

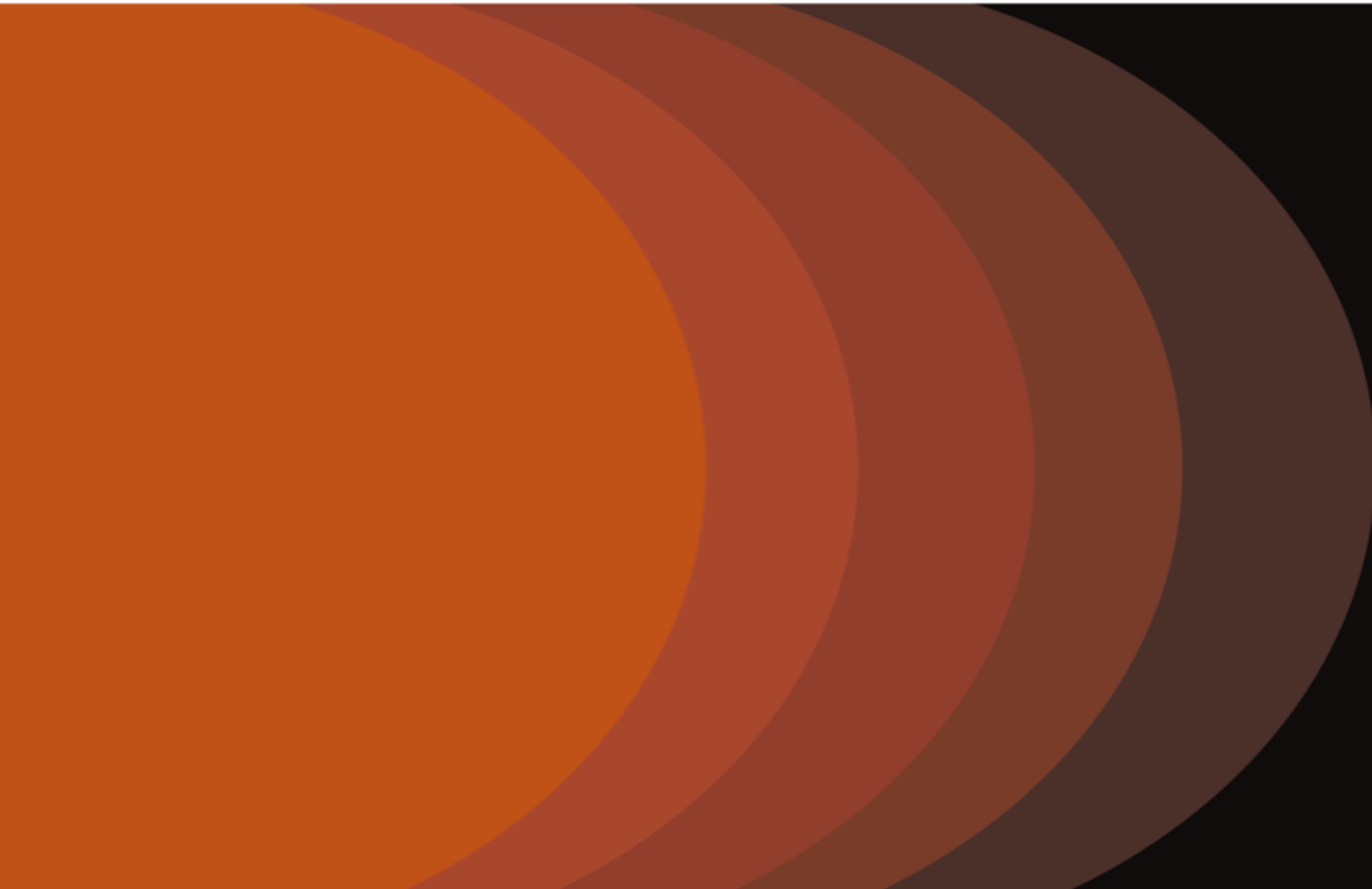


HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in  
**Lewisham**

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HM Inspectorate of Probation, September 2024



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## Acknowledgements

This inspection was led by HM Inspector, Sara Pordham, supported by a team of inspectors and colleagues from across the inspectorate. We would like to thank all those who helped plan and took part in the inspection; without their help and cooperation, the inspection would not have been possible.

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### Published by:

HM Inspectorate of Probation  
1st Floor Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester  
M3 3FX

Follow us on Twitter  
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ISBN: 978-1-916621-52-7

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## Foreword

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

Considerable work has been undertaken by the YJS since our last inspection in 2016, and it is positive to see improvements in service delivery. The board includes strategic leaders from statutory and non-statutory partners, complemented by representatives from the Young Mayors team, a service volunteer, and a parent champion. The board has inspirational and innovative leaders, notably, the board chair and service manager, who are aspirational for children. However, there needs to be improvements in how the board analyses, evaluates, and uses performance data. It is intended that the newly formed performance subgroup will be fundamental to achieving this.

The service is well respected and influential with its partners, and this has resulted in a range of services to support children, families, and victims. Alongside specialist and seconded staff in the service, there are commissioned services and community projects. The therapy hub is impressive, co-locating a range of therapeutic and psychological professionals, who provide case formulations and planning, specialist assessments and services to children and families, as well as direct support to YJS staff. The team is central to developing and embedding the TIARRA (trauma-informed, anti-racist, restorative in approaches) practice model, which is evident throughout YJS delivery. The model has enabled trauma-informed, restorative approaches to be embedded, and resulted in a passionate commitment to anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality, which honours the Lewisham community.

Staff, managers, and volunteers are passionate and authentic about improving outcomes for children, families, and victims. They are skilled and knowledgeable. The leadership is invested in supporting their staff, and we found evidence of an extensive training offer, prioritisation of supervision, and access to clinical supervision and reflective groups. Supporting career progression and development is strong, particularly with Black and global majority staff. Staff and managers reported feeling valued and recognised for their achievements.

Desistance practice was strong and of high quality in post-court and out-of-court disposals. This was supported by collaborative working with children, parents or carers, and partners, meaningful diversity practice, and the provision of interventions to meet need. However, risk and safety practice in court disposals, primarily in relation to assessing and review, needs to be strengthened. Work did not fully consider all presenting behaviours or factors, or consistently consider victim safety.















This is a motivated service, who should feel rightly proud of their progress to date. We have made six recommendations and have confidence the service will use these to further develop.



