritise and improve the full range of services and interventions for YJS children.

Diversity

In our pre-inspection survey, of the 16 staff who identified a diversity need, all stated that the YJS met their needs 'very well'. Of the six volunteer staff who identified a diversity need, five stated that the YJS met their needs 'very well' and one stated 'quite well'.

There is a developing awareness of the make-up and context of diversity within the area. However, further work is needed through strategic analysis to understand and mainstream this across the whole partnership.

Data submitted by the YJS indicates that children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system in Cumberland. Indeed, compared with a 10–17-year-old population of 7.4 per cent, the YJS cohort of children from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background stands at just 2.4 per cent. However, the YJS is unable to explain the context of this data, which appears to be very positive. This indicates a need for further work to be undertaken at strategic and operational levels to understand this.

The YJS recognises that the partnership is seeing an increase in the numbers of children with neurodiversity and SEND entering the system, with more children waiting for specialist assessments such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This is recognised as a priority area in the strategic plan. The YJS acknowledges that it needs to do more work to analyse data on children with SEND and EHCPs, and more to improve health and neurodiversity screening, as well as refresh and recommission its health offer.

The YJS has gathered manual data to support performance management arrangements until it is able to get comparative data in March 2025. This data indicates a slight increase in the number of females in the YJS cohort. The YJS is monitoring this further to try and determine whether it is a longer-term trend and what this slight increase may be attributable to.

There are clear arrangements for children to access support through liaison and diversion. The police have also established a working practice that ensures a female custody staff member will be allocated to address the individual needs of girls in police custody.

The YJS had received specialist input from experts in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and the needs of their children. However, the YJS would benefit from a strategic approach to ensure the needs of these children are met.

YJS police officers have developed child-friendly versions of various documents (informed by consultation with neurodiversity charities) to support children's understanding of the out-of-court-disposal scheme and process.

In our inspected cases, work undertaken to address diversity was not consistent across all aspects of casework. Better quality work was seen in planning and delivery in out-of-court-disposals and the majority of resettlement cases we inspected we judged that the child's diversity needs were sufficiently met. A focus on achieving this consistently is key.

Domain two: Court disposals

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

2.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	63%
how to keep the child safe?	63%
how to keep other people safe?	38% ³

Assessing of desistance was of sufficient quality in almost two-thirds of cases. Practitioners used a range of information from partner agencies to understand and analyse children's behaviour, attitudes, and motivation for offending. This was balanced with promoting strengths and protective factors. The meaningful engagement of parents or carers was impressive, and practitioners took time to build relationships with the child, their family, and wider networks. However, there was insufficient assessment of opportunities for restorative justice, and recognition and analysis of children's diversity needed to be strengthened. In the instances where this was sufficient, we found evidence that practitioners had taken the time to explore the child's culture and neurodiversity, to understand their impact on the child's lived experience.

We found some thorough assessments of risks to the child, and some detailed understanding of potential outcomes. When case managers had good relationships with other workers, particularly social workers, we saw examples of a joint understanding of the child's needs. As a result, assessments were accurate and gave a holistic view of the child. However, there needed to be a wider and more systematic understanding of the contribution that partners should be making to assessing activity. Where relationships were not as established, we identified gaps in the sharing of information and critical areas where work to support and safeguard children needed to be more consistent.

Assessing of safety to others was variable. Where it was done well, practitioners used information from other agencies. Although in many respects the YJS case managers knew their children and were able to express this verbally to inspectors, this was not always reflected in the quality of the case recording. As such, the quality

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.](#)

³ Professional discretion was applied at the ratings panel increasing this rating from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires improvement'.

of work was not consistent across all of the inspected cases, and we found many instances where there were omissions and shortfalls in the analysis of children's previous and current behaviour. This meant that there were gaps in assessing activity, such as in identifying the factors that affect other people's safety, and any subsequent controls and interventions needed.

