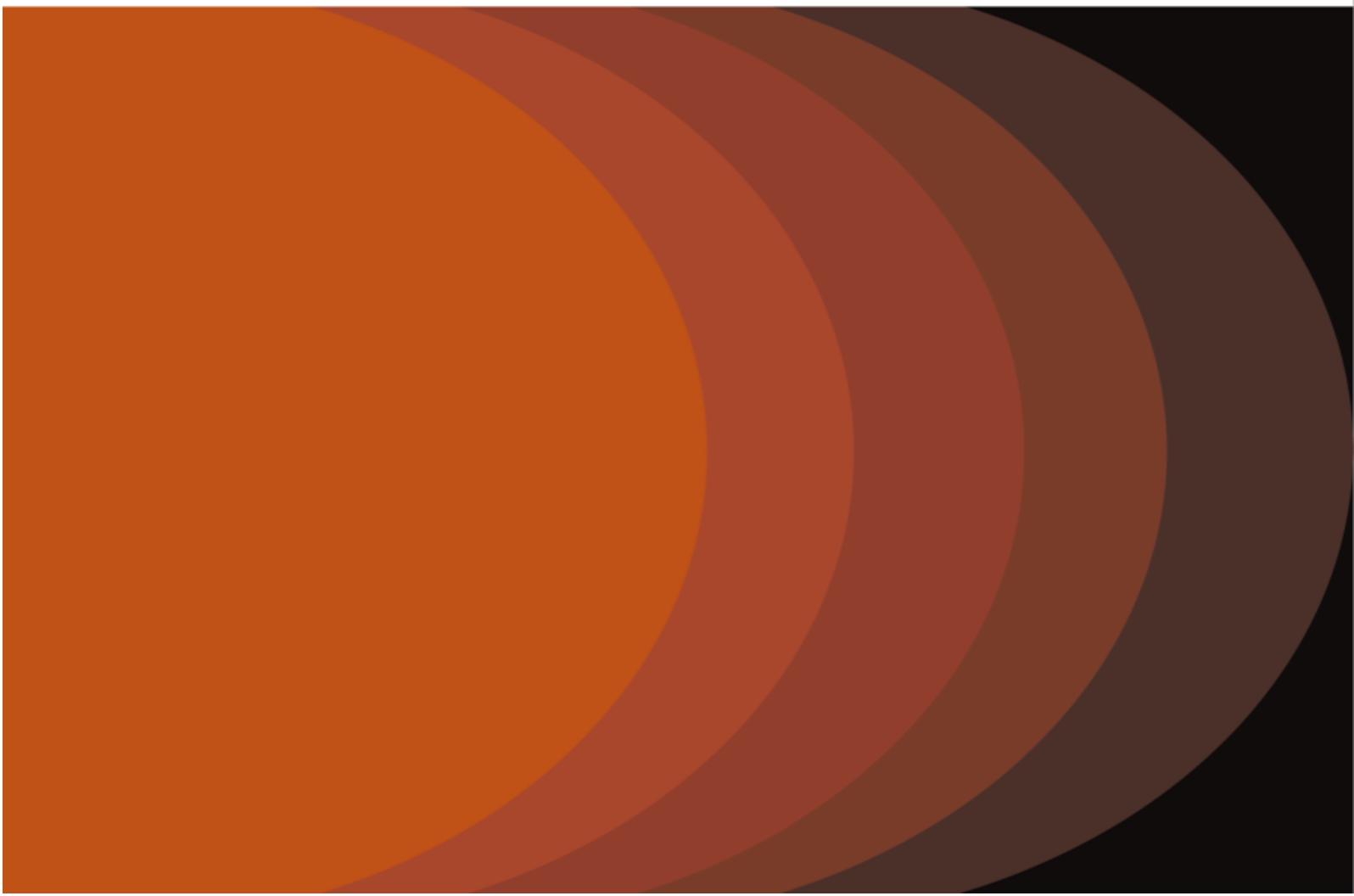




Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

An inspection of youth offending services in
Kent

HM Inspectorate of Probation, October 2021



Contents

Foreword	3
Ratings	4
Executive summary	5
Recommendations	8
Background	10
Contextual facts	11
1. Organisational delivery	13
1.1. Governance and leadership.....	14
1.2. Staff.....	16
1.3. Partnerships and services	19
1.4. Information and facilities	23
2. Court disposals	25
2.1. Assessment.....	26
2.2. Planning	28
2.3. Implementation and delivery.....	30
2.4. Reviewing	32
3. Out-of-court disposals	34
3.1. Assessment.....	35
3.2. Planning	37
3.3. Implementation and delivery.....	39
3.4. Joint working.....	40
Annex 1: Methodology	43
Annex 2: Inspection results	46

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The role of HM Inspectorate of Probation

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth offending and probation services in England and Wales. We report on the effectiveness of probation and Youth Justice Service work with adults and children. We inspect these services and publish inspection reports. We highlight good and poor practice and use our data and information to encourage high-quality services. We are independent of government and speak independently. Please note that throughout the report the names in the practice examples have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

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Foreword

This inspection is part of our four-year programme of youth offending service inspections. We have inspected and rated Kent Youth Justice Service (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, Kent YJS is rated as 'Requires improvement'.

