

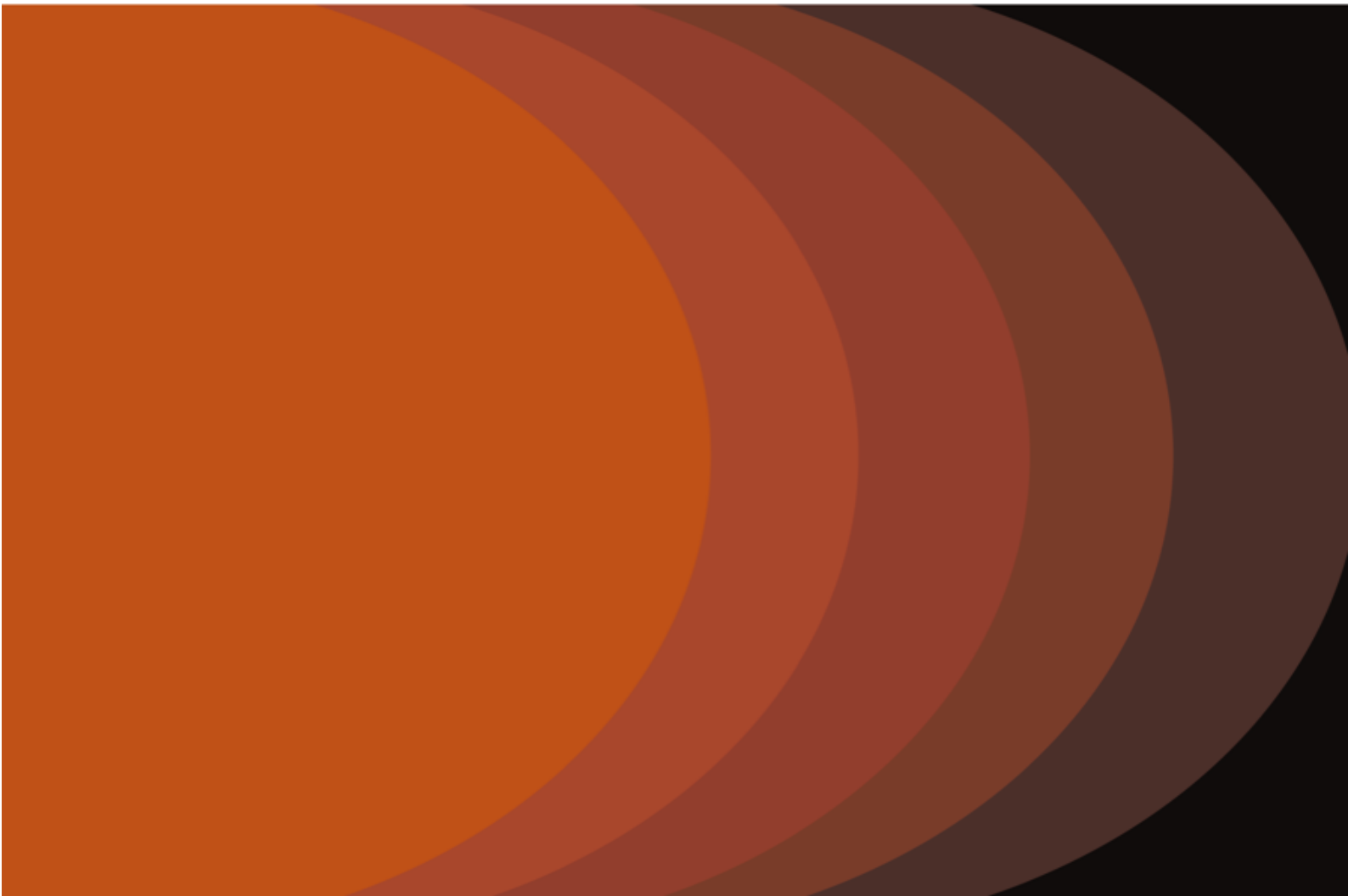


HM Inspectorate
of Probation

An inspection of youth justice services in

Ceredigion

HM Inspectorate of Probation, November 2024



Contents

Foreword	3
Ratings	4
Recommendations	5
Background	6
Domain one: Organisational delivery	7
1.1. Governance and leadership.....	7
1.2. Staff	9
1.3. Partnerships and services	11
1.4. Information and facilities.....	13
Domain three: Out-of-court disposals	16
3.1. Assessment.....	16
3.2. Planning.....	18
3.3. Implementation and delivery	19
3.4. Out-of-court disposal policy and provision.....	21
4.1. Resettlement	23
4.1. Resettlement policy and provision	23
Further information	24

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our programme of youth justice service (YJS) inspections. We have inspected and rated Ceredigion youth justice and prevention service (YJPS) across two broad areas: the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service, and the quality of out-of-court disposal work.