2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

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

Does planning focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	63%
keeping the child safe?	63%
keeping other people safe?	25%

Planning for desistance embodied the YJS's child-first and trauma-informed ethos. Practitioners took a strengths-based approach to planning and collaborated with children and families. Where we saw it done well, planning was balanced. Practitioners paid attention to areas of concern, but also tried to focus on community integration and access to a breadth of community projects and local third-sector organisations such as community centres, local foodbanks, work on a nature reserve, allotment projects and sports clubs. Given the challenges presented by the rurality of Cumberland, practitioners had thought about the sequencing of interventions, how and where they would be delivered, and the learning style of the child.

In less than half of the cases where there needed to be clear planning with other partners to keep children safe, this either had not happened or was ineffective. We found there was a lack of understanding internally and externally of how agencies should be supporting each other's work. Gaps in joint planning were evident in some of our inspected cases, specifically gaps in provision for CAMHS and the Complex Safeguarding Team, which sits in early help. This meant it was difficult for YJS staff to identify how their work needed to be planned in order to avoid duplication and support any work already agreed by other agencies. Planning for the safety of the child set the necessary controls and interventions in just over half of the relevant cases.

Planning to keep other people safe was the weakest area of practice in court disposal cases. Planning to keep others safe was not consistently integrated or aligned with other agencies' plans or activities to manage risk. Planning for victim work was often general rather than individualised. It did not adequately address the specific concerns or risks to actual or potential victims in a large majority of the inspected cases. Planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote other people's safety in less than half of the cases. Inspectors found limited evidence of robust contingency planning. This area of practice needs to be strengthened to provide clarity about the action that needs to be taken, as well as the timescale, intervention and which professional would be responsible.

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.](#)

2.3. Implementation and delivery



High-quality, well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.	Requires improvement
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Our rating⁵ 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?	63%
effectively support the safety of the child?	50%
effectively support the safety of other people?	50%

YJS staff worked hard to try and deliver the interventions and actions that they had planned. Although work that recognised the child's diversity needs was inconsistent, practitioners developed positive relationships with children and their parents/carers in a majority of the court disposal cases we inspected. We found staff working with persistence and determination to draw in other agencies when they needed to work jointly. They sometimes achieved this by escalating issues across team managers and heads of service to deal with barriers. However, we found that delivery did not always promote opportunities for community integration and access to services after supervision. As such, YJS staff often had to rely on relationships or their own resourcefulness to fill the gaps where there were shortfalls in partnership provision or access to services.

Work needed to be better coordinated to keep children safe, particularly where children needed a more joined-up approach to undertaking work on lifestyle, exploitation and emotional wellbeing/mental health issues. We saw some effective joint work, but in just over half of the cases, agencies were working in isolation from each other rather than together, while other gaps in provision were evident in terms of swift and priority access to specialist services such as CAMHS.

Though work to keep others safe was slightly stronger than assessment and planning, inspectors found gaps, such as the specific and necessary work to reduce risks to others. In some cases, intervention only focused on the index offence, rather than considering other known behaviour or concerns. This meant key areas such as peer pressure and intimate relationships had been missed. In other cases, there was not enough work and support to promote safety, including interventions on attitudes and work on specific behaviours of concern. Inspectors also found that there needed to be more focus on actual and potential victims, to ensure that there were adequate controls in place and active oversight to support safety.

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.](#)

2.4. Reviewing



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

Inadequate

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

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	75%
keeping the child safe?	25%
keeping other people safe?	50%

Reviewing was part of day-to-day case management, so in most cases, when new information became known, it was considered quickly. The weekly YJS team case discussion meetings provided an arena for many discussions, which enabled all staff to be sighted and updated on all children. Formal reviews were responsive to changes and involved the child and their parent or carer in all cases. There was a clear focus on supporting the child's protective factors and understanding whether the child's social and family context had changed, which led to adjustments and changes in the approaches practitioners were taking. These aimed to keep the child engaged and motivated, and included changing the meeting place and duration of sessions if the child had disengaged.

