

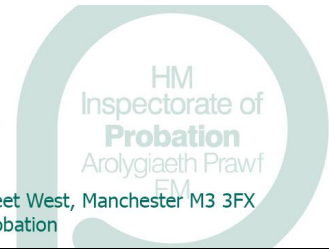


Inspection of Youth Offending Work

Arolygiad o Waith Troseddu Ieuenctid

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<i>To:</i>	Phil Evans, Chair of Vale of Glamorgan YOS Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Julie Fox, Assistant Chief Inspector
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Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Vale of Glamorgan

This report outlines the findings of the recent SQS inspection, conducted from 9th-11th December 2013. We carried this out as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report will be published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Context

As an independent inspectorate, HMI Probation provides assurance to Ministers and the public on the effectiveness of work with those who have offended or are likely to offend, promotes continuous improvement by the organisations that we inspect and contributes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. The purpose of this inspection was to assess the quality and effectiveness of recent casework with children and young people who had offended. In order to do this, we examined 14 cases supervised by the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service (YOS). Wherever possible this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby increasing the effectiveness as a learning opportunity for staff.

We gather evidence against the SQS criteria, which are available on the HMI Probation website - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmi-probation>.

Summary

Overall, we found a very positive picture in the Vale of Glamorgan YOS. The YOS can be rightly proud of the substantial progress it has made since our previous inspection in 2010. That inspection had identified the need for improvements in several important areas of work. We were pleased to note that substantial progress had been made in the quality of assessments, plans and reviews being undertaken by practitioners. Staff were committed to delivering high quality services and they were well supported in their work. They engaged with an appropriate range of partners and, in general, children and young people were well served by the good quality reports, assessments and plans being produced by the YOS. There was scope for further improving the quality of practice by ensuring that diversity issues were integrated into assessments and plans.

Commentary on the inspection in the Vale of Glamorgan:

1. Reducing the likelihood of reoffending

- 1.1. In all nine relevant cases, we found that good quality pre-sentence reports (PSRs) had been provided to the courts and that management oversight of the quality of reports had been effective. An inspector commented on one PSR: *"This report contained a comprehensive review of the issues underpinning the offending of the young person and offered a proposal that both marked the seriousness of the offence and provided constructive interventions aimed at tackling offending related factors. The report drew on a broad range of information sources, for example, the information from the social worker was crucial to informing the PSR. The quality of the joint work meant that the court was offered a credible proposal for a community penalty"*.
- 1.2. All but one of the initial assessments looking at what was likely to make a child or young person offend had been done on time and were of good enough quality. While this was an aspect of practice that was generally strong in the team, there was scope for further improvement by increasing the information flows, in relevant cases, between the YOS and the police. We noted several cases where exchanges of information of this sort would have been helpful in confirming, or allaying, concerns about potential offending by children and young people.
- 1.3. The family and personal circumstances of many children and young people can alter quickly. As a result, assessments need to be reviewed in order that they keep pace with changing situations. All but one of the assessments we looked at, that should have been reviewed, had been completed and well enough.
- 1.4. Following on from assessment, we expect to see a plan of work to help reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Almost all of the initial plans were of a sufficient standard and nine out of ten plans had been adequately kept under review. In one case we noted: *"The YOS used the 'Positive Choices' package to address offending behaviour issues on an individual basis and 'Clued Up' to do this work in groups. In this case James¹ took part in an eight week group course to address his anger management. He attended each of the eight sessions and engaged well. There had been no further examples of anger issues since his completion of that package and this was reflected in the reviews in the case"*. Where the child or young person was serving a custodial sentence, we found that the planning during the custodial phase of the sentence addressed the likelihood of them reoffending, in all four relevant cases.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. A good quality assessment of risk of harm to others was seen in 13 of the 14 cases we reviewed, including all nine where there had been a PSR. In one case we felt that the risk of harm classification was too low and that potential victims' issues had not been adequately considered.
- 2.2. Where a child or young person may pose a risk of harm to others, we expect to see a plan to minimise the likelihood of this happening. In nine of the ten relevant cases, planning was done well enough to manage the risk of harm. Within this, planning was satisfactory for two out of the three custodial cases. In the custody case that did not have an adequate plan to address risk of harm issues, we found that the plan of work did not fully reflect the assessed issues in the case.

¹ To help protect the identity of the young person the name has been changed.