Overall, Ceredigion YJPS was rated as 'Inadequate'. Although we inspected the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts, due to the low number of cases, we have not rated this area of work. We also inspected the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was not rated because there were no resettlement cases within the timescale covered by the inspection.

In Ceredigion, the fundamental foundations required to deliver effective youth justice services to children and victims are missing. We found significant concerns with governance and leadership, staffing arrangements, partnerships and services, and information and facilities. This has contributed to systemic insufficiencies in the assessing, planning, and delivery of work to promote desistance and to keep children and other people safe.

Governance arrangements require considerable development. The YJPS management board is not driving the vision and strategy for the service. Connectivity with the team, volunteers, and children is absent and there is a void between operational practice and strategic arrangements. Barriers to collating and analysing data mean that neither the YJPS nor the board understand the profile of children known to the service, or whether the work with children and their parents or carers is effective. Essential policies, processes, and joint working agreements are not in place, and this has exacerbated the lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities.

Partnership arrangements do not support the effective delivery of work with children. The YJPS does not benefit from secondment arrangements with health, education, or probation services. Referral pathways into key specialist services are not formalised or monitored by the board, meaning that children's needs are not always identified or supported.

Operationally, the team responsible for post-court work and out-of-court disposals consists of one case manager, a restorative practitioner, a volunteer coordinator, and a senior practitioner. Staff are attempting to deliver the entire range of services a youth justice service needs to operate effectively, largely in isolation. The team manager and head of service have responsibilities for the YJPS and additional teams. We found dedicated managers and staff, motivated to do their best for children, but their vast spans of responsibilities and dual roles have diluted the youth justice expertise required to deliver effective services to children and victims. Quality assurance processes require urgent development to ensure that casework effectively keeps children and others safe from harm.

The disappointing findings from this inspection require immediate action and we are reassured by the response from senior leaders in Ceredigion to commit additional resources to prioritise progress against our inspection recommendations. We will monitor that progress.



Martin Jones CBE
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Ceredigion Youth Justice Service
Fieldwork started July 2024

Score 1/24

Overall rating

Inadequate



1. Organisational delivery

1.1 Governance and leadership

Inadequate



1.2 Staff

Requires improvement



1.3 Partnerships and services

Inadequate



1.4 Information and facilities

Inadequate



2. Court disposals

2.1 Assessment

Not rated

2.2 Planning

Not rated

2.3 Implementation and delivery

Not rated

2.4 Reviewing

Not rated

3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1 Assessment

Inadequate



3.2 Planning

Inadequate



3.3 Implementation and delivery

Inadequate



3.4 Out-of-court disposal policy and provision

Inadequate



4. Resettlement¹

4.1 Resettlement policy and provision

Not rated

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

Recommendations

As a result of our inspection findings, we have made 11 recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will have a positive impact on the quality of youth justice and prevention services in Ceredigion. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with the service, and better protect the public.

The Ceredigion Youth Justice and Prevention Management Board should:

1. prioritise effective progress against the management board action plan and drive operational service improvement in response to findings from the inspection
2. ensure that it sets the strategic direction for the YJPS by having a clear vision that is communicated to key stakeholders, staff, and volunteers
3. understand the statutory requirements of a youth justice partnership and ensure that mechanisms are in place to hold the partnership to account for the allocation of resources to the service
4. create data analysis processes to promote an understanding of the profile of children, with a particular focus on developing effective mechanisms to capture, analyse, and mitigate against disproportionality and overrepresentation in the service
5. provide the YJPS leadership team with the necessary resources and support to manage the service effectively, including securing an information officer, and reviewing the absent case manager post and victim worker role
6. develop connectivity with the YJPS staff team, volunteers, and children and their parents or carers.

The Ceredigion YJPS Leadership Team should:

7. urgently develop a quality assurance and management oversight process to ensure that the sufficiency of assessing, planning, and delivery of work keeps children and others safe
8. develop joint working protocols, policies, procedures, and guidance that will enable the YJPS staff to deliver high-quality work
9. review the resourcing of casework, victim work, and reparation to ensure that staff have sufficient capacity to complete their roles to a consistently high standard
10. ensure that all staff and leaders reset, and refresh their knowledge of current youth justice approaches and use the learning to improve the quality and oversight of casework
11. review the format of the bureau decision-making panel so that it has the relevant input, from the necessary agencies and professionals, to ensure that the out-of-court disposal meets the needs of the child.

Background

We conducted fieldwork in Ceredigion YJS over a period of a week, beginning 29 July 2024. We inspected nine out-of-court disposals that were delivered between 31 July 2023 and 24 May 2024 and three court cases that fell within the inspection criteria. This number was too low for court cases to be rated. There were no resettlement cases that fell within the relevant timeframes for inspectors to review. We conducted nine interviews with case managers.