Reviewing to keep the child and others safe was not consistently sufficient. In many cases, communication between services was ineffective, gaps in information were not consistently followed up, and there was not a proactive approach to verifying if risks had changed. Often, it was the responsibility of the YJS practitioner to pursue other services repeatedly, rather than having clear information-sharing arrangements in place. In some instances, multi-agency meetings were held to review risks but, in many cases, this did not result in a sufficient response to mitigate concerns. There needed to be a more coordinated and aligned response from the partnership, whereby the review of risks to and from the child became a shared responsibility.

Reviewing to keep people safe had not effectively identified and responded to changes or new incidents in just over half of the cases inspected. We found that monitoring and oversight processes were in place but did not reflect that risks were being addressed. In a majority of inspected cases, input from other services was lacking. As a result, practitioners did not sufficiently analyse the changes to understand either the impact, or any need to then change the original risk assessments. Examples included reported incidents of violence, aggression, and alleged further offending. This meant there were shortfalls in the activity undertaken, such as a review of the risk management plan and identifying appropriate interventions or actions to promote safety.

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.](#)

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 12 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of three youth conditional cautions and nine community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in 11 cases.

3.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	92%
how to keep the child safe?	58%
how to keep other people safe?	42%

Assessing of desistance factors was consistently strong. Staff gained a thorough understanding of children, and their wider familial and social context. They achieved this by being warm, engaging and strengths-based, which ensured that children, and their parents/carers, were central to the assessment process in every case. This approach was echoed in the positive feedback received from the children who responded to our text survey. Assessing of diversity was more variable, which the YJS need to be mindful of, so as to not undermine the positive aspects highlighted above. Assessing of victims' needs and wishes was more consistent, which resulted in opportunities for restorative justice in a large majority of relevant cases.

In two-thirds of the inspected cases, we agreed with the case manager's assessment of the child's safety. In a majority, these assessments drew on information from other agencies. However, there was inconsistency and shortfalls in how the information was drawn together and analysed. Consequently, not all assessment activity sufficiently reflected the impact of those complex issues that many of the children had experienced previously or currently. Some cases would have been further improved with a clearer and more evident investigative and reflective approach to assessing the factors impacting on the child's safety.

Assessment should also provide an analysis of how other people will be kept safe. Unfortunately, we saw inconsistent evidence of this in the out-of-court disposal cases. In many of these, the child had previously received sanctions and a large majority had committed offences of violence or aggression. Case managers often failed to draw together current and historical issues or behaviours, or sufficiently used other sources of information, in just over half of the cases inspected. This meant that analysis was insufficient in majority of these cases and, as a result, practitioners did not identify the key factors to be addressed or managed to ensure the safety of others.

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.](#)

3.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

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

Does planning focus on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	92%
keeping the child safe?	67%
keeping other people safe?	58%

Planning to support the child's desistance was sufficient in all but one of the inspected cases. Planning to address the child's diversity was evident in a majority of cases, and it was clear that case managers made every effort to plan for the child's individual needs, personal circumstances and social context. Children were fully involved in planning, as were their parents or carers, where appropriate. Planning activity was strengths-based and we saw the tenacity of case managers in trying to identify and sequence interventions. However, this was despite gaps in access to other services, such as ETE and speech and language therapy. As a result, we saw variability when it came to opportunities for community integration and access to mainstream services following completion of out-of-court disposal work.

Planning to promote the safety of the child was sufficiently promoted in a majority of cases. Where this was done well, we saw examples of joint planning with key agencies such as social care and education, although this tended to be driven by YJS staff. However, in some instances, we saw gaps in joint planning with CAMHS and in relation to harmful sexual behaviour. Overall, inspectors found sufficiency in the quality of contingency plans for the safety of the child. This is important, as there should be a clear plan of action if the level of risk to a child were to increase or decrease. In a majority of the relevant inspected cases, contingency plans set out adequate actions or responses to be taken if, or when, circumstances changed.

We were pleased to see that planning to manage the safety of others often involved other agencies. However, this did not consistently translate into addressing specific concerns and risks to actual or potential victims. We judged this sufficient in just half of the cases we inspected. In many cases, planning was too generic and vague, while in others it was not clear what specific work would be done, by whom and when. Alongside this, circumstances in a child's life can change quickly. Case managers need to consider the potential for change in each case so that, should concerns escalate, they are prepared and more likely to respond effectively. In almost half of the cases, inspectors found that contingency planning lacked clarity and detail about specific actions to keep others safe.