This has been a difficult period for practitioners. Many have felt the pressures of their workload caused by Covid-19. We found inconsistency in the level of management oversight and of support to new staff.

Although practitioners worked well with their partners to support desistance and help children access appropriate interventions, in too many cases the quality of assessment and planning to keep the child and other people safe did not meet the standards we expect, and there was inconsistency in the priority given to protecting victims.

Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on the personal and professional lives of the workforce, and on children's lives. The YJS, as part of an integrated partnership service, has continued to support its children, checking the effectiveness of its procedures and strengthening these to reflect the current working climate.

Leadership of youth justice in Kent is strong. Children reap the benefits of an effective partnership that has the interest, evidence and resourcefulness to provide a range of evidence-based initiatives, such as the district contextual safeguarding process and serious youth violence project. Youth justice work has been strengthened by the introduction of (youth) participation apprentices, who channel the voice of the child into strategic and operational decisions.

We found enthusiastic practitioners working in a holistic way with families, and being appropriately creative and child centred to support positive change. Out-of-court decision-making panel meetings exemplified effective practice, and the additional offer of support attached to informal community resolutions provided the opportunity to work with children whose behaviour might otherwise have escalated.

Practitioners work well with their partners to support desistance and help children access appropriate interventions and services. However, in too many cases the quality of assessment and planning to keep the child and other people safe did not meet the standards we expect, and there was inconsistency in the priority given to protecting victims.

We have made six recommendations to strengthen service delivery and have every confidence that the YJS will implement these quickly and effectively.



Justin Russell
Chief Inspector of Probation

Ratings

Kent Youth Justice Service **Score** 18/36

Overall rating **Requires improvement** 

1. Organisational delivery

1.1	Governance and leadership	Good	
1.2	Staff	Requires improvement	
1.3	Partnerships and services	Outstanding	
1.4	Information and facilities	Outstanding	

2. Court disposals

2.1	Assessment	Inadequate	
2.2	Planning	Inadequate	
2.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
2.4	Reviewing	Requires improvement	

3. Out-of-court disposals

3.1	Assessment	Requires improvement	
3.2	Planning	Requires improvement	
3.3	Implementation and delivery	Good	
3.4	Joint working	Good	

Executive summary

Overall, Kent Youth Justice Service (YJS) is rated as 'Requires improvement'. This rating has been determined by inspecting the YJS in three areas of its work, referred to as 'domains'. We inspect against 12 'standards', shared between the domains. Our fieldwork was conducted remotely between 21 June and 25 June 2021. The standards are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. They are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with children who have offended.¹ Published scoring rules generate the overall YJS rating.² The findings and subsequent ratings in those domains are described below.

1. Organisational delivery



We interviewed the head of Kent YJS and the chair of the Kent County Youth Justice Board. We held meetings with other members of the board; managers, staff and partners working in and with the YJS; and its volunteers.

Kent's youth justice partnership is strong. The Kent County Youth Justice Board functions effectively to drive and govern an ambitious strategic agenda for children. Members have a healthy appetite for deepening their knowledge and investing in effective services and interventions tailored to the needs of children.

Partners work together well to achieve their aims, anticipating, as part of their core business, future needs and risks to delivery. They have shown an impressive commitment to continuing work on their strategic priorities throughout the Covid-19 period, adapting services to strengthen provision where possible. Practitioners have continued to work with children, seeing some face-to-face where necessary and where this will strengthen their engagement in YJS processes.

Kent's experience of Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on staff, personally and professionally. The YJS has retained a core of knowledgeable practitioners, who are passionate about their work with children. However, we found inconsistencies in their knowledge and skills, and that this has resulted in deficiencies in their approach to assessing and planning for risk.

Changes to working arrangements and the impact of staff absence during the pandemic have led to an inevitable drift in some staffing processes. Most notably, this has affected the quality of induction for new staff, and management oversight. During this period, practitioners have become busier, to make sure that children receive the best service possible. Despite the evident commitment to do the best for children, Kent YJS has been unable to sustain an effective approach to case management during the pandemic period.

¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation's standards can be found here:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

² Each of the 12 standards is scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; 'Outstanding' = 3. Adding these scores produces a total score ranging from 0–36, which is banded to produce the overall rating, as follows: 0–6 = 'Inadequate', 7–18 = 'Requires improvement', 19–30 = 'Good', 31–36 = 'Outstanding'.