Ceredigion is a county located in Mid-West Wales, bordered by Gwynedd, Powys, Carmarthenshire, and Pembrokeshire. Ceredigion is the fourth largest county in Wales, covering a vast geographical area, but it is the second smallest in terms of population. Rurality is a significant factor in the demographics of Ceredigion, with 59 per cent of the population living in the smallest towns, villages, and countryside. The 2021 Census details that 45 per cent of the residents of Ceredigion speak Welsh.

Ceredigion County Council operates a Through Age Wellbeing (TAW) model of service delivery. The integrated service model focuses on early intervention and prevention, aiming to reduce the numbers of children and adults requiring acute or statutory services.

In 2020, the service delivering court work, out-of-court disposals, and prevention was reviewed. This resulted in the separation of provision into two support areas. The team providing post-court and out-of-court (Bureau) provision currently sits within the Planned Care department of Porth Cynnal, which focuses on specialist and complex care service. The youth service, including all universal and targeted prevention work for those at risk of offending, sits within Porth Cymorth Cynnar. The local authority has requested that we reference the inspected service as the youth justice and prevention service (YJPS), to reflect a model of seamless support between youth justice and youth services. In practice, inspectors found a disjointed approach to supporting children, with missed opportunities to utilise the extensive youth service offer to inform intervention and exit planning strategies.

Dyfed Powys Police (DPP) covers the YJPS area. The YJPS has links with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) with a representative attending the management board.

The youth justice plan 2024/2025 details that between April 2023 and March 2024 the service received 78 referrals. At the time of announcing the inspection, the service had 17 open cases, consisting of two court orders and 15 out-of-court disposals. Data recording and collation are underdeveloped within the YJPS; however, the youth justice plan identifies disproportionate custodial outcomes for Black, Asian, and mixed heritage children.

In Ceredigion, we found a shared narrative that the statutory and out-of-court team is a small service, working with small numbers of children and victims. The vulnerabilities and complex needs of children in the youth justice arena are overlooked and the profile and identity of the service have become lost within the local authority and statutory partnership arrangements.

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.

Inadequate

Strengths:

- The Youth Justice and Prevention Service (YJPS) management board and senior leadership team have insight into the significant and urgent work required to develop their governance arrangements. Senior leaders were responsive to concerns and demonstrated commitment to providing additional resources to ensure progress against inspection findings.
- The format and agenda of the management board meetings have been reviewed. There is a renewed focus on the importance of induction and a revised detailed pack for new members.
- Board membership consists of a range of statutory and non-statutory partners, of sufficient seniority to impact positive change.
- Attendance at the board is a strength and there is an opportunity to reinvigorate engagement and energy as a means of driving forward the YJPS's governance arrangements.
- The board has held a development day, with the support of the Youth Justice Board Cymru, to help members to understand their roles and responsibilities.

Areas for improvement:

- Inspectors found an organisation with a disjointed approach to governance arrangements and with blurred roles and responsibilities, resulting in missed opportunities for children to access provision. The YJPS management board needs to establish its core function and elevate the profile of the service within the local authority and wider partnership.
- The board needs urgently to review the resourcing, capacity, and spans of responsibilities among the YJPS leadership and staff teams to support the delivery of effective work with children and victims.
- Board members have not driven or contributed to the youth justice plan. Board members should set and regularly review the YJPS's vision and strategy.
- The YJPS and board members do not have access to the necessary data and information to understand the service's performance. The lack of data creates a systemic barrier to analysis and evaluation activity. There is a commitment to

prioritise the recruitment of an information officer to develop data recording and reporting systems.

- There are no systems or processes in place to track, analyse, and monitor disproportionality.
- The youth justice plan details that 45 per cent of Ceredigion's population can speak Welsh, the third highest nationally; however, there is a lack of strategic focus on providing services in the language of choice.
- The YJPS partnership arrangements do not facilitate the delivery of effective operational work. The YJPS action plan identifies a need for partner agencies to provide the appropriate support to the service, and this is rated as incomplete. During the fieldwork, we found an underdeveloped understanding of the statutory requirements of the partnership, and confusion with regard to seconding arrangements, vacancies, resourcing, and pathways to accessing services.
- As a collective, the board does not have the required elevated profile to ensure that it is sufficiently linked into other key strategic forums across the local authority or wider regional arrangements.
- The management board action plan was created in January 2024 and ratified by the board in April 2024. The board must take collective responsibility to ensure that timely progress is made against the objectives, and that board members hold one another to account. Inspectors found that reviews had an overoptimistic view of progress.
- The areas of responsibility for the YJPS leadership team require reviewing, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to drive the urgent improvement of casework and core youth justice practice. The board needs to have oversight of the work undertaken with children, parents or carers, and victims, and be reassured that operational arrangements sufficiently promote desistance and keep the child and others safe.
- Connectivity between the team and management board is absent. The management board is not aware of factors impacting operational practice, and staff are not cited on strategic board activity.
- The voices and views of children, parents or carers, and victims are not effectively incorporated into setting and reviewing the vision and strategy.
- The YJS leadership team does not routinely report to the board on staff wellbeing, supervision arrangements, training needs, quality assurance, and the capacity of the team to deliver services to children.
- The board is not cited on serious incident notifications. These need to be shared with the board in a timely manner and the board needs to oversee formalised learning reviews.
- The lack of an effective risk register is hindering the board's ability to identify, monitor, make progress against, and mitigate potential risks. The governance arrangements have not actioned fundamental risks such as a longstanding case manager vacancy in the team, the lack of an information officer, the conflicts associated with dual roles, statutory partnership requirements, the absence of policies and procedures, and the lack of data to inform analysis and evaluation.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Strengths:

- Staff are committed, dedicated, and passionate about their work with children. Inspectors found staff to be reflective and eager to learn as a means of improving outcomes for children.
- Staff should be commended for their positivity and adaptability in delivering services to children within the context of competing demands and limited resources.
- The recruitment, training, and ongoing support of volunteers is impressive. Volunteers receive extensive training to participate in referral order panels, the bureau decision-making panel, and appropriate adult support.
- Staff report that supervision is frequent and balances case management discussions with a focus on wellbeing. Managers are described as accessible and approachable.
- Team meetings take place on a regular basis and are welcomed as a forum for peer support.
- Opportunities to engage in academic courses are supported, with examples of practitioners participating in the social work qualification and the Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate. Practitioners support student placements as a means of providing practical learning opportunities.
- Practitioners have been funded to engage in Welsh language courses.
- Diversity needs and individual circumstances are considered well, and staff, volunteers, and leaders feel supported by each other and the organisation.
- Staff and volunteers feel safe undertaking their work.

Areas for improvement:

- Prior to 2020, the youth justice statutory, out-of-court, and preventative services were provided by a unified team. A restructure resulted in the creation of two teams, with one focused on the statutory and out-of-court elements of youth justice, and the other on universal and targeted prevention services. The team providing statutory and out-of-court services consists of one case manager, a restorative practitioner, volunteer coordinator, and senior practitioner. The team manager has a dual role, with oversight of both the YJS and care leavers. The head of service has vast areas of responsibility across planned care services. Inspectors found that the spans of responsibility, for leaders and staff, were not conducive to delivering effective services to children and victims. A review of capacity and resourcing is urgently required.
- Quality assurance processes are ineffective in ensuring that casework is sufficiently promoting desistance and keeping children and others safe.
- The absence of a specific victim worker role results in practitioners supporting both the child and the person that has been harmed. There is no specialist support or oversight to mitigate the impact of these potentially conflicting roles.

- The absence of a training needs analysis results in an ad hoc approach to identifying and sourcing crucial training opportunities.
- Leaders and staff had limited opportunities to refresh their knowledge of current youth justice practice, including child-first principles, desistance theory, and trauma-informed approaches.
- The absence of screening tools was a barrier to the identification of children's needs. Children's vulnerabilities were not understood in the context of their lived experiences. Factors such as adverse childhood experiences, trauma, and the impact of extra-familial harm need to be consistently understood as a means of keeping children safe.
- The lack of specialist workers leads to significant gaps in knowledge. This is particularly acute around speech, language and communication, additional learning needs, exploitation, and the interface between the YJS and probation services.
- Practitioners' spans of responsibilities limit opportunities for reflective practice and learning.
- Clinical supervision is not available.
- Staff and volunteers are not provided with opportunities to have an input into the YJS plan.
- There is no resilience in the team for planned or unplanned absences.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Inadequate

Strengths:

- Relationships between the YJPS and social care services are assisted by shared management structures. The YJPS is routinely invited to social care strategy discussions, care and support, and child protection meetings. Social workers attend the YJPS-led high-risk management meetings.
- A youth liaison link nurse attends monthly meetings with the YJS and can offer direct support to children presenting with lower-level unmet health needs. The nurse can refer to the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) and provide support with signposting to universal health services. Inspectors looked at the case records of one child that had specialist CAMHS involvement.
- The police officer linked to the YJS undertakes a range of roles, including consulting with arresting officers, triaging referrals, attending bureau decision-making panels, issuing out-of-court disposals, attending risk meetings, and undertaking intelligence checks. Both the YJPS and police view the partnership as working positively.
- The youth service is resourced well and offers a wide range of universal provision and targeted support for children at risk of offending. The Supporting Teenagers in the Community initiative is a joint framework model supporting children at risk of antisocial behaviour, resulting in the delivery of interventions focused on county lines, exploitation, grooming, substance misuse, and peer relationships. The use of virtual reality headsets aims to raise knowledge and understanding of trauma and exploitation.
- Referral pathways for substance misuse are understood and utilised.
- Inspectors witnessed established and positive relationships among individuals in the partnership. This needs to be formalised by way of documented pathways and processes.

