

To: Customer & Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee
From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member Customer & Communities and Amanda Honey, Corporate Director Customer & Communities
Date: 20 January 2012
Subject: The Learning from the Case Audits Undertaken by Kent Youth Offending Service
Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The processes designed to achieve the changes in the quality of practice and of management oversight required following the Inspection and set out in the Improvement Plan are now well established and their influence and impact are being seen during audits. The audits indicate there is still ongoing work to be done to ensure the necessary standards are consistently achieved and are evident across the caseload of the Youth Offending Service.

1. Introduction

This paper sets out the detail of the actions that Kent YOS is undertaking to address the findings of the Core Case Inspection of the Service held in April 2011. The findings focus upon the quality of practice with respect to:

- safeguarding the welfare of children and young people amongst the youth offending population
- the management of the risk of serious harm to others

The actions that have been taken are included in the Improvement Plan agreed by the Service with both the National Youth Justice Board and the Inspectorate of Probation. The Service has yet to hear from the Youth Justice Board as to when their regional team will review the progress that has been made towards each of the objectives included in the Plan.

The prime focus of this paper is the case auditing that has been undertaken by the Service and how the learning has been used to:

- confirm the responsibilities of the Practice Supervisor and of the Case Manager
- develop specific areas of practice and to inform the design and contents of training to assist the achievement of these required developments
- shape partnership arrangements, particularly with the Health Service and with Specialist Children's Services.

2. The Context

The very successful diversionary strategies which have been adopted by Kent Police are centred on the use of restorative justice and have resulted in a:

- downward trend in the population within the youth justice system:
 - 1,918 in 2009/10
 - 1,428 in 2010/11
 - 1,322 in 2011/12 (a projected total based on the first two quarters of the current year)
- declining Court population:
 - 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010 there were 2,590 sentences imposed
 - 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011 there were 2,254 imposed - a fall of 13%

The consequences of these changes for the Service are a reduced average caseload, now approximately 650 at any one time, and a greater complexity of the needs and risks associated with the individual children and young people being supervised by the Service.

The greater complexity of the caseload was illustrated by a snapshot study held on 4 October 2011. This revealed the Service was supervising a total of 170 “looked after children”, which represented an increase of 16.0% when compared to the findings of a similar study (146) completed in June 2011. The looked after children included 91 from Kent and 79 from other Local Authorities. In addition, there were 83 “children in need” and 37 who were subjects of Child Protection Plans. Therefore, over 40% of the children and young people making up the Service’s caseload are likely to be receiving a service from either Specialist Children’s Services or the 16+ Leaving Care Service in Kent, or from their equivalent in another Local Authority.

3. Improvement Plan

The case audits being undertaken are assessing whether there is evidence of the changes required by the Improvement Plan to the quality of practice and to the management oversight in individual cases.

The required changes are:

- timely and good quality assessments and plans, using ASSET (the youth justice assessment tool), are completed when cases start
- timely and good quality assessments of vulnerability and of *Risk of Harm to others* are completed as appropriate to each case at the start
- intervention plans are specific about what will now be done in order to safeguard the child or young person from harm, to make them less likely to reoffend, and to minimise any identified *Risk of Harm to others*
- intervention plans are regularly reviewed and correctly recorded in ASSET
- regular and effective oversight by management of individual cases

4. Case Audits – The Methods Employed

Three types of audit have been undertaken since the Inspection report was received towards the end of May 2011:

- (i) monthly audits, using a template designed by the Service, that are led by the Effective Practice & Performance Manager. They involve practitioners in the Service who are directly engaged in the supervision of children and young people acting as peer auditors. These audits consider the “golden thread” of individual cases:
 - (a) the quality of the assessment
 - (b) the strength of the association between the assessment outcomes and the objectives included in risk management, vulnerability management and intervention plans
 - (c) the actions actually taken and the strength of their association with the objectives included in the plans
 - (d) the timeliness of reviews and the outcomes from them

- (ii) a Health audit (a commitment included in the Care Quality Commission Action Plan for the Service) has provided an opportunity to review the assessments of over 160 children and young people being supervised by the Service during July. The audit has collated information on the social care, education and health needs of the youth offending population which, in the majority of cases are considerable

- (iii) a review of only three referrals made by YOS to Specialist Children’s Services. This review was undertaken for an audit co-ordinated by the Safeguarding Children Board. Each of the referrals reviewed were made by YOS in response to a 16 / 17 year old known to the Service becoming homeless