**Martin Jones CBE**

Chief Inspector of Probation

## Ratings

<b>Lewisham Youth Justice Service</b>		<b>Score</b>	<b>22/36</b>
Fieldwork started June 2024			
<b>Overall rating</b>		<b>Good</b>	
<b>1. Organisational delivery</b>			
1.1	Governance and leadership	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
1.2	Staff	<b>Good</b>	
1.3	Partnerships and services	<b>Good</b>	
1.4	Information and facilities	<b>Good</b>	
<b>2. Court disposals</b>			
2.1	Assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
2.2	Planning	<b>Good</b>	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Good</b>	
2.4	Reviewing	<b>Requires improvement</b>	
<b>3. Out-of-court disposals</b>			
3.1	Assessment	<b>Good</b>	
3.2	Planning	<b>Outstanding</b>	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	<b>Good</b>	
3.4	Out-of-court disposal policy and provision	<b>Good</b>	
<b>4. Resettlement<sup>1</sup></b>			
4.1	Resettlement policy and provision	<b>Requires improvement</b>	

<sup>1</sup> The rating for Resettlement does not influence the overall YOS rating.

## Recommendations

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

### **The statutory youth justice partners within Lewisham should:**

1. ensure that there are consistent and committed representatives of the appropriate seniority on the integrated adolescent and youth justice partnership board, so that it can fulfil its aims and purpose, and improves outcomes for youth justice children, families, and victims.

### **The Integrated Adolescent and Youth Justice Partnership Board should:**

2. enhance its use and analysis of YJS and partnership performance data to evaluate the impact and outcomes of interventions and services to children, families, and victims, to ensure that they are effective
3. ensure work with the partnership is prioritised to improve education experiences and outcomes for school-aged children.

### **The Youth Justice Service should:**

4. improve the quality of operational risk and safety practice within court disposals and resettlement, particularly in relation to assessment and reviewing activity. This includes ensuring effective management oversight and quality assurance processes
5. improve practice across court and out-of-court disposals to ensure effective victim safety work is undertaken.

### **The Metropolitan Police should:**

6. review the use of Outcome 22<sup>2</sup> or other deferred prosecution options in Lewisham as a priority, and work with the YJS to ensure that all children are offered and supported to access appropriate diversionary interventions at the earliest opportunity.

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<sup>2</sup> Outcome 22 is a deferred prosecution involving diversionary, educational, or intervention activity.

## Background

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We conducted fieldwork in Lewisham YJS over a period of a week, beginning 10 June 2024. We inspected cases where the sentence or licence began between 12 June 2023 and 05 April 2024; out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 12 June 2023 and 05 April 2024; and resettlement cases that were sentenced or released between 12 June 2023 and 05 April 2024. We also conducted 33 interviews with case managers or the respective line manager.

The London Borough of Lewisham is in the south-east of the city. It has a population of 298,653, of which 9.2 per cent (27,370) are children aged 10–17. Lewisham is a young and richly diverse borough, with 48.6 per cent of its total population being of Black and global majority heritage.<sup>3</sup> This increases to 67.9 per cent for the 10–17 population. Data supplied by the YJS at the start of the inspection indicated that 77 per cent of children known to the service were of Black and global majority heritage, reflecting their overrepresentation in the youth justice system. The service has taken a strong stance on this with its anti-racist and addressing disproportionality approach, which is evident throughout its strategic and operational practice.

The YJS is based in the families, quality, and commissioning directorate of children and young people services in Lewisham. It is part of a recently formed integrated adolescent service (IAS), which includes a specialist exploitation team. The service manager leads three teams, including prevention, intervention, and the therapy hub. Each has an operational manager specialising in specific practice areas, supported by team leaders. YJS practitioners in each team supervise children subject to post-court and out-of-court disposals. The service has dedicated leads in restorative justice and education, as well as seconded staff including two police officers and a probation officer. Youth workers make up the engage team, which provides preventative in-reach support to children in police custody. The therapy hub includes a speech and language therapist (SaLT), the Lewisham YJS Family Therapy (LYFT) team, and the adolescent resource and therapy service, commissioned by child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and comprising a clinical lead, forensic psychologist, drama therapist, and child and adolescent forensic psychiatrist.

The service predominantly works with boys aged 15 to 17 who are of Black or global majority heritage. From data supplied at the time the inspection was announced, 53 children were subject to post-court disposals and 40 were engaged in out-of-court disposals, the majority (34) being community resolutions. There has been a consistent reduction in first-time entrants, the use of custody, and serious youth violence, over the past two years.

The service has a strong commitment to child-first principles, which is complemented by their unique TIARRA (trauma-informed, anti-racist, restorative in approach) vision and practice model. This model is fully embedded and was evident in the work we inspected. The service is well respected in the borough, which has seen this model influence the wider partnership and the services delivered.

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<sup>3</sup> 2021 Census Profile for areas in England and Wales - Nomis (nomisweb.co.uk)

## Domain one: Organisational delivery

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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.

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### 1.1. Governance and leadership



The governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Requires improvement

#### Strengths:

- The partnership board sets the vision and priorities for Lewisham Youth Justice Service in collaboration with the leadership team, operational staff, partners, children, and parents or carers.
- The development of the integrated adolescent and youth justice partnership board is positive and encouraging.
- There are comprehensive terms of reference, which govern the operation of the board, including its purpose and role. These are supported by a detailed partnership agreement which confirms the strategic and resource commitment of each agency.
- There is a strong strategic focus and embedded commitment to anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality, which influences other strategic partnership boards and services. There is exceptional commitment and responsiveness to addressing disproportionality for Black and mixed heritage children.
- Board members receive an induction from the chair of the partnership board and the YJS service manager.
- Board membership is enhanced by representatives who are residents of Lewisham, including the Young Mayors team representative, who is connected to a diverse range of youth groups, and a volunteer community panel member.
- The board chair is an inspirational leader, who is knowledgeable in youth justice and engaged in regional and strategic forums focused on improving outcomes for youth justice children. He has a clear vision for the integrated adolescent service, is aspirational for children and families, and is strongly committed to anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality.
- Partnership arrangements within Lewisham YJS are evident, with statutory partners fulfilling their required duties through seconded staff, commissioned services, and effective joint working protocols, which support service delivery.
- There is connectivity between the YJS and other key strategic partnerships. The needs of children and families known to the YJS are integrated across the

partnership, ensuring a focus on supporting desistance and promoting safety, as well as a commitment to early intervention and prevention.