Areas for improvement:

- Legislatively, youth justice services are intended to be multi-agency, to ensure that children with the highest vulnerabilities and most complex needs are sufficiently supported. We found significant gaps in the statutory partnership and an absence of specialist and commissioned services to support desistance, promote safety and wellbeing, and keep other people safe.
- Outdated agreements have contributed towards an inconsistent understanding of the allocation of resources and secondment arrangements.
- The absence of holistic data collation and analysis means that the partnership does not understand the profile of children known to the service. The partnership needs urgently to improve the way it collates and analyses data to inform a strategic approach to developing the most effective interventions and services for children. This includes developing an understanding of disproportionality and overrepresentation among the cohort.

- Risk and safety management processes are not effective in keeping children and other people safe. There needs to be consistent support and input from partners to ensure that risks are identified and understood, and that there is shared responsibility to manage these.
- The absence of seconded health, education, and probation specialists results in gaps in services provided to children and adds additional pressures onto the workloads of youth justice practitioners.
- Victim work is not viewed as a specialist role. YJS case managers simultaneously work with the child and the person harmed. A review of victim work is needed.
- The absence of an exploitation screening tool results in an overreliance on individual perspective rather than a collective understanding of the indicators of extra-familial harm.
- The YJPS is not able to refer directly for speech, language and communication, or neurodiversity assessments and support.
- The partnership pathway for harmful sexualised behaviour assessments is via the YJPS. At the time of the inspection, none of the YJPS practitioners had completed the Assessment, Intervention & Moving-on 3 (AIM 3) project training. Training has been sourced, but the capacity to provide an authority-wide offer is questionable.
- Referrals between the youth service and YJS are not effectively monitored to ensure that children have access to the range of services to support desistance. Inspectors found missed opportunities to utilise the youth service provision for exit planning activities.
- The partnership identified gaps in support for children released under investigation or subject to bail conditions.
- Pathways and referral processes into partnership services are not formalised. Inspectors found inconsistent understanding of the availability and accessibility of services.
- There are no systems to review or evaluate the suitability, use, or effectiveness of services, and there is an overreliance on anecdotal information.
- The availability of reparation is dependent on case managers' capacity to source and deliver projects. Reparation activity is not accredited.

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.

Inadequate

Strengths:

- The YJPS recognises the impact of the rurality on the accessibility of services for children. Practitioners are responsive in their approaches to seeing children within their locality and in spaces where they feel safe.
- Staff and volunteers all reported feeling safe when undertaking their work. Corporate lone working policies and arrangements are understood.
- Information and communications technology ensures that staff can work effectively from offices and remote bases.
- The YJPS practitioners have access to children's social care systems, and the youth service has full access to the YJPS Child View case management system.

Areas for improvement:

- Quality assurance processes for all casework need urgent attention to ensure that the safety of children, victims, and the public is prioritised.
- The use of data and information to monitor and improve services is very limited. For the past two years, practitioners and managers have filled the void of a specialist information officer, often resulting in manual data collation. The YJPS is committed to the recruitment of an information officer.
- The YJPS does not have the necessary policies to guide effective service delivery. Policies need updating to reflect current youth justice practices and diversity considerations, specific to the demographics and trends in Ceredigion. The YJPS confirmed the absence of policies focused on risk and safety management, victims, diversity and disproportionality, and quality assurance.
- The out-of-court disposal and resettlement policies are in draft format and have been created in isolation of key statutory partners.
- The management board needs to drive the reviewing and scrutiny of the YJPS policies, ensuring that its oversight holds the partnership to account for its roles in operationalising the processes. Creation and reviewing of policies have been an action from the management board for the past 18 months, but this has not resulted in policies being discussed or presented to the board.
- Limitations with data collation and analysis have created barriers to evaluation and learning. There is a lack of process in place to ensure that the YJPS learns from things that do not go to plan. Serious incident notifications are not shared with the management board in a timely manner and learning reviews are not prioritised.
- Service level agreements and memorandums of understanding with partner agencies are outdated.
- The views of children and their parents or carers are not formally collated and analysed to inform future service delivery.

Involvement of children and their parents or carers

Ceredigion YJPS has committed staff and volunteers who display genuine care for their work and for supporting children and their parents or carers. Ceredigion Local Authority has several established child participation forums, but mechanisms to capture and analyse feedback formally from those working with the YJPS need to be developed. The management board has started to discuss individual case studies and it is acknowledged that work needs to be undertaken to hear the voice of the child meaningfully at board meetings.