Key findings about organisational delivery were as follows:

- Practitioners are passionate about their work with children.
- The Kent County Youth Justice Board works effectively; it is well established, with systems in place to make sure that members understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Strategic leaders across the partnership are decisive and work cohesively to understand and meet the needs of children in the community and in custody.
- The board has an impressive focus on 'what works', implementing evidence-based, integrated and innovative initiatives to reduce offending.
- Partners have a genuine interest in understanding and addressing over-representation, especially among children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic.
- Partners demonstrate their commitment to listening and responding to the views of victims and children.
- The (youth) participation apprentices provide a good practice model for implementing creative initiatives to strengthen service development.

But:

- Not all staff have sufficient knowledge and skills to manage the cases allocated to them.
- Some practitioners have considerable workloads.
- Case allocation does not consistently take enough account of the diversity of children.
- Information does not always cascade effectively from the senior leaders to practitioners.

2. Court disposals



We took a detailed look at 38 community sentences and one custodial sentence managed by the YJS. We also conducted 36 interviews with the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment; planning; implementation and delivery of services; and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. For services to keep the child safe, we assessed the quality of planning, and implementation and delivery in the 35 cases where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning, and implementation and delivery in the 31 cases where meaningful work was required.

Overall, assessment and planning were assessed as 'Inadequate' because less than 50 per cent of cases met all our quality requirements for these standards. Although practice around desistance was reasonable, other areas were weaker; in particular, youth justice workers did not analyse all the factors in a case deeply enough to understand how to support a child's safety and wellbeing, and protect victims.

Implementation and delivery was rated as 'Good' as at least 68 per cent of cases were sufficient across all aspects of this work. Although reviewing focused sufficiently on desistance and work to keep the child safe in 82 and 70 per cent of cases,

respectively, reviewing of work to keep other people safe met our requirements in only 59 per cent of cases. This led to an overall rating of 'Requires improvement' for this aspect of case management.

Our key findings about court disposals are as follows:

- The YJS recognised the link between building relationships and successful outcomes, and focused on this appropriately.
- Practitioners worked hard and creatively to maintain meaningful service provision, despite Covid-19 restrictions.
- A holistic, strengths-based and solution-focused approach was embedded as normal practice.
- A case formulation 4Ps approach (predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating and protective factors) was used routinely to understand the child's lived experience and how this influenced behaviour. This included asking 'why me?'; 'why now?'; 'why does it continue?'; 'what can I rely on?'
- In some of the most complex cases, youth justice workers were responsive and insightful, reviewing progress and working well in partnership with the complex adolescent harm management process to address escalating issues.

But:

- There was a lack of consistency in the quality of case management across teams.
- Youth justice workers did not analyse all the factors in a case deeply enough to understand how to support a child's safety and wellbeing, and protect victims.
- Underestimation of the risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child and other people affected the quality of planning to address these.
- Work to keep victims safe was not given enough priority.
- There was too little effective management oversight of casework.

3. Out-of-court disposals



We inspected 26 cases managed by the YJS that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of four youth conditional cautions, eight youth cautions and 14 community resolutions. Some decisions to offer children community resolutions had been made, and delivered, outside the formal process. In Kent, these are still referred to integrated adolescent services, to make sure that needs are assessed, and families offered support. We inspected 12 such cases and interviewed the case managers in 24 cases.

We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. For the 16 cases where there were factors related to harm, we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the 25 cases where safety and wellbeing concerns were identified, we looked at work done to safeguard the child. We also looked at the quality of joint working with local police in the four youth conditional caution cases.

Of the cases inspected, only 54 per cent met all our standards for assessment, resulting in a 'Requires improvement' rating for this aspect of work. Although there was a good level of sufficiency in the quality of planning to support desistance, planning to protect other people met our requirements in only half of the cases we inspected, leading to an overall rating for planning of 'Requires improvement'. The service worked consistently well to implement and deliver services to support desistance and the safety and wellbeing of the child, and met our expectations to keep other people safe in 69 per cent of cases. This earned a rating of 'Good'. Initially, joint working was rated as 'Requires improvement'. Following the meeting of our internal ratings panel, however, we used professional discretion to increase this to 'Good'.³

Our key findings about out-of-court disposals are as follows:

- Overall, work to support desistance was of a high standard.
- The strengths-based, family approach used for out-of-court disposals enabled practitioners to take a responsive, holistic approach to their work.
- The YJS contributed good-quality information and recommendations to the out-of-court disposal joint decision-making panel.
- Practitioners tailored the implementation of each out-of-court disposal to the needs of the individual case, making sure that this was proportionate to the type of disposal.
- Work to implement informal community resolutions was of consistently good quality.
- Children were supported well to improve their access to education, training and employment.