- The YJS service manager is skilled and knowledgeable in youth justice, and well respected and influential across the partnership. He demonstrates a willingness to explore new ways of working, based on effective practice, and a commitment to diversity and addressing disproportionality. This openness to learning has resulted in a practice model which is having a tangible impact on children, families, and the community.
- Operational managers are experienced and knowledgeable, with complementary skills. This supports oversight of service delivery and operationalisation of the vision, priorities, and development plan.
- There is an embedded culture of openness, constructive challenge, and innovation within the leadership team, which supports service development.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- Attendance at the newly formed integrated adolescent and youth justice partnership board and advocacy for the service are not consistent across all board members. It is encouraging that police and health partners have renewed their commitment to the board, with representatives of the right seniority, but this needs to be sustained to support the effectiveness of board arrangements, particularly as some board members took up their role six months ago.
- While there is a strong strategic commitment to focus on the unique needs and oversight of the YJS from the board chair and service manager, this needs to be reflected across the whole partnership and all board members.
- Work should be undertaken with operational staff to provide clarity on the vision and priorities of the newly developing integrated adolescent service.
- Connectivity between the operational staff and managers of the YJS and the integrated adolescent and youth justice partnership board would benefit from being strengthened and further developed. The development of the operational subgroup is positive, but it is at an embryonic stage.
- There needs to be a detailed and granular analysis of performance data, so that the board and leadership team can be assured of the quality of operational practice, in terms of effectiveness and impact.
- The board and leadership team should oversee an improvement in risk and safety management practice, particularly in relation to the quality of assessment and reviewing practice for court disposals.



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## 1.2. Staff



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

Good

### Strengths:

- Staff and managers are highly skilled, experienced, knowledgeable, and authentic about securing good outcomes for children and families. They epitomise the child-first, TIARRA model of practice.
- Workloads are manageable and there is a considered approach to the allocation of work, which is responsive to demand.
- Team leaders and operational managers have appropriate spans of control, and where challenges or fluctuations in demand occur, there is a supportive and collaborative response to maintain effective service delivery.
- The ethnic diversity of the workforce is representative of the children that the YJS works with.
- There is a comprehensive supervision framework which is aligned to the service's TIARRA vision and practice model. Staff and managers receive regular supervision and feel cared for and valued.
- Case work is considered within supervision, along with a focus on pastoral care and personal development. In particular, team leaders operate with high levels of emotional intelligence. They are responsive to the staff they supervise and foster a supportive culture.
- Supervision and support of staff and managers are enhanced through clinical supervision and reflective group supervision, demonstrating the leadership commitment to being a trauma-informed service which values staff and recognises the impact of vicarious trauma.
- Community panel members feel valued and are integral to the YJS. They are committed to the vision and priorities of the service. They are well supported through induction, group supervision, and access to individual or clinical supervision when required.
- Induction processes are comprehensive and prepare staff to undertake their role. This includes introductions to the leadership team, understanding specialist roles and provision within the service, corporate and service-specific training, shadowing or observing internal and partnership panels and practice, peer support through an allocated 'buddy', and an incremental allocation of work.
- Annual appraisals are undertaken and viewed as helpful for informing career progression and development, as well as recognising achievements.
- There is a comprehensive annual training programme which supports skills development, knowledge, and experience, to ensure that practice is current and responsive to the diverse and changing needs of the children, families, and victims. Training is firmly grounded in the TIARRA practice model.

- The training offer extends to community panel members. It supports them to undertake their role and enables professional development.
- Lewisham YJS embodies a culture of learning, development, and continuous improvement. This is supported by a breadth of arrangements, such as reflective practice, a willingness to embrace new and emerging practice, and a quality assurance framework.
- Career progression and succession planning is evident and valued by the service, with examples of volunteers becoming paid employees, staff progressing into management and leadership roles, and the use of apprenticeships. The proactive anti-racist approach and commitment to addressing disproportionality is reflected by Black and global majority staff progressing into leadership roles, through access to the borough's leadership training and the youth justice board (YJB) Elevate programme.
- Staff and managers feel valued as their work and achievements are recognised by the management board, leadership team, wider partnership, and each other.
- There is a strong culture of promoting staff safety and wellbeing, particularly in terms of psychological and emotional safety.

**Areas for improvement:**

- Staff supervision and management oversight needs to ensure that there is consistent and effective case recording which reflects the work undertaken with children.
- The inspection case data indicates that improvements are required in all areas of risk and safety management practice in respect of court disposals. Specific attention is needed to improve operational staff understanding, management oversight, and quality assurance of risk and safety practice, with regard to all assessment activity.
- Refresher training on the principles of risk and safety management should be delivered.

### 1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Good

#### Strengths:

- The YJS is well respected by the wider partnership and its practice is seen as innovative and influential. There are good relationships with partnership agencies, characterised by effective communication and healthy challenge.
- There is a wide range of specialist and mainstream services and interventions to support and meet the needs of children, families, and victims, provided through seconded or specialist staff, internal resources, commissioned services, or access to local voluntary and community-based organisations.
- The Engage team comprises youth workers who attend police custody suites to engage children during 'reachable and teachable moments' and offer preventative interventions.
- The therapy hub provides a safe and supportive environment for children and staff. It is instrumental and central to the TIARRA model of practice, which is evident throughout YJS operational delivery.
- The therapy hub is an impressive team which co-locates a diverse, but complementary, range of therapeutic and psychological professionals, who provide innovative and extensive services and interventions to children and families.
- There is a focus on improving education outcomes for children within the YJS, particularly in terms of those aged 16–18, via the enhanced education, training, and employment (ETE) panel. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of children above statutory school age who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).
- The immersive schools project is an encouraging and innovative trauma-informed, restorative approach to reducing school exclusions, addressing disproportionality, and improving education outcomes for children.
- There is a varied and proactive victim offer and embedded restorative practice culture across the service, which are supported and valued by the wider youth justice partnership.
- Staff leading on work with victims are tenacious, motivated, and enthusiastic, placing victims at the centre of their work. They are proficient at maintaining an appropriate balance between the needs, wishes, and safety of victims, while also being child centred.
- The service seeks the views of, and engages, children and their parents or carers to shape individual interventions. We saw examples of wider operational service delivery through consultation and co-design. Notable developments include the recruitment of parent champions and a community fathers' group.

- The service works closely with a range of partners at an operational and strategic level, supported by a number of YJS-led multi-agency panels. There is a good understanding of differing roles and responsibilities, and we saw examples of collaborative working, as well as effective challenge and escalation, to ensure that the desistance needs of children are appropriately responded to.
- There is a framework in place to oversee the risk and safety management of children known to the YJS. This includes a range of multi-agency risk and safety management panels, which are well attended, with clear terms of reference.
- The pilot National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decision-making panel is a positive addition to safeguarding children at risk of exploitation. It is a robust approach to keeping children safe, with timely decision-making, which facilitates enhanced access to support and intervention.
- There is a clear partnership between the YJS and violence reduction team (VRT) at a strategic and operational level, which supports safety and risk management across the borough.
- The seconded probation officer reflects the commitment of the probation service to the YJS.
- The multi-agency attendance and support of the contextual safeguarding formulations provide a constructive and effective approach to the management of risk and safety within the borough.
- The TIARRA vision and practice model, which promotes anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality, particularly of Black and global majority children, is consistently evident and supported across the partnership.
- There is a well-established relationship with Bromley Youth Court. The service is held in high regard and has taken a proactive approach to addressing disproportionality, in terms of the sentencing of Black and mixed heritage children within the borough, through the provision of training to both magistrates and district judges.