The YJPS 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 five children and parents who consented, and one parent replied. We also spoke to two children and a parent to understand their experiences of working with the YJPS. Feedback from children and parents detailed that they were supported well by their YJPS workers, and all respondents felt that staff have the right skills to engage with children.

Children commented:

| *“My worker was amazing and really understanding.”*

| *“They worked with me in a clear and open way.”*

And a parent added that:

| *“[REDACTED] was professional approachable and helpful. They was personable and easy to get on with. That applies to both me being the parent and my son who was undertaking work with them.”*

Practitioners are mindful of the impact of rurality on children’s ability to engage with services. It was pleasing to see that all respondents felt that children were seen in spaces that were safe and easy to get to. One child stated that their preference was to be seen at school or at home, and that this was accommodated. Another child appreciated that their views had been heard in arranging a specific location for appointments:

| *“This was a safe place and the best place for me to have meetings.”*

Children and their parents or carers would have liked to have been provided with materials to enhance their work with the YJPS. Additionally, we heard that the YJPS should improve clarity around the support available following the end of a child’s out-of-court disposal or court order.

A parent summarised:

| *“It would be good to have clearer signposting to resources/support at the end of working with YJS.”*

Feedback from children and parents was positive with regard to the skills of the workers, the support offered, and opportunities to meet in safe spaces and places.

It is of note that a parent highlighted the need for clearer signposting and support at the end of the involvement with the YJS, reflecting the inspection findings that exit planning and pathways into the youth service is an area for development.

Diversity

- The management board needs to support the YJPS to identify and understand diversity and disproportionality, including developing a clear strategic response. Key areas such as resettlement and out-of-court disposals need to be considered. This includes specific guidance on how the strategy will be operationalised to deliver systemic change and meet the needs of children.
- The YJPS plan acknowledged disproportionate custodial outcomes for Black, Asian, and minority ethnic children, but this had not resulted in action. The YJPS and management board had not completed a deep-dive analysis to understand and learn from factors linked to disproportionality.
- A detailed strategic needs analysis would help the partnership to tailor services to the breadth and range of diversity within the YJS cohort.
- The absence of seconded specialists and screening tools results in an inconsistent approach to identifying and analysing children's unmet needs.
- Staff and managers express that their diversity needs are supported with adjustments made to accommodate individual circumstances. Out of the eight volunteers who identified a diversity need in our survey, all reported that their diversity needs had been responded to 'very well' or 'quite well'.
- Ceredigion County Council has supported two YJS practitioners to undertake Welsh language classes. Inspectors found examples of the use of the Welsh language, including an impressive instance of restorative practice delivered with the child and victim in Welsh. However, the YJS plan details that 45 per cent of Ceredigion residents can speak the Welsh language, the third highest percentage of Welsh speakers out of all other Welsh local authorities, yet the YJPS does not routinely analyse data to track whether Welsh language needs can be consistently met.
- Practitioners had recognised children's diverse needs in two out of nine out-of-court disposals.
- The organisational data provided by the YJS indicates an increasing percentage in the number of girls referred to out-of-court panels; however, this has not been explored and actioned.
- The YJPS recognises the impact of the rurality within the county. Inspectors found that practitioners were responsive in their approaches to seeing children within their locality and in spaces where they felt safe. The youth service undertakes outreach work, ensuring that children residing in rural communities have opportunities to access services.
- In accordance with the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales, early intervention and preventative services are comprehensive and there is a strong offer to children.

Domain two: Court disposals

We took a detailed look at three community cases managed by the YJS. There were insufficient cases that met the HM Inspectorate of Probation criteria, carried out within the timescale covered by the inspection, so this work has not been rated. We found similar themes in both post-court and out-of-court casework.

Domain three: Out-of-court disposals

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

3.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

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

Does assessment sufficiently analyse:	% 'Yes'
how to support the child's desistance?	11%
how to keep the child safe?	0%
how to keep other people safe?	0%

Out-of-court assessing activity to support children's desistance, their safety, and the safety of others needed significant attention. Inspectors found shortfalls in the analysis of the offence and an overreliance on information provided by the police in their referrals. Information held by relevant agencies was not captured and used to create a holistic picture of the child and their circumstances, which was of particular concern, given the absence of a multi-agency input in the bureau decision-making panel.

The child's diversity needs and individual circumstances were only considered in the minority of cases, and assessing did not pay sufficient attention to understanding the child's levels of maturity. Where it worked well, practitioners had considered a child's language preference, impact of rurality, what was important to the child, and their lived experiences. This had assisted in drawing out the child's strengths. Understanding the child's experience and engaging them in discussions regarding their strengths and interests is a fundamental part of promoting future desistance, and this was lacking in the majority of cases we inspected.

We found an inherent belief in the YJPS, and across the partnership, that children referred for out-of-court disposals present with low levels of needs and concerns. This perspective may have contributed to insufficiencies in assessing activity to keep the child and others

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

safe in all of the out-of-court disposal cases inspected, and was at odds with some of the challenges, vulnerabilities and complexities of the children the YJPS was working with on out-of-court disposals.