But:

- Assessments were too narrow in their focus and lacked analysis of important information.
- There was too little focus on understanding the level and nature of need relating to safety and wellbeing, and the risk of harm that children posed to others.
- Planning did not include appropriate contingency measures to protect the child and others should circumstances in the case change.
- Overall, work to keep others safe required improvement.
- We had concerns that opportunities were being lost to divert children away from the criminal justice system and into services better able to meet their needs.

³ An increase from 'Requires improvement' to 'Good' was made on the following basis: the original rating for joint working was derived from our assessment of four cases. A more positive judgement in one case would have raised the overall score for this aspect of work to 75 per cent. The rating was changed to reflect this and to take account of the overall quality of the YJS's joint work to deliver out-of-court disposals.

Recommendations

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 Kent. This will improve the lives of the children in contact with youth justice services, and better protect the public.

The Kent Youth Justice Service should make sure that:

1. practitioners have the time, knowledge and skills to meet the needs of their cases
2. assessment and planning to keep the child and others safe are thorough and give sufficient focus to protecting victims
3. oversight of case management is applied consistently
4. the staff appraisal system works effectively, with appraisals adding value to practitioners, personally and professionally, and completed in a timely manner
5. staff at all levels understand the activities of the board – for instance, by inviting remote observations of meetings
6. it works with its partners to assure itself that out-of-court disposal decisions are proportionate, and that voluntary outcomes maximise opportunities for children to receive support without being criminalised.

Background

Youth offending teams (YOTs) work with children aged 10 to 18 who have been sentenced by a court, or who have come to the attention of the police because of their offending behaviour but have not been charged – instead, they were dealt with out of court. HM Inspectorate of Probation inspects both these aspects of youth offending services. We use the terms ‘child’ or ‘children’ to denote their special legal status and to highlight the obligations of relevant agencies such as social care, education and health, to meet their safety and wellbeing needs.

Youth justice services (YJSs) are statutory partnerships, and they are multidisciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child. They are required to have staff from local authority social care and education services, the police, the National Probation Service (NPS) and local health services.⁴ Most YOTs are based within local authorities; however, this can vary.

YJS work is governed and shaped by a range of legislation and guidance specific to the youth justice sector (such as the National Standards for Youth Justice) or else applicable across the criminal justice sector (for example, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements guidance). The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) provides some funding to YOTs. It also monitors their performance and issues guidance to them about how things are to be done.

Kent is one of the largest counties in Great Britain. It shares a border with London, stretching to the River Thames on its north face, Dover to the east and the affluent Tunbridge Wells in the west. Some of the communities in Thanet and Swale are among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country.⁵ Kent County Council works with its 12 district councils and Medway, a unitary authority. The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) covers the whole of Kent. Kent has seen a rise in county lines offending and in the number of children moving out of London for safety reasons. While custodial rates are low, a rise in serious youth violence led to a spike in custody rates between 2018 and 2019, with some children subject to substantial sentences.

Youth justice was restructured in 2019 and combined with adolescent early help and a strategic development team into an integrated adolescent service. Each locality is supported by a dedicated business support officer. Adolescent early help practitioners play a key role in the delivery of out-of-court disposals.

Covid-19 has had a sustained impact in Kent. A more virulent strain has been prevalent since autumn 2020, affecting both the personal and professional lives of staff. Additionally, an information and communications technology (ICT) problem early in 2021 left the integrated adolescent service with limited or no access for some time. The findings of this inspection draw heavily on our assessment of cases, dating back to September 2020. As such, our findings are set in the context of the difficulties that practitioners faced at that time.

⁴ The *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)* set out the arrangements for local YOTs and partnership working.

⁵ Information provided by Kent YJS.

Contextual facts

Youth justice information

120	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in Kent ⁶
207	First-time entrant rate per 100,000 in England and Wales ⁶
34%	Reoffending rate for Kent ⁷
38%	Reoffending rate in England and Wales ⁷

Population information

1,589,057	Total population Kent ⁸ (2020)
156,593	Total youth population (10–17 years) in Kent ⁸ (mid-2020)

Caseload information⁹

Age	10–14	15–17
Kent YJS	19%	81%
National average	22%	78%

Race/ethnicity	White	Black and minority ethnic	Unknown
Kent YJS	80%	18%	2%

Gender	Male	Female
Kent YJS	86%	14%
National average	85%	15%

Additional caseload data¹⁰

283	Total current caseload, of which:
144 (51%)	Court disposals
139 (49%)	Out-of-court disposals

⁶ Youth Justice Board. (2021). *First time entrants, January to December 2019*.