#### **Areas for improvement:**

- Data reporting and analysis need to improve, to inform service delivery and ensure that it provides a more comprehensive and granular understanding of the children the YJS works with. The newly formed performance subgroup provides an opportunity for the service to re-evaluate and reshape its performance reporting and data analysis, although it is still in its infancy.
- The wide range of partnership services and interventions within the YJS would be enhanced through a dedicated nurse provision, to meet the physical and sexual health needs of children and families.
- There is evidence of the YJS working well with partner education teams, such as special education needs and disabilities (SEND), Fair Access, and the virtual school, but this needs to be enhanced, given the high numbers of children in the YJS who are in alternative provisions or on reduced timetables. A greater focus is needed on improving education outcomes for school-age children who are known to the YJS.

- The SaLT provision is a valuable addition to the YJS, but consideration needs to be given as to whether this is sufficient to meet the needs of children and the wider service.
- It is anticipated the joint working arrangements between the YJS and Safe Space team, under the umbrella of the newly established integrated adolescent service, will enhance practice, in terms of responding to extra familial harm and contextual safeguarding. However, these arrangements are currently embryonic.
- The YJS needs to undertake improvement activity to ensure that victim safety practice in court disposals is strengthened and reflective of the stronger practice in out-of-court disposals.
- The YJS needs to develop and expand the number of reparation projects and activities, ensuring that they are focused on repairing harm to the community as well as being reflective of children's interests. It would also be beneficial to explore how projects could be accredited to support children's skill development and achievement of qualifications.
- While there has been some evaluative work undertaken in respect of the effectiveness of services and interventions within the YJS, this would benefit from being strengthened, including a focus on more granular detail as to its effectiveness and impact.

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## 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:

- Children are seen in a range of community-based venues, including the YJS office base in Catford, or at home. The location where children and families are seen is determined by safety and accessibility.
- The YJS has created an office space which is child friendly and welcoming, in which children state that they feel safe while they are there.
- The reception staff at Holbeach Road are exceptional in their warmth, kindness, and friendly approach to anyone visiting, ensuring that all feel welcomed.
- The YJS effectively considers and responds to the physical safety of staff, in terms of operational delivery. There is an organisational commitment to prioritise and support the emotional and psychological wellbeing of staff, to ensure that they can deliver effective services to children.
- There is a range of policies in place which support operational delivery to ensure that children, families, and staff are safe.
- There are clear policies, procedures, and workflow process maps to guide and promote effective youth justice practice, which are consistently aligned to child-first principles and reflect the Lewisham TIARRA practice model.
- The victim and restorative approaches policies have been developed in consultation with staff and partners, and are grounded in effective practice, the legal context, and national and local learning. They are distinct but aligned policies, to make a clear distinction between work which is responsive to victims' needs, wishes, and safety, and broader restorative approaches to practice.
- Although there are restrictions in the capacity of the police to share victim information, the seconded police staff proactively seek engagement with victims, to promote the victim offer and restorative approaches available in the YJS.
- Staff understand the local policies and procedures that apply to their role. They support the delivery of practice.
- YJS staff and managers have access to effective information and communication technology (ICT) systems which enable the timely planning, delivery, and recording of work. These systems also enable staff and managers to work flexibly to meet the needs of children and families.
- There are agreements in place with key partners to promote effective information sharing, which supports the delivery of services to children and families.

- ICT systems support the production of quarterly data and performance reports, which are scrutinised by the integrated adolescent and youth justice partnership board.
- High-level performance data demonstrates the positive impact of work undertaken across the YJS partnership, which has seen reductions in first-time entrants, reoffending, custody, and serious violence.
- The YJS learns from inspection reports, learning reviews, and independently commissioned evaluations, as evidenced through its activity and 'journey of the Black and mixed heritage' action plan in response to its involvement in HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic inspection of Black and mixed heritage boys.
- The improved alignment of the YJS with the children's social care's quality assurance and performance processes and team is a positive development.

### **Areas for improvement:**

- There is a comprehensive quality assurance framework which covers all aspects of service delivery. The YJS needs to ensure quality assurance processes are consistently applied, so that all assessment and reviewing activity is of high quality, particularly in respect of court disposals.
- The YJS should revise and develop its current 'safety and wellbeing and risk to the public' policy, to ensure that there is a centralised and comprehensive risk management guidance document, which promotes and supports effective operational practice.
- The service would benefit from reviewing all its policies and procedures, to ensure that they are of equitable quality. Monitoring or tracking arrangements regarding the review of policies and procedures should be more robust, to ensure that they are current and cover all required areas of youth justice practice.
- The use of more granular quantitative data, analysis, and evaluation, to demonstrate outcomes and the impact of service delivery more clearly, would enhance the service's improvement work.
- Arrangements are in place to gather and analyse feedback from children, their parents or carers, and stakeholders, but the impact of this needs greater prominence in service delivery.

## Involvement of children and their parents or carers

The YJS is committed to understanding the experiences of children and families to shape service delivery. Various methods are used, such as self-assessments, co-produced plans, and collaborative reviews during interventions; consultation with child scrutineers facilitated by the Young Mayors team; parent champions who provide feedback on the service and have a representative on the partnership board; a Young Mayors team member on the board; and the board chair personally meeting children to hear their views. Participation activity has included talking to fathers about how they want to be worked with, resulting in a professionals training session and development of a six-weekly fathers' group; co-design of the local Your Choice programme and Engage and Turnaround offers; and children's participation in commissioning and recruiting of the Appropriate Adult service. Children are currently being asked about the development, topics, and content of group programmes.

The YJS contacted, on our behalf, the children, parents or carers that they worked with, to gain their consent for an interview or text survey. Twenty-three agreed to take the text survey, which was delivered independently, with 10 responses received. They were asked firstly to rate the YJS and then indicate how much it had helped them to stay out of trouble, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'poor' and 10 being 'fantastic'. The majority of respondents rated the service between 8 and 10, for both questions.