Inspectors found that safety and wellbeing level thresholds were focused on the child's immediate physical safety, and assessing did not analyse a child's wellbeing and emotional and psychological safety. The impact of trauma, adverse childhood experiences, emotional and mental health, exploitation, and substance misuse was not routinely considered. We found examples of children who had recent engagement with care and support plans, but this information was not used to inform an analysis of safety and wellbeing concerns. Similarly, information regarding low school attendance and fixed-term exclusions was not explored to provide a holistic picture of what was happening in the child's life. The gaps in gathering and analysing information from all relevant sources meant that the context in which potential future harm could occur to the child had not been fully recognised, and there was an underestimation of safety and well-being concerns.

Assessing activity to keep people safe focused on the referral behaviour and did not take account of previous incidents or information from other agencies. Inspectors found a focus on serious harm, which meant that other harmful behaviours had not been identified or analysed. This had resulted in a limited understanding of the concerns, the context in which the harmful behaviour could occur, its imminence, and who would be at risk. The victim's needs, wishes, and safety were assessed in the minority of cases, and we found case managers simultaneously attempting to support the child and those who had been harmed.

There was a limited understanding of the correlation between risk and safety concerns. For example, information regarding children carrying knives did not result in a holistic view of both the potential impact of harm on others, and the adverse outcomes for the child's own safety.

Quality assurance processes did not identify deficits in assessing activity or the underestimation of risk and safety classifications. An urgent review of quality assurance processes was required to improve the quality of assessments.

3.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating³ for planning is based on the following key questions:

Does planning focus on:	% 'Yes'
supporting the child's desistance?	33%
keeping the child safe?	0%
keeping other people safe?	0%

Planning to support the child's desistance needs was sufficient in three out of the nine cases inspected. Where this worked well, planning was collaborative with the child and their parent or carer and there had been liaison between the case manager and the school, youth service, and victim to devise a holistic plan. However, this occurred in too few cases, and the attendance of children and their parents or carers at the bureau decision-making panel had not resulted in meaningful and holistic planning activities. We found an absence of child-friendly plans and an underdeveloped strengths-based approach to promoting desistance. Planning and exit planning did not explore opportunities for children to access community provision in any of the nine cases inspected, resulting in missed opportunities for children to link in with the youth service and the extensive universal and targeted prevention offer.

Planning to keep the child and others safe was insufficient in all inspected cases. The bureau out-of-court decision-making panel did not include representatives from education, health, or children's services, and their inclusion might have provided an opportunity to improve collaborative planning.

Insufficiencies in assessing and the absence of screening tools had impacted on planning. Key areas to support risk and safety concerns were not being addressed, including peer and family relationships, emotional and mental health, exploitation, and substance misuse.

In over half the cases inspected, victims' needs and safety had been overlooked. This included not recognising ongoing risks to actual and potential victims, and making appropriate plans to mitigate concerns. Contingency planning was not undertaken for children subject to out-of-court disposals. This, coupled with the underestimation of risk and safety classifications, meant that children with high vulnerabilities and those presenting risks to others were not identified as requiring multi-agency approaches and were not referred to the YJPS-led high-risk multi-agency forum. This limited the ability of practitioners and partner agencies to be responsive to changing circumstances.

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

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Inadequate

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

Does service delivery effectively support:	% 'Yes'
the child's desistance?	44%
the safety of the child?	11%
the safety of other people?	11%

The gaps in the statutory partnership arrangements and underdeveloped pathways into key services have impacted the quality of work delivered to children. We found missed opportunities to involve school-based youth workers and health workers in children's lives. When referrals were made to other services for support, the follow-up work or outcomes were not always clear.

We found that when the delivery of services to support desistance was done well, it had considered a child's diversity needs, resulting in adaptations to interventions and methods of engagement. We found examples of case managers sensitively seeking to build trusting relationships by ensuring that children were seen in safe spaces, and an appropriate persistence in engaging children with their out-of-court disposals. Unfortunately, this happened in a minority of cases, and we found that practitioners' span of responsibility had resulted in limited opportunities to provide effective services to children and victims. One of the nine cases inspected provided sufficient attention to the protection of actual and potential victims. Reparation and restorative justice were only available if the case managers had capacity to source, support, and undertake the activities themselves, and this had resulted in gaps in service provision. The limited availability of resources and interventions to engage children creatively meant that sessions tended to focus on dated approaches to addressing offending behaviours. Approaches to working with harmful sexualised behaviours were underdeveloped, compounded by the delays in accessing specialist training and the absence of evidenced-based resources.