5. Main Findings to Date from the Case Audits

The strengths and improvements in areas of practice which have been identified to date include:

- (i) assessments:
 - (a) the analysis of the offending behaviour providing better insight into the immediate triggers for the offending
 - (b) the analysis provided with respect to the dynamic risk factors (ie. those factors research has indicated are most commonly associated with the offending behaviour of young people such as substance misuse, mental ill health, family and personal relationships, poor attainment at school) the assessment has strongly linked to the child / young person’s offending
 - (c) the recognition of the need for either a more in depth risk assessment to be prepared, with a view to the necessity for a risk management plan to be in place, or a vulnerability (ie. safeguarding) management plan or both to be in place

- (d) the assessment format, "What Do You Think?", designed for the young person to complete is increasingly used by case managers (the target is 100% of cases)
- (e) the Learning Styles Questionnaire (designed to inform the most effective means for communicating with the child / young person) is now being used in the majority of cases but the 100% target is yet to be reached

(ii) plans:

- (a) timeliness – the National Standard of 15 working days is being met for the initial Intervention Plan
- (b) partners – there is evidence of those services most clearly associated with the needs and risks associated with the child / young person being involved in the planning meetings
- (c) objectives - there is evidence of a link between the assessment outcomes and the objectives included in the three types of plan

(iii) contacts with children and young people:

- (a) family based work – there is evidence of more frequent and appropriate engagement of parents / carers in the supervisory relationship
- (b) partners – those from agencies such as Health, Education, Connexions and the Police are evidently contributing to the supervision of children and young people so increasing the likelihood of a positive outcome
- (c) objectives of the plans – there is a clear association generally between the activity with a child / young person and the agreed objectives of the Plans

(iv) reviews:

- (a) risk and vulnerability management meetings (these are held monthly and review the cases where the risk / vulnerability is either high or very high) – where a case has been reviewed there is a record of this in the vast majority of cases
- (b) young people in custody – there is good evidence of YOS and Secure Establishments working together to review a young person's progress prior to their return to the community

The improvements still required relate in the main to ensuring that in all cases the planned changes are achieved. The most evident of these are:

- (i) the triggers in the assessment process for more detailed work on either risk of serious harm, vulnerability or both are fully recognised and responded to
- (ii) the integration of the objectives of risk & vulnerability management and intervention plans so that there is a co-ordinated approach to the work being undertaken with the child / young person
- (iii) the provision of more information, and plainly written, within plans to clarify for the child / young person the actions required both of themselves and of others

- (iv) the schedule for reviews (as required by National Standards) is adhered to throughout statutory interventions
- (v) themed recording of contacts so that the actions taken with respect to each objective are made explicit within the overall case record

6. Actions Taken To Date in Response to Audit Findings

The actions that have been taken in response to the findings from the case audits include the following:

- (i) to clarify the accountabilities of both case managers and of Practice Supervisors for the quality of the work undertaken by the Service separate practice notes have been sent to them by the Acting Head of Service setting out their responsibilities with respect to both the standards required and to the quality assurance procedures required of them
- (ii) delivery of training to Team Managers and Practice Supervisors on risk and vulnerability management. This training will be provided for all staff during Quarter 4 of 2011.12
- (iii) revisions being made to the Supervision Policy for the Service with a view to strengthening the management oversight of work in individual cases
- (iv) engagement of both Specialist Children's Services and Health (both the Directorate of Child Health and the providers of community health services and of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) with the objective to strengthen joint working arrangements. These issues will be covered in training for YOS practitioners during Quarter 4 of 2011.12

7. Conclusions

The view is that good progress is being made towards the objectives of the Improvement Plan but that there is still work to be done to ensure that the required changes to practice and to management oversight are seen to be consistently applied to all cases being managed by the Youth Offending Service.

There are processes in place which provide a strong platform to ensure that the desired levels in the quality of management and of practice within YOS will be achieved during the next Quarter in line with the timetable published in the Improvement Plan.

8. Recommendations

Members of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to NOTE the findings to date from the case audits and the actions being taken to ensure the required levels of performance are achieved.

Director of Service Improvement : Angela Slaven

Contact Officer: Charlie Beaumont

Effective Practice & Performance Manager

Contact Number: 07710 347101

Email Address: charlie.beaumont@kent.gov.uk