We interviewed three children and three parents. All indicated that YJS staff had the skills to work with children, and that they were able to access the right services and support to stay out of trouble. One child said:

*"My worker was up to date in her knowledge. It felt comfortable, 100 per cent. I felt it was easy to talk to them and that helped me a lot as I didn't really think it would help to begin with. The worker found a way to make me feel OK about talking and sharing the things that were making me angry."*

Feedback from parents included:

*"Definitely she understood my child's learning needs (autism) and modified her style to cater to those needs."*

*"They have been following my son closely, addressing his problems, responding to his needs professionally. They maintain frequent contact and keep me up to date with what they are doing and how my son is doing. They also visit him at home. Their communication skills and ability to break down barriers and to get through to my son are the most important skills."*

Participants were also asked what they liked most about the YJS or if there was anything else they wanted to add about the service. Responses included:

*"That the YJS is very good, everything about it seemed OK, it was easy for me to trust them, and they made me feel comfortable to talk to them."*

*"That it's there for young people who go through things and need some outside help."*

*"They are lovely. How welcoming they are, they are not judgemental at all, very understanding and nurturing, from the receptionist when you come in, to the top they are all polite and respectful."*

*"They have excellent communication skills. My son's case worker goes out of their way sometimes to maintain contact with me and keep me up-to-date and I appreciate it."*



## Diversity

- There is a strong strategic focus and embedded commitment to anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality, which influences other strategic partnership boards and services.
- The board chair is an inspirational leader, who is aspirational for children and families and is strongly committed to anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality.
- The YJS service manager has a strong focus on diversity, evidenced through his commitment and that of the service to embed anti-racist practice and address disproportionality.
- The ethnic diversity of the workforce is representative of the children that the YJS works with. This has been achieved through a proactive and targeted approach to recruitment by the leadership team.
- The support and progression of Black and global majority staff progressing into leadership roles, through access to the borough's leadership training and the YJB Elevate programme, are reflective of the service's proactive anti-racist approach and commitment to addressing disproportionality.
- Children's identity, in respect of gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual identity, was consistently recorded. This was further supplemented by a knowledge of the gender, ethnicity, and religious preferences of parents or carers. This proactive response to understanding the protected characteristics of the child and their parents or carers assisted YJS practitioners to have an insight into the lived experience of children.
- The TIARRA vision and practice model, which promotes anti-racist practice and addressing disproportionality, particularly of Black and global majority children, is at the centre of service delivery. It influences and is supported by the wider partnership in Lewisham. This is typified by the Immersive School project, an innovative trauma-informed, restorative approach to reducing school exclusions, addressing disproportionality, and improving education outcomes for children.
- The well-established relationship with Bromley Youth Court has enabled the service to take a proactive approach to addressing disproportionality in the sentencing of Black and mixed heritage children, through the training of magistrates and district judges and cascading this training nationally.
- The current out-of-court policy and procedures could be strengthened by more clearly indicating the response to all over-represented groups, in terms of their identification and the adaptation of interventions to meet children's diverse needs.
- Out-of-court disposal policy and practice could be enhanced by the introduction of Outcome 22 or deferred prosecution processes to support the current work to address disproportionality.
- The service has taken a proactive approach to engaging police and defence solicitors to inform and influence their approach to Black and mixed heritage children in custody. Sessions to highlight issues of overrepresentation, disproportionality and adultification, the TIARRA approach and model, and the out-of-court disposal offer from Lewisham YJS have been delivered by YJS staff. This is a proactive response to address the challenges caused by a

lack of Outcome 22/ effective deferred prosecution opportunities within London. The board chair's engagement in strategic spaces may assist in facilitating a change in regional policy.

- Lewisham YJS embodies a culture of learning, development, and continuous improvement. This is typified by the service's development of a 'journey of the Black and mixed heritage child' action plan following its involvement in the HM Inspectorate of Probation's thematic inspection of Black and mixed heritage boys. This considers, and is acting on, all points of a child's journey through the youth justice system and has resulted in adaptations to practice and a more effective approach to mixed heritage children.
- An anti-racist approach, challenging discrimination, and advocating for children in custody to ensure that their unique needs are met, are strengths of the resettlement policy and are reflected in practice. Staff are committed and responsive to meeting the diverse needs of children. They strongly and tenaciously advocate for YJS children to ensure that their needs are met, including the use of challenge and escalation where required.
- There is a focus on tracking and improving practice in relation to meeting the needs of Black and mixed heritage children in the secure estate.
- The evaluative work of resettlement policy and practice should be expanded to take account of all diversity needs and protected characteristics.

## Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 15 community sentences managed by the YJS. We interviewed the practitioner or the line manager in 15 cases.

### 2.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>4</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	67%
how to keep the child safe?	60%
how to keep other people safe?	<b>53%</b>

Practitioners utilised information from partner agencies, such as children's social care, education providers, police, and community safety teams, as well as engaging children and their parents or carers in assessment activity to support desistance. Analysis of diversity and protected characteristics for children, as well as their parents or carers, was a strength, particularly in terms of ethnicity and culture. This enhanced the understanding of children's lived experience. Consideration of the protective factors and strengths in children's lives was comprehensive. However, assessment activity needed to be strengthened through the analysis of all presenting factors for and against desistance, as well as ensuring that all current and previous offending behaviour was fully incorporated into assessment.

Inspectors saw some effective work, in terms of identifying and analysing the previous and current factors which impacted on children's safety, including the use of other agency information. However, this was inconsistent, as often the current risk indicators impacting children's safety were not fully analysed. This was particularly evident when considering the risk of exploitation or a child being a potential victim of weapon-related offending. Assessing children's safety was undermined by not obtaining or pursuing key information from partners, such as children's social care, police, or other local authority areas.

Assessing activity in relation to the safety of others needed development. There was evidence of practitioners analysing index offences, but this did not extend to the consideration of all historic, pending, or un-convicted harm-related behaviours. There was inconsistency regarding the identification of wider risk factors, resulting in assessment not being fully cognisant of the safety of others. Strengths were seen in assessing the risks to actual victims; however, this was variable when considering potential or future victims. Exploration of exploitation risks needed further development, as assessing did not fully analyse the influence of adults on children to cause harm and did not always recognise the harm that children can cause other

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

children, particularly as these risks are not always mutually exclusive. Cross-border information sharing was weak, which had a detrimental impact on effective assessing practice.

Management oversight arrangements in relation to the safety of children and the safety of others did not consistently identify shortfalls in assessment. This needed strengthening to support the delivery of high-quality assessment activity.

## 2.2. Planning



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

Good

Our rating<sup>5</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

Does planning focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	100%
keeping the child safe?	80%
keeping other people safe?	<b>67%</b>

Desistance planning was impressive, identifying and responding to children's desistance needs well. This included engagement in specific interventions, such as cognitive behavioural therapy, substance misuse work, and the Your Choice programme to address concerns around exploitation and serious violence, as well as involvement in positive activities, such as mentoring and reparation. Planning was collaborative, involving children and their parents or carers, as well as partner agencies such as education providers, children's social care, and CAMHS. Responding to children's diversity needs was a strength, with numerous examples of consideration of children's learning needs, neurodiversity, culture, ethnicity, and self-identity.