⁷ Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Proven reoffending statistics, April 2018 to March 2019*.

⁸ Office for National Statistics. (2020). *UK population estimates, mid-2020*.

⁹ Youth Justice Board. (2021). *Youth justice annual statistics: 2019 to 2020*.

¹⁰ Information supplied by the YJS.

Of the 144 court disposals:

138 (96%)	Total current caseload on community sentences
4 (3%)	Total current caseload in custody
2 (1%)	Total current caseload on licence

Of the 139 out-of-court disposals:

21 (15%)	Total current caseload with youth caution
13 (9%)	Total current caseload with youth conditional caution
105 (76%)	Total current caseload: community resolution or other out-of-court disposal

Education and child protection status of caseload

8.4%	Current caseload Looked After Children resident in the YOT area
1.9%	Current caseload Looked After Children placed outside the YOT area
1.3%	Current caseload with child protection plan
26.5%	Current caseload with child in need plan
13.5%	Current caseload aged 16 and not in school/pupil referral unit/alternative education
48.6%	Current caseload aged 16 and under in a pupil referral unit or alternative education
39.5%	Current caseload aged 17+ not in education, training or employment

For children in the inspected cases subject to court disposals:¹¹

Offence types	%
Violence against the person	44%
Burglary	8%
Robbery	10%
Theft and handling stolen goods	5%
Criminal damage	3%
Drug offences	13%
Summary motoring offences	5%
Indictable motoring offences	5%
Other summary offences	3%
Other indictable offences	5%

¹¹ Data from the cases assessed during this inspection.

1. Organisational delivery



Kent's youth justice partnership is strong. The Kent County Youth Justice Board functions effectively to drive and govern an ambitious strategic agenda for children. Members are highly motivated to deepen their knowledge, in order to invest in effective services and interventions tailored to the needs of children.

Partners work together well to achieve their aims, anticipating future needs and risks to delivery. They have shown an impressive commitment to continuing work on their strategic priorities throughout the Covid-19 period, adapting services to strengthen provision where possible. Practitioners have continued to work with children, seeing some face-to-face where necessary and where this will strengthen their engagement in YJS processes.

Kent's experience of Covid-19 has had a considerable impact on staff, personally and professionally. Despite this, the YJS has retained a core of knowledgeable practitioners, passionate about their work with children. However, with changes to working arrangements and the impact of staff absence, there has been an inevitable drift in some processes, including induction and management oversight. Practitioners have become busier, to make sure that children receive the best service possible. Despite the evident commitment to do the best for children, Kent YJS has been unable to sustain an effective approach to case management for the period assessed during our inspection.

Strengths:

- Practitioners are passionate about their work with children.
- The Kent County Youth Justice Board works effectively; it is well established, with systems in place to make sure that members understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Strategic leaders across the partnership are decisive and work cohesively to understand and meet the needs of children in the community and in custody.
- The board has an impressive focus on 'what works', implementing evidence-based, integrated and innovative initiatives to reduce offending.
- Partners have a genuine interest in understanding and addressing over-representation, especially among children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic.
- Partners demonstrate their commitment to listening and responding to the views of victims and children.
- The (youth) participation apprentices provide a good practice model for implementing creative initiatives to strengthen service development.

Areas for improvement:

- Not all staff have sufficient knowledge and skills to manage the cases allocated to them.
- Some practitioners have considerable workloads.
- Case allocation does not consistently take enough account of the diversity of children.
- Information does not always cascade effectively from the senior leaders to practitioners.

Organisations that are well led and well managed are more likely to achieve their aims. We inspect against four standards.

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.

Good

Key data¹²

Total spend in financial year – 2018/2019	£3.337m (YJB Good Practice Grant £1.161m) ¹³
Total projected budget for the current financial year – 2020/2021	£5.234m (YJB Good Practice Grant £2.828m) ¹³

In making a judgement about governance and leadership, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a clear local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

The management board is effective and models proactively a culture of empowerment, development, commitment and investment to support children involved in the criminal justice service. The chair is shared between the corporate director for children, young people and education, and the director for integrated children's services. Together, they bring strong and knowledgeable leadership to the partnership.

The YJS and partners, at all levels, know what they want to achieve with children. They understand the strengths of the child-centred, trauma-informed approach used to accomplish this, and reflect their 'child first' ethos in their strategic decision-making.

¹² Information supplied by the YOT.

¹³ The purpose of the Youth Justice Good Practice Grant is to develop good practice and commission research with a view to achieving outcomes in reducing offending, the number of first-time entrants to the justice system, and the use of youth custody.

The head of the YJS has worked effectively to empower the board to drive the direction and strategy for youth justice. The board's structure, responsibilities and agenda are set down clearly and members receive a thorough induction to help them understand these.