- 2.3. In six of the seven relevant cases, plans to address the risk of harm to others had been reviewed to a satisfactory standard. For one, the review had not been timely and nor was it of sufficient quality.
- 2.4. Where there was an identifiable victim or potential victim, we were pleased to see that the risk of harm they faced had been effectively managed in all cases. An inspector cited one case as an example; *"Darren² had been convicted of a sexual offence involving another young person. As part of his on-going rehabilitation and social development, education was identified as a key area of need. An appropriate course at a local college was found but there were some risk management issues in that setting. The case manager worked closely with the college authorities and provided them with a comprehensive risk assessment and a detailed management plan. This highlighted relevant and specific concerns around risks to others as well as vulnerability concerns for Darren. It also offered practical suggestions for managing those issues. This approach reassured the college that the risks were manageable with the right support and controls and they accepted Darren onto the course"*.
- 2.5. Management oversight of risk of harm work had been effective in almost all of the relevant cases.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. In all but 1 of the 14 cases, vulnerability and safeguarding needs had been sufficiently assessed. These issues were fully addressed in all nine PSRs.
- 3.2. The great majority of reviews of safeguarding and vulnerability throughout the sentence were of an acceptable standard.
- 3.3. In 13 out of the 14 cases, planning for work to manage and reduce vulnerability was of a good standard. The one case that was not adequate had a planned response that was insufficiently clear and the plan had not incorporated the views of the young person's social worker.
- 3.4. In 9 out of the 11 relevant cases we found adequate reviews, throughout the sentence, to address safeguarding and vulnerability needs.
- 3.5. There was evidence of management oversight taking place in the majority of cases. In 11 out of 13 relevant cases management oversight was effective in ensuring the quality of work to address safeguarding and vulnerability.

4. Ensuring that the sentence is served

- 4.1. The great majority of assessments of diversity factors and barriers to engagement were sufficient. Appropriate attention had been given to these issues in all of the PSRs.
- 4.2. The child or young person or parent/carer was involved in the preparation of all of the PSRs. We also found that there was good engagement with the child or young person and parents/carers to carry out further assessments and plans. While we found attention was being paid in most plans to diversity factors and to potential barriers to engagement, it was not always adequately considered in respect of age and maturity, race and ethnicity, and for girls and young women.
- 4.3. In all but 1 out of the 13 relevant cases that we reviewed, sufficient attention had been given to the health and well-being of the child or young person.

² To help protect the identity of the young person the name has been changed.

- 4.4. Levels of contact with the children and young people subject to supervision maintained a good balance between promoting compliance with interventions that supported positive change for the individual, for example educational input, and putting boundaries around their behaviour, for example curfews.
- 4.5. Five children and young people had fully complied with the requirements of their sentence. Five had needed work by the case manager to secure compliance with the requirements of supervision. In all cases where the child or young person had not cooperated, the response of the YOS was appropriate. This led to the child or young person re-engaging with the work, or, in three cases, being returned to court for breach proceedings. One inspector noted: *"This case offered yet another example of sound management of a chaotic young person who had not engaged effectively with the YOS and its partners over a number of years, and was on the cusp of moving to the adult world. The 'transitions' arrangements in place between the YOS, the probation service and the police were robust, and helped to ensure that the children and young people who would be supervised in the adult context had been appropriately prepared for transition and understood the differing expectations of supervision in the adult world"*.

Operational management

We found that the Vale of Glamorgan YOS had responded to the previous inspection by implementing a range of measures aimed at improving the quality of their work. Effective management of improvement activity included establishing a quality assurance process to underpin good practice in report writing and a case planning forum to structure work in complex cases. We saw examples of both of these being used to good effect. Practitioners had welcomed these and other developments to support practice and had incorporated them into their work.

Case managers valued the arrangements for providing management oversight of practice. This was noteworthy, given that the Management Team had carried a key vacancy for a considerable period of time. Almost all of the practitioners described countersigning and management oversight of risk of harm and safeguarding work as an effective process. We judged that staff supervision and quality assurance arrangements had made a positive impact in almost all of the cases inspected. In general, staff said that they received effective supervision and that their line manager had the skills and knowledge to help them to improve the quality of their work and to support them appropriately.

Most staff reported having received recent training to enable them to do their current job, but several said they had not had enough training in addressing diversity issues, including speech, language and communication needs. We found that the practitioners were aware of local policies and procedures that related to compliance, vulnerability and risk of harm and how the principles of effective practice applied in their work with children and young people.

Key strengths

- The quality of PSRs prepared for the courts.
- The engagement of children and young people and parents/carers in assessments.
- Risk of harm and vulnerability issues were being managed effectively in most cases.
- Clear attention was being given to addressing compliance and non-engagement issues.

Area requiring improvement

- Integrating diversity issues into assessments and plans.

We are grateful for the support that we received from staff in the YOS to facilitate and engage with this inspection. Please pass on our thanks, and ensure that they are made fully aware of these inspection findings.

If you have any further questions about the inspection please contact the lead inspector, who was Joseph Simpson. He can be contacted on 07917 084764, and by email at joe.simpson@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk.

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