Planning to keep children safe was strong, being responsive to the child's needs and risks, and with appropriate interventions planned, in terms of emotional wellbeing, substance misuse, or addressing identified trauma. There was evidence of the use of case formulations to support planning and effective multi-agency working with key partners, such as children's social care, CAMHS, and the VRT. In contrast to assessing practice, the collaborative working with partner agencies and parents or carers supported a more robust response to exploitation. This included use of NRM monitoring activity and access to home safety measures. Inspectors assessed contingency planning as sufficient, although this could have been strengthened through more specific and responsive actions to the risks identified.

Planning for the safety of others was variable. Intervention planning responded to identified risks, including, for example, weapons work, thinking skills, Your Choice, and identity work. There was generally collaborative multi-agency working with partners, including police and the VRT. However, planning in relation to victim work and keeping actual or potential victims safe was inconsistent. Inspectors saw examples of strong practice, including planned victim awareness interventions and the use of external controls, such as non-association and exclusion conditions, but this contrasted with planning which did not adequately consider or account for the safety of actual or potential victims. The quality of contingency planning varied, and where it was deemed insufficient, it did not address all risks, was generic and unspecific, and focused primarily on information sharing rather than taking action. Where relevant inspectors felt that there was insufficient consideration and use of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) when planning for and

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

managing risk to others. There was evidence of oversight from the YJS critical risk and safeguarding panel (CRiSP), as well as the crime and serious violence reduction panel, but planning could have been strengthened through the use of the MAPPA panel.

## 2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating<sup>6</sup> 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?	87%
effectively support the safety of the child?	<b>67%</b>
effectively support the safety of other people?	<b>67%</b>

Practitioners were skilled at building effective and constructive relationships with children, parents, and carers. Being responsive to children's individual and diverse needs was a strength, including understanding and responding to a child's identity and lived experience. The trauma-informed, anti-racist approach addressed barriers and promoted children's engagement with interventions, activities, and partner agencies, to meet desistance needs and support sustainable community integration. Interventions were delivered in a meaningful way; for example, one practitioner ensured that a child understood why sessions covered specific topics and then checked their learning afterwards. Engaging children in ETE was a focus, particularly for 16–18-year-olds. Practitioners supported children to write CVs, gain college placements, and delivered interventions to prepare children for work. Reparation delivery was variable in quality. Creative examples of practice were seen, such as recording a rap about a child's experiences of violence and the youth justice system, which could be used in interventions with other children. However, this was offset by examples of reparation not being prioritised, fully delivered, or fulfilling the aim of repairing harm. Recording practice was also variable and needed improvement.

Delivery to keep children safe was generally sufficient, with interventions responsive to needs and risks, such as weapons awareness, substance misuse, traumatic experiences of discrimination, and identity. This was supported by the engagement of specialist support and services such as Sparks2Life, the Lewisham YJS Family Therapy (LYFT) team, and the VRT. There was evidence of good multi-agency oversight arrangements and joint working with partner agencies, but this was inconsistent, and at times was not effective at identifying and managing new and emerging risks.

Delivery to keep others safe was sufficient, but shortfalls undermined overall efficacy. Interventions, such as the trauma-informed weapons awareness programme, sessions on thinking skills in relation to violence, the Your Choice programme, and victim awareness work, were responsive to risks. Delivery was sometimes impeded by specific risks not being identified in assessment or by not responding to newly emerging safety issues. In some cases, delivery was prioritised to respond to the safety of the child rather than be appropriately balanced to respond to the safety of others, despite these risks being equitable. Coordinated

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

multi-agency working was generally effective, with partners including police, children's social care, and the VRT. It involved information sharing, monitoring imposed external controls, and direct delivery to children. However, responding to the safety of actual and potential victims needed strengthening, as this was compromised by a lack of communication and information sharing, and of oversight of measures to protect victims by YJS staff or partner agencies.



## 2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating<sup>7</sup> for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	87%
keeping the child safe?	67%
keeping other people safe?	<b>60%</b>

Reviewing activity for desistance was strong. Practitioners were cognisant of changes in children's lives and reflected the progress and impact of interventions in reviewing practice. Children were actively engaged in the process, resulting in the incorporation of their views on their progress and what further support or services they needed. This resulted in adaptations to plans, including practical changes to session times due to exam commitments or the provision of support or services to promote engagement in ETE or positive activities. Children's positive progress and achievements were recognised and celebrated by practitioners through the use of certificates or small rewards, as well as the application for early revocations of orders where appropriate. This reflected the strong relational approach to practice in the service.

Reviewing of children's safety was generally effective. Reviews were completed and involved a range of partner agencies, including children's social care, police, the VRT, and housing providers. Where risks to a child's safety increased, this was combined with escalation to multi-agency oversight arrangements, such as the YJS CRiSP and strategy discussions. Reviewing activity contributed to the adjustment of plans and delivery to enhance safety, including the involvement of children and their parents or carers in the creation and monitoring of individual safety plans. However, inspectors saw inconsistency in practice, as not all reviews considered current or emerging factors which impacted on children's safety, which resulted in there not always being an appropriate multi-agency response to safeguard the child.

Reviewing activity regarding the safety of others was variable. Where reviews were done well, they reflected changes in circumstances or new incidents such as arrests or renewed contact with adults of concern. They included information sharing and delivery by partner agencies, as well as analysing the impact of interventions and children's progress and development. Where inspectors saw stronger reviewing practice, this resulted in appropriate adjustments to risk classifications and adaptations to plans. There was also effective oversight from the multi-agency risk panels to track and monitor actions to support the safety of others. Where reviewing was less effective, this was attributed to not all current and emerging risk factors or new partnership information being fully considered. This subsequently impacted on the revision of plans, resulting in the partnership not being fully collaborative in

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

addressing the presenting risks. There was also evidence of victim safety not being considered or responded to. Management oversight needed to be strengthened, as this did not always identify or address shortfalls in reviewing activity.

## Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

We inspected 15 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of four youth conditional cautions, five youth cautions and six community resolutions. We interviewed the case managers in all the cases.

### 3.1. Assessment



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

Good

Our rating<sup>8</sup> for assessment is based on the following key questions:

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	80%
how to keep the child safe?	80%
how to keep other people safe?	<b>73%</b>

Assessing of desistance was a strength. Practitioners comprehensively identified and analysed the issues associated with desistance, alongside children's strengths and protective factors. Consideration of partner agency information, including police, children's social care, and early help services, supported this. Assessing would have been enhanced with more detailed information from schools. Children and their parents or carers were routinely involved in assessment, supporting a robust analysis of the motivation, attitudes, and behaviours contributing to offending. Diversity was analysed well, with numerous examples of practitioners considering intersectionality, which enabled a full understanding of the lived experience of children and their parents or carers. The needs and wishes of victims were generally reflected in assessment. Where inspectors identified shortfalls in assessment practice, this occurred as a result of not all behaviours being fully considered or analysed.