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.](#)

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating⁹ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

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

Implementation and delivery work to support the child's desistance was very strong. Inspectors found a high level of engagement from children, which in all cases reflected the proactive approach of staff and their capacity to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with them and with parents and carers. Case managers took account of the child's diversity needs in all but one case. Of note was the consistent strengths-based approach, which ensured that all children in our sample were given sufficient attention to encourage and help them to engage with the work of the YJS. Despite some of the gaps in provision from partnership services, YJS staff often showed tenacity and resourcefulness to fill gaps, or navigate complex partnership arrangements, to get good outcomes for children. As a result, in a majority of cases, service delivery promoted opportunities for community integration, particularly in the use of step-down into support through the use of the Turnaround programme.

Implementation and delivery to support the safety of the child was evident in a majority of the out-of-court-disposals we inspected. Where such work was done sufficiently, we saw YJS practitioners working with key agencies and organisations to deliver well-coordinated packages of support. Case managers advocated on behalf of children at multi-agency safeguarding meetings. However, shortfalls in specialist mental health provision meant that other agencies were sufficiently involved in keeping the child safe in just over half of the relevant cases. However, in a small number of instances, we saw the effective use of formulations through the enhanced case management approach, which had been extended to include some children subject to out-of-court disposals.

Managing the safety of others often involved developing a better understanding of the victim's perspective, using a number of restorative justice techniques, as well as using intelligence from the police and support from other community projects and professionals. We saw sufficient evidence of children being discussed in risk management panels and delivery of interventions to manage the safety of other people. In a majority of cases, inspectors judged that case managers paid attention to the protection of actual and potential victims.

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

3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision



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

Requires improvement

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

Strengths:

- The YJS partnership has completed significant strategic and operational work to disaggregate the previous Cumbria-wide out-of-court-disposal policy and provision. This ensures there is now a separate, localised scheme for Cumberland as a new local authority.
- There is a clear out-of-court disposal policy, based on a tiered approach that sets out the vision and strategy for out-of-court disposal work, targeted YJS intervention and early intervention. This ensures a broad offer, but without net-widening. The out-of-court-disposal policy is supported by case management guidance in a locally developed 'practitioner handbook'.
- There is flexibility in out-of-court disposal decision-making and each case is considered individually. Arrangements are in place for cases to come back from court for consideration of an out-of-court-disposal where appropriate.
- Decisions are supported by checks of relevant systems (the police, YJS, and social care) and use of such information to determine the out-of-court disposal. There are clear arrangements for escalating and resolving differences when these occur.
- YJS police officers communicated and delivered inputs regularly with wider force colleagues, to ensure that police teams were aware of the out-of-court-disposal process and diversion offer.
- YJS police officers have developed an active 'flagging' system to support dynamic management of any risk or safeguarding needs. This also ensures that YJS children are not overlooked, and that the YJS can engage with relevant or eligible children.
- Out-of-court disposal cases that are assessed as either high risk of harm or safety and wellbeing concerns can be referred into, and managed through, the YJS risk management panel process.
- Following a successful pilot and evaluation of an enhanced case management model, a separate short-version 'clinic pathway' was developed specifically to work with children subject to an out-of-court-disposal.
- There are clear pathways to support children who have completed their out-of-court disposal. Where appropriate, the YJS uses the Turnaround programme as a step down once a child has completed an out-of-court-disposal.

- There are robust decision-making scrutiny arrangements in place, through the quarterly multi-agency scrutiny panel, led by the police and crime commissioner.
- The YJS has gathered and used local evaluation data to measure the reoffending rates of children subject to community resolutions. The data is positive and shows an overall reoffending rate for this cohort of 22.2 per cent after six months and 33.3 per cent after 12 months. In the inspected cases, we found that children's desistance needs were met well across the assessing, planning and delivery of out-of-court-disposal work.
- The YJS has implemented the YJB's new out-of-court disposal assessment tool, although full training is not scheduled until September 2024.
- YJS police officers have developed child-friendly versions of various documents (informed by consultation with neurodiverse charities) to help children to understand the out-of-court-disposal scheme and process.
- There are clear arrangements for children to access to support through liaison and diversion. Work has been identified and is ongoing to develop a deferred pathway to further formalise the use of Outcome 22. This is used if children are already working with targeted youth support and if partnership agencies are involved.