Statutory partners are represented on the board at an appropriate level. They are not all the most senior in their organisation but bring a wealth of strategic and operational knowledge to partnerships discussions. There are procedures in place to escalate issues to their senior managers where necessary. We found no evidence that this arrangement adversely affected the quality of decision-making by the board.

Membership of the board is broad and includes statutory partners, and representation by public health, the integrated adolescent service information management team, the local magistrates' bench and Kent Equality Cohesion Council. This enriches debate, providing productive challenge at meetings. Generally, attendance across the partnership is good. Amalgamation of Kent's clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) has strengthened representation by the healthcare sector attendance and contribution to partnership commissioning.

Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?

The YJS's position at the heart of the adolescent integrated service raises the profile of its children across the partnership. The board chairs and members also attend other key strategic boards, enabling the cross-fertilisation of ideas and joined-up strategic decision-making.

The specific needs of children involved with the YJS are considered consistently as part of the strategic agenda to improve children's access to health and education, training and employment; address serious youth violence; and safeguard children from both intra- and extra-familial harm.

The partnership works creatively to make sure that children are supported, even where services are not normally available in the community. The CCG's provision of a speech, language and communication (SLC) consultation and support service for each locality team is a good example of this. A range of other services has been funded through the board partnership, including a serious youth violence initiative and a (youth) participation apprenticeship scheme.

Does the leadership of the YOT support effective service delivery?

The head of the YJS is visible, transparent and approachable. Managers across the partnership and their staff understand the vision and strategy for children, and work collaboratively and holistically to help achieve this across Kent. Practitioners across the partnership appreciate and can explain the strategic imperative to use a child-first, trauma-informed, case formulation approach to practice.

Leaders support innovation at a strategic and practice level. Practitioners welcome their managers' encouragement to find creative solutions to remove barriers to a child's engagement with them, and we found evidence of this in the cases we inspected. We also saw this ethos applied at a service level. For instance, staff work with children and volunteers to review and adapt the referral panel process, to strengthen participation during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

The board and senior managers use all the data available to understand risks to the business and operational delivery. This includes financial reports, laid out in layperson's terms, to help members understand how the YJS funding is spent and

how it can fund further initiatives. Leaders have completed a thorough assessment of the risks relating to Covid-19. The board has considered the impact of this on children’s wellbeing and in terms of risks to the business, and has taken steps to understand and address these. They have, for instance, supported the YJS’s proposal to recruit additional practitioners to meet the anticipated influx of cases from the courts as they return to full capacity after the lockdown.

Partners, volunteers and sentencers feel that they have a good link with the board and understand its work. They are confident that their views are fed into discussions and taken into account. Team managers have a rota for attending the board, and all staff have an open invitation to attend. A notable proportion of staff, however, do not know enough about board activities or decisions made at a strategic level that affect their area of practice.

Overall, Kent’s out-of-court disposal process is effective. However, the partnership would benefit from improving its understanding of whether and how decisions relating to non-statutory disposals help it achieve its vision for children. Leaders acknowledge that they have yet to do this work, and anticipate that their new information management system will enable them to do so.

1.2. Staff



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

Requires improvement

Key staffing data¹⁴

Total staff headcount (full-time equivalent, FTE)	54.6
Total headcount qualified case managers (FTE)	24
Total headcount other case managers (FTE)	2
Vacancy rate (total unfilled posts as percentage of total staff headcount)	9%
Vacancy rate: case managers only (total unfilled case manager posts as percentage of total case manager headcount)	8%
Average caseload per case manager (FTE)	10.5
Average annual sickness days (all staff)	3
Staff attrition (percentage of all staff leaving in 12-month period)	14%

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following four questions:

Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

¹⁴ Information supplied by the YJS and reflecting the caseload at the time of the inspection announcement.

Leaders take an active and responsive approach to staffing levels. They have looked carefully at the impact of Covid-19 on capacity and anticipated the need for extra staff during this period and beyond. As a result, the YJS and police have been able to maintain timetables for children subject to intensive supervision and surveillance requirements. This will also provide additional capacity to manage the increase in cases referred by courts as the lockdown eases.

Staff are locality based; team boundaries have been set to reflect the complexity of issues prevalent in each area. On the whole, teams work in silo and do not provide cover for other localities. There is an informal approach within teams for covering short-term leave, and senior managers agree solutions for covering long-term absence.

Practitioners are busy. Some fulfil specialist duties or provide ongoing support to families after a child's sentence ends. More than one-third of YJS staff feel that their workloads are too high.

Sickness and vacancy rates are low, currently. However, sickness absence has affected performance in the last 12 months.

Data provided by dedicated youth justice staff in the directorate's management information service are analysed by the YJS' head of service and provided to the board in routine and ad-hoc performance and thematic reports. Together with annual profiling reports, these provide board members with a good level of detailed, well presented information to support their understanding and ambition to develop services tailored to the needs of children.

Do the skills of YOT staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?

Kent has experienced extended periods of lockdown due to Covid-19. Staff have felt the weight of this, both personally and professionally, but presented to the Inspectorate as motivated, enthusiastic and willing to go the extra mile to support children through their disposals. We found them to be skilled at having conversations with children to understand their lives. For instance, they explore thoroughly with children their gender and ethnic identity, sexuality, relationships and living circumstances. Magistrates described YJS workers as 'impressive and trusted'.

The YJS has a system in place to make sure that practitioners are skilled and able to manage their cases effectively. It has a core of experienced and knowledgeable practitioners, and all but two have a relevant qualification.

Team managers complete a screening tool in cases where a formal out-of-court disposal is being considered, before assessment and report to the panel. This identifies if a full AssetPlus assessment, rather than an EH assessment, should be completed, and so helps to make sure the case is allocated to a practitioner with the appropriate level of knowledge and skills. More complex cases are allocated to senior youth justice workers. However, this system is not working effectively in practice. Ten per cent of practitioners holding medium- and high-risk cases do not feel sufficiently experienced and qualified to manage these. Our case assessments highlighted that while some practitioners are highly skilled and confident, a number do not have the experience and knowledge to manage their complex cases or to understand the full implications of out-of-court disposals. Some practitioners indicated that case allocation feels ad hoc rather than well considered and linked to skills, knowledge and capabilities.

The diversity of the workforce does not reflect that of the children working with the YJS. 12 per cent of staff and 21 per cent of children identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic. The organisation has changed its approach to advertising staff vacancies, to attract a more diverse workforce.

Although there is no formal succession route through integrated adolescent services, many of those in senior positions have previously worked with Kent County Council and its children. The county council offers dedicated management training courses and a bespoke senior early help worker programme that is being adapted for YJS staff. There are opportunities, also, for development through internal temporary promotion.

Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?

Staff receive supervision from their managers, and reflective supervision in teams weekly to discuss their cases. The YJS has commissioned external clinical supervision for staff and is training its team managers to facilitate this on an ongoing basis. Staff are highly satisfied with the quality of supervision and support they receive from their managers.

Kent County Council has changed its approach to appraisal during the Covid-19 lockdown period, removing its link to financial reward. More than 25 per cent of staff responding to our survey indicated that they had not received an appraisal this year or that this had been of little value.

A new, structured induction programme has been co-created by staff and managers. The majority of staff who joined the organisation in the last 12 months advise that they are content with their induction. However, some new staff reported that there had been challenges in accessing training during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The 'buddying' of experienced practitioners with new staff has helped to address the impact of this.

Staff report that they are held to account, and most appreciate the quality of oversight that managers provide for their casework. However, the post-court cases we inspected were drawn from a period during which one team received inconsistent management. We judged that management oversight did not meet the needs of half of the post-court cases we inspected. Overall, we assessed that oversight is not making enough positive difference to practice against our standard to keep the child and other people safe. The YJS recognises that there has been variation in the quality of management oversight and has taken measures to address this.

Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?

Nearly all staff reported that their training and development needs are met.

There is a strong culture of learning and development across the partnership. Training focuses on making sure that staff understand and can take a trauma-informed approach to their work.

Practitioners are expected to complete programmes on forensic case formulation, trauma and SLC needs. Staff can access training through the Kent County Council, to strengthen their interpersonal skills, awareness about the community, and quality of practice. Some courses are mandatory, and others included as part of the staff induction process. The range is extensive and includes AssetPlus; emotional

intelligence; Gypsy, Romany and Traveller cultural awareness; attachment and child development; and personal resilience.

Training for referral panel volunteers is thorough and a feedback cycle helps to identify ongoing development needs. Sufficient panel members have been trained to ensure that there is a pool qualified to sit on sexually harmful behaviour panels both pre- and post-court, to prevent delays in supporting these children.

1.3. Partnerships and services



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

Outstanding

Caseload characteristics¹⁵

Percentage of current caseload with mental health issues	45.2%
Percentage of current caseload with substance misuse issues	68.4%
Percentage of current caseload with an education, health and care plan	18.7%

In making a judgement about partnerships and services, we take into account the answers to the following three questions:

Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the profile of children, to ensure that the YOT can deliver well-targeted services?

The board has a good understanding of such headline data and takes an ongoing active and inquisitive approach to identify and understand the over-representation of specific characteristics among children working with the integrated adolescent service.