Children's safety was comprehensively assessed. Practitioners were able to identify and analyse the factors contributing to a child's safety, which resulted in appropriate and evidenced risk judgements. As with assessing desistance, this was supported by the effective use of partnership information and intelligence. Strong assessing practice regarding diversity contributed to the safety of the child, as practitioners sensitively recognised the traumatic impact of discrimination in respect of children's emotional wellbeing and safety. Assessing safety was compromised when there was incomplete information from partners or specific agencies checks were not requested, as this resulted in not all risk indicators being fully analysed.

Assessing the safety of others was generally deemed to be sufficient. Assessing was informed by partnership information and analysed all current and historic risk behaviours and indicators, including identifying who was at risk, alongside the nature and imminence of the behaviour. This resulted in appropriate and reasonable risk judgements. Where assessment activity was insufficient, this primarily related to the current offence and behaviours not being fully assessed, and a lack of attention paid to past behaviours where harm had been caused. Shortfalls were also seen in terms of the impact on and safety of victims.

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

## 3.2. Planning



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

Outstanding

Our rating<sup>9</sup> for planning is based on the following key questions:

Does planning focus on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	87%
keeping the child safe?	87%
keeping other people safe?	<b>80%</b>

Planning to support desistance was impressive and of high quality. Plans were consistently child centred and relationship based. They were co-produced with children and their parents or carers, with consideration given to how parents or carers could support their child to engage, as well as how to meet parental needs. Planning could have been strengthened by greater involvement of fathers. Plans addressed a range of desistance factors, such as engagement in ETE, substance misuse, and emotional wellbeing. They also built on strengths and protective factors through the use of positive activities, which supported long-term sustainability and community integration. Responding to children's diverse needs was a strength, not only in terms of how sessions and practice were adapted, but also through the planned delivery of identity work. Planning was responsive to the needs and wishes of victims.

Planning for the safety of children was thorough and robust. It was responsive to the identified risks associated with the child's safety and included factors such as substance misuse and emotional wellbeing. There were examples of planned interventions from the varied services within the therapy hub, including individual and family therapy, SaLT assessments, and responding to undiagnosed neurodiversity. Plans were co-produced with children and their parents or carers, which supported specific joint safety planning activity to address exploitation concerns. Plans were collaborative, involving key partner agencies in promoting safety, including children's social care, the Safe Space team, and the VRT. Contingency plans were generally sufficient; however, they would have been strengthened through being more specific and action based.

Addressing the factors associated with the safety of others was evident and strong. Planned interventions were linked to the risks identified, including weapons and knife possession, emotional regulation and violence, peer interactions, and social media. They were typified by joint working with key partners, such as police, the VRT, children's social care, and schools. There was also evidence of parent or carer involvement in safety planning. Where planning was insufficient, not all identified risks were addressed, including within contingency plans, or they were not fully cognisant and reflective of the impact on or safety of victims.

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

### 3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating<sup>10</sup> for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

Does service delivery effectively support:	% 'Yes'
the child's desistance?	87%
the safety of the child?	80%
the safety of other people?	<b>73%</b>

Delivery to support desistance was of high quality and responsive to children's needs. Practitioners were skilled at building positive and constructive relationships with children and their parents or carers. This included supporting parents or carers to access practical or therapeutic support, as well as working collaboratively to support the child. Diversity practice was strong, with inspectors seeing sensitive delivery of work which recognised children's protected characteristics and sought to strengthen or support understanding of their individual identity. This was typified through work with a Black child and their experiences of discrimination and adultification. They were supported to write their own story as a Black male in the youth justice system, which not only developed their own understanding, but was also planned to be used to empower other children. Interventions were focused on addressing desistance factors such as engagement in ETE, offence-focused work, victim awareness, and substance misuse. This was complemented by accessing partnership- or community-based services or projects which promoted children's strengths and protective factors, while supporting sustainable community integration and exit planning.

Work to keep children safe was built on effective liaison and communication with partners, such as children's social care, substance misuse workers, the VRT, and schools. This included sharing information on how to effectively communicate with a child to facilitate other agencies' engagement with them and to strengthen safety plans. Joint working was also evidenced in the direct delivery of services to children through, for example, Insights and specialists in the therapy hub. Inspectors saw collaborative working with parents, in terms of liaison and information sharing, the development and oversight of individual safety plans, and through restorative conversations to strengthen relationships. A range of interventions was delivered to address the identified safety needs of children, including emotional regulation, substance misuse work, therapeutic interventions in response to trauma, SaLT assessments, identity work, and online safety sessions, alongside supporting children and their parents or carer with practical issues such as housing.

Delivery to keep others safe was generally of good quality. Inspectors saw interventions which directly addressed the safety of others, including trauma-informed knife crime work, peer interactions, identity work, and emotional

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

regulation. Multi-agency working was evident through information sharing and the monitoring of behaviours or conditions, as well as the use of mapping activity to understand the interconnections of peer relationships associated with the risk and safety of others. Parents and carers were involved through regular information sharing, monitoring, and, where required, direct interventions to resolve familial conflict. However, work responsive to victim needs and safety was variable. There was evidence of strong practice, such as a reflective letter which consolidated a child's understanding of the impact of their behaviour, direct work with a victim to promote and monitor their safety alongside the child being supported to complete a letter of apology, and a direct restorative mediation which resolved conflict between peers enabling a child to maintain their college placement. However, although sufficient in many aspects this could be further improved, as there was also evidence of victim's needs, wishes or safety not being considered when required, or that the identified victim work was not delivered.