Areas for improvement:

- In some cases, out-of-court disposal decisions are made before a full assessment has been completed with the child.
- The inspected cases evidence that the YJS out-of-court-disposal cohort is complex. While the decision-making panel shares relevant information to support appropriate disposals, not all partners are consistently present.
- Out-of-court-disposal panel members should include representatives of the agencies that are focused on the safeguarding and welfare of children (such as social care, education and health), as well as those that are part of the criminal justice system. This would ensure that all partners are visible, accountable and able to fully understand the risks and needs of these YJS children.
- The out-of-court disposal policy does not expressly detail how diversity and disproportionality are to be addressed.
- Previous YJS audits have found variability in case practice for out-of-court disposals. Despite managers being of the view that there has been progress, we found that this audit activity has not yet translated into consistent high-quality practice in relation to safety and wellbeing and risk of harm.
- Further analysis of quantitative data across the full range of prevention and out-of-court-disposal work would enable the YJS to demonstrate any additional impact.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision



There is a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

Requires improvement

We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings and interviews. To illustrate that work, we inspected two cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

Strengths:

- The YJS has identified a range of activities to support and embed further development of the partnership's approach to resettlement, including an internal thematic review; seeking feedback from all children subject to remand or custody; feedback from all case workers; case studies; and the development of a new protocol with children's social care for remand management.
- There is a clear resettlement policy, which is evidence-based and recognises an approach based on the principles of constructive resettlement. There is underpinning case management guidance for bail, remand and custody for YJS staff working with this cohort of children.
- YJS staff are sighted on the individual needs of children. They advocate for them and support relevant activity. Custodial visits are supported in terms of costs and time, including transporting family members where appropriate.
- YJS staff develop strong relationships with their children and their families and escalate issues to managers where required. Where resettlement case practice was done well, this was often driven by the YJS and we saw sufficient attention to keeping the child safe and keeping others safe.
- There is a focus on victims and restorative justice workers to support victims and liaise in relation to licence conditions and the delivery of work.
- YJS children are deemed a priority group through emergency accommodation arrangements (the positive housing pathway). However, this does not consistently extend to moving-on accommodation or to children who are higher risk. Nevertheless, in some instances, we saw examples of children's services holding places and paying retainers to keep accommodation available for children on release.
- Arrangements for identifying children who are subject to MAPPA are in place and understood. These arrangements sit alongside the YJS's own risk management policies.

Areas for improvement:

- The YJS has identified resettlement as a key strategic priority and the head of service is clear about her aspiration to provide the 'gold standard' for this cohort of children. However, this needs to be understood and owned across all strategic and operational partners.

- The resettlement policy is not currently driving the partnership to give YJS children in custody sufficient priority. It would be further improved by addressing more fully the whole range of protected characteristics across children's diversity.
- Resettlement practice is variable, primarily because it depends on the case manager, the institution or individual working relationships. As such, there were too many variables that can impact on outcomes. This occurs across all pathways and means that not all children get the same experience and provision when in custody and on release. This was reaffirmed in an internal audit of the resettlement cohort of children in May 2023, which found that the quality of practice was variable and inconsistent.
- Communication between the secure estate and YJS case managers is inconsistent. We found that it was better from secure children's homes than from young offender institutions.
- YJS staff were not clear about the resettlement training that they had been received. Resettlement training is not identified in the YJS training strategy and needs to be extended across the wider partnership, so that workers can understand the unique needs of this small, but complex, cohort.
- There needs to be more focused resettlement planning meetings for YJS children. There should be a designated resettlement panel/forum, with delegated decision-making authority.
- Feedback from children and parents/carers in relation to resettlement policy and provision is underdeveloped.

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.](#)