Reports to the board include a multi-agency violence reduction unit strategic needs assessment. Reports on the profile of children receiving post-court and out-of-court disposals provide a good picture of the nature and context of offending behaviour. In addition to routine outcomes data, such reports provide granulated data to help explain the complex factors underpinning behaviour – for instance, in relation to barriers to education, training and employment; specific locations; transience; municipal challenge and access to family basics.

At the time of the inspection, children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic comprised 21.3 per cent of the caseload. The board has focused effectively on the over-representation of these children. It has sought to understand their experience of the criminal justice system, particularly in the context of custodial settings. The Kent Equality Cohesion Council has played a key role in strengthening the board's insight and encouraging partners to question their interpretation of data against their personal assumptions. The YJS (youth) participation apprentices have completed a feedback survey of children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic. The board has also developed its understanding through a deep-dive audit of

¹⁵ Data supplied by the YJS.

children sentenced to custody, and a visit to HM Youth Offender Institution Cookham Wood. Inspired by the NHS' Secure Stairs' initiative, which provides a holistic package of support to children during their stay in the secure estate and through their transition to the community on release, the board has agreed that the YJS will support and enhance this work.

The YJS partnership continually seeks to strengthen the sophistication of its data sets and the way that these reflect the lives of children. The recent upgrade of the YJS information management system to Core+ will further enrich the data available.

Does the YOT partnership have access to the volume, range and quality of services and interventions to meet the needs of all children?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, children have had access to a good range of services, used well by practitioners to meet identified need. The YJS has continued to see children face-to-face: where risk dictated this to be a priority; for referral order panel meetings and to support children attending court remotely from police cells. Additionally, intensive supervision and surveillance timetables have been maintained during this period.

Service provision is evidence and strengths based and child centred. Practitioners focus on building relationships and take a family approach to intervention. They are skilled at adapting their style to take account of the child's needs and aspirations, finding innovative solutions to remove barriers to progress.

The YJS has recently strengthened its work with victims. A successful business case was made to the board to employ four full-time restorative justice practitioners to co-create a suite of accredited reparation activities. Additionally, the YJS now has its own Victims' Voice team, to complement the work completed by the PCC-funded Restorative Solutions. Victims' Voice practitioners have contacted 100 victims in their first six months of operation.

In normal circumstances, Kent's youth hubs offer interventions and activities – for example, a 'Course4Youth' programme focusing on future choices, healthy relationships, victims, risk-taking behaviour, anger management and antisocial behaviour. Although access has been limited through the Covid-19 lockdown, in the cases we inspected we saw examples of these services being used well to support children and their desistance.

Covid-19 has led to longer waits to access emotional and mental health services. However, the majority of children working with the YJS have access to these services through the conduct and behaviour pathway. We were advised that only 40 in every 5,000 children referred to the North East London NHS Foundation Trust (the provider for the mental health service) wait more than 18 weeks to see a specialist. All children have access to online counselling. Children wait a long time for a neurodevelopmental pathway assessment.

At the time of our inspection, 39.5 per cent of children aged 17 years and above and involved with the YJS were not in formal education, training or employment. The board, having identified significant barriers to post-16 education, training and employment among children working with the YJS, has commissioned The Education People to provide a re-engagement project for this cohort of children.

There is no general provision in Kent for 16–18-year-olds to access SLC services. Having made a business case to the board, the CCG has provided funding for a speech and language therapist (SALT) to work in each locality. They work on a

consultancy basis, have introduced the YJS SLC champion role and have helped to adapt resources to meet the needs of individual children. The CCG has agreed to sustain this service beyond the original contract, pending improvements to Kent-wide provision.

The 'We Are With You' (WAWY) service was commissioned to help children understand and address their use of substances, and is an embedded partner in integrated adolescent services. It also offers emotional wellbeing services, such as cognitive behavioural therapy and counselling. Children are able to access WAWY services without delay.

There is an effective, coordinated approach to support children at risk of exploitation and gang involvement. Children are offered support by specialist mentors and can complete a knife first-aid course, so that they can assist stabbing victims. Referrals are made promptly to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), but investigations by this service take too long while children continue to be at extreme risk. Senior leaders recognise the role of children as victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, and are piloting an initiative to support parents and carers harmed by their children.

The YJS encourages a focus on interventions that lead to reward. As an example, children can be referred to the Construction Youth Trust, which facilitates community projects, helps children meet potential employers and provides them with a construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card and certificate.

Services, such as for substance misuse, knife first-aid and the referral order panel process, are evaluated. Initiatives, for instance the Violence Reduction Unit, are monitored by oversight and scrutiny panels. Out-of-court disposal decisions made by the joint panel are reviewed by both an internal and external scrutiny panel, to provide a localised, robust approach to evaluating this work.

Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?

The YJS is a key partner in Kent and Medway's adolescent district contextual safeguarding process. This is a fully integrated model, providing a coordinated, evidence