### 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:

- There is a strong commitment across the partnership to the appropriate diversion of children to prevent unnecessary criminalisation, which is aligned to child-first and TIARRA practice principles.
- There is a comprehensive out-of-court disposal framework and process, which is understood by partners and embedded in practice.
- There are clearly defined eligibility criteria regarding the use of out-of-court disposals, which are guided by the current National Police Chiefs' Council's child gravity matrix. The criteria are applied flexibly and appropriately.
- There are child-friendly and accessible guidance sheets on the different types of out-of-court disposals for children and their parents or carers, which detail the aim of the disposal, the requirements of the intervention, and how information is shared.
- Children subject to out-of-court and court disposals have equitable access to interventions and services, ensuring that their needs are met and responded to.
- There is an embedded and strong commitment to addressing disproportionality, particularly in respect of Black and global majority children, promoted by an integral anti-racist approach to practice. The service works proactively with police and defence solicitors to inform and influence their approach to children in custody and to increase the understanding of, and access to, out-of-court disposals for overrepresented groups.
- The multi-agency out-of-court disposal panel is well attended by knowledgeable and experienced practitioners and managers, who are committed to the appropriate diversion of children from the youth justice system.
- YJS practitioners present their assessment, proposed disposal, and co-developed intervention plan to the multi-agency panel, which also considers the victim's views, where available; the child gravity matrix; and any additional partnership information. A child-first TIARRA approach to decision-making is used by the panel to agree the most suitable disposal.
- Escalation processes are embedded, aligned to policy, and well understood by staff and managers involved in the out-of-court disposal panel. While escalations are infrequent, there was evidence of appropriate use and truly joint decision-making at every stage.

- Any children subject to out-of-court disposal assessed as being high or very high in terms of likelihood of reoffending, safety and wellbeing or risk of harm to others, are subject to the same risk management and safeguarding processes, procedures, and oversight, as those subject to court orders.
- YJS seconded police staff administer youth cautions and youth conditional cautions to children and their parents or carers as a future-focused session which promotes engagement in the planned intervention.
- The proactive response by the YJS to offer assessments and interventions on a voluntary basis to all children subject to police-led community resolutions is reflective of the service's commitment to prevention and early intervention.
- Out-of-court policy, provision, and practice is reviewed and evaluated through a range of internal and external mechanisms, which support an understanding of operational practice and assist in shaping delivery.

**Areas for improvement:**

- The joint YJS and Metropolitan Police Standard Operating Procedures and local YJS procedural guidance should be reviewed to ensure that they are more closely aligned, reflecting all informal and formal out-of-court disposals and processes.
- The out-of-court disposal panel should be strengthened through the attendance of a consistent children's social care representative.
- Out-of-court disposal policy and practice could be enhanced by the introduction of Outcome 22 or deferred prosecution processes to support the current work to address disproportionality.
- The current out-of-court policy and procedures could be strengthened in relation to all overrepresented groups, in terms of how they are identified and responded to, and the activities undertaken by the YJS and partners to promote diversion.
- The analysis and evaluation of out-of-court disposals should be extended to enhance the YJS's understanding of the effectiveness of decision-making, disposals, and operational practice, to prevent further offending.



## 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 three cases managed by the YJS that had received a custodial sentence. Our key findings were as follows.

#### Strengths:

- There is a comprehensive resettlement policy which is grounded in constructive resettlement principles and identity theory. The policy is clearly aligned to the TIARRA practice model and provides clear guidance regarding the expectations of practice when working with children in custody.
- The trend of reducing custodial remands and sentences is evidence of the service's influence and partnership commitment to meeting the needs of children in custody. There is recognition of the harmful impact of custody on children and their development.
- The partnership commitment to effective resettlement is demonstrated in the resettlement policy and other local and regional policy and protocol documents, including the joint working protocol between children's social care and the YJS, and the pan-London accommodation protocol.
- The policy emphasises early and effective planning to meet the resettlement needs of children, specifically referencing the need to address accommodation, ETE, health needs, and the use of release on temporary licence, as well as working collaboratively with children and their parents or carers.
- Anti-racist practice, challenging discrimination and advocating for children in custody to ensure that their unique needs are met, is a strength of the policy.
- The service has developed a leaflet clearly detailing the YJS resettlement offer and what children and families can expect. It is in two formats, one more detailed and one which is accessible and child friendly.
- The planning for, and provision of, accommodation for children's release from custody is a strength. Practitioners work closely with parents or carers, or social workers, to ensure that children are aware of where they will be living on release. Additional support to families, to maintain and enhance relationships, is provided through the LYFT team.
- Relationships with children's social care are well established and strong, in terms of resettlement practice. We saw examples of retainer payments being used to obtain and maintain placements for children when they are released from custody.
- There is a proactive and collaborative response to resettlement planning, with a range of statutory and community sector partners.

- Staff are committed and responsive to meeting the diverse needs of children. They advocate strongly and tenaciously for YJS children, to ensure that their needs are met, including the use of challenge and escalation where required.
- YJS practitioners are focused and committed to supporting and visiting the children while they are in custody, despite the challenges of some children being located in establishments a significant distance from Lewisham.
- The use of contextual safeguarding formulations within custody is an innovative approach to promoting children's risk and safety in custody and the community.
- The resettlement policy has been reviewed and updated recently, to ensure that it is responsive to the current evidence base and local practice model.
- The partnership board and the board chair have taken steps to oversee the needs of children and the provision of services to them within the secure estate.
- There is a focus on tracking and improving practice in relation to meeting the needs of Black and mixed heritage children in the secure estate, through the 'journey of the Black and mixed heritage child' action plan.

**Areas for improvement:**

- The resettlement policy needs to be strengthened by referencing internal YJS risk management processes, as well as MAPPA responsibilities of practitioners and the service, when children are subject to custodial sentences or licences.
- Transitions practice should be considered in a broader capacity within the resettlement policy, rather than purely the transition to the adult estate. This includes responding to children's experience of moving between youth secure estate providers and moving to new accommodation, or new areas, on release. This should be reflected in the resettlement policy.
- The policy does not sufficiently detail the service response and practice to meet the needs of children remanded to youth detention accommodation.
- Custodial transitions practice needs to be reviewed and improved to ensure that children moving into the adult secure estate are appropriately supported. The current project work, based on the lived experience of young adults, is a positive step towards this.
- Although some risk and safety management practice was innovative and effective in the case work inspected, it was inconsistent across all resettlement work. Improvement activity is needed to ensure a consistent approach.
- Work should be undertaken to ensure that victim needs, wishes, and safety are responded to consistently, including prompt and effective referral and engagement with the probation victim liaison officer, when children are subject to custodial sentences.
- The evaluative work of resettlement policy and practice should be expanded to take account of all the diversity needs and protected characteristics.
- Review of the resettlement policy and provision could be strengthened through the use, analysis, and evaluation of data from the YJS, and partnership services involved in resettlement practice to inform and shape

service delivery. This would also be enhanced by the meaningful involvement of children, parents, and carers.

- Given the low number of children sentenced or remanded to custody, the service and the partnership board would benefit from undertaking a 'journey of' exercise to identify the themes and needs of children in custody to assure themselves that the service, the partnership, and the secure estate are responsive to and meeting the needs of children.
- Although many staff had received specific training in resettlement, there was a lack of clarity around when this was, and the impact of it. Refresher training would enhance existing staff skills and experience.

## Further information

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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.](#)