The delivery of services to keep children and others safe was sufficient in one out of nine cases inspected. The YJPS's role in delivering services to manage the risks presented to and from the child was not clearly understood by the service or the wider partnership. Key information indicating significant changes in a child's life was not shared in a timely manner and there was a lack of a cohesive partnership response. Inspectors found examples of children experiencing deterioration in their emotional and mental health which did not result in a responsive offer from the YJPS, health services, children's services, or school support workers. We also found examples of escalating concerns regarding violence and aggression which would have benefited from a YJS-led multi-agency forum focused on keeping the child and other people safe.

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

Inspectors found that management oversight was insufficient in all relevant cases. Managers did not routinely audit all casework, and oversight consisted of a general case update and discussions, resulting in limited actions.

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.

Inadequate

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 out-of-court policy and procedure had been reviewed to include national guidance. The policy distinguished between formal and informal out-of-court disposals.
- The roles and responsibilities of the YJS manager, case manager, YJS police officer, Dyfed-Powys Police, victim worker, and business support were clearly documented.
- Children's individual needs and diversity considerations were considered in the policy.
- The police notified the YJPS of youth arrests and street-issued youth restorative disposals.
- Deferred prosecution by way of outcome 22 had been introduced and was available to children.

Areas for improvement:

- Risk and safety management processes and provision required a fundamental review. Inspectors found significant shortfalls in out-of-court practices and insufficiency in the assessing, planning, and delivery to keep the child and others safe. Urgent attention was required to develop quality assurance processes to improve the quality of casework.
- Resourcing of out-of-court responsibilities needed to be reviewed. Inspectors found an outdated view of out-of-court disposals as being 'low level' and lacking complexity. We found that the framework was focused on the process and disposal rather than the child's individual need.
- The roles and responsibilities of the YJPS in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children were not explicitly covered in the policy. Inspectors found an inconsistent understanding of the role of the YJPS in keeping children safe.
- The policy and procedure created by the YJPS had not had input from the police, or children's social care, education, or health services. The policy had not been ratified by the management board.
- Strategic oversight and independent scrutiny of out-of-court work was absent. The management board was not updated on out-of-court data, policies, or practices. Oversight mechanisms did not provide reassurance that disposals were fair, consistent, timely, and effective.
- The bureau decision-making panel did not include key representation from children's social care, education, and health services. There was no provision for involved agencies to attend or contribute to the decision-making panel.

- Children and their parents or carers were expected to attend all bureau panels. It was unclear how their individual needs were considered in preparing them for the panel and supporting them to understand the outcome. Victim statements were read to the child and their parent or carer as part of the decision-making forum, but the impact on the child and victim safety were not considered or evaluated.
- Strengths-based interventions were limited, and inspectors found missed opportunities for children subject to out-of-court disposals to access the extensive provision offered by the youth service. The out-of-court disposal policy needed to document the pathways between the YJS and youth service.
- Vast spans of responsibilities and limited capacity meant that restorative and reparative sessions were only available to children in cases where the victim had requested specific work to be undertaken.
- Outcome 22 use required development, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Children and their parents or carers had not been directly involved in any evaluation of the out-of-court disposal policy.

4.1. Resettlement

4.1. Resettlement policy and provision

There is a high-quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.	Not rated
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We inspected the quality of policy and provision in place for resettlement work, using evidence from documents, meetings, and interviews. This standard has not been rated because there were no resettlement cases that fell within the inspection timescale.

Strengths:

- The current resettlement policy and procedures were grounded in current practice, demonstrated by the links to constructive resettlement principles. The YJPS roles and responsibilities in supporting children sentenced to custody were clearly documented.
- The policy recognised the importance of providing individualised services to children, to enable a positive identity shift.
- Constructive resettlement training was delivered in 2022 and children sentenced to custody were allocated to experienced senior practitioners or case managers.

Areas for improvement:

- The resettlement policy was created in isolation of the partnership and had not been ratified by the management board. This did not promote shared responsibility and accountability for resettlement policy and provision.
- While we were confident that YJPS staff would work with the custodial establishments to support children the best that they could, the lack of an effective operational and strategic partnership was not conducive to prioritising the needs of children preparing for release from custody.
- The board did not have oversight of resettlement, and this had resulted in missed opportunities to learn from the experiences of children sentenced to custody. Two children most recently sentenced to custody were from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups and this had not resulted in a deep-dive analysis to understand factors linked to disproportionality.
- There was no explicit reference within the policy to approaches that would reduce disproportionality.
- Policies did not detail how the partnership would meet the needs of Welsh-speaking children placed in custodial establishments outside of Wales.
- Victim work was not sufficiently explicit in the policy and procedures.
- The policy and procedures did not establish how the partnership would work collaboratively to ensure that there was a holistic approach to keeping the child and others safe. There was no mention of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in the policy.
- Children and their parents or carers had not been involved in the review of the resettlement policy.

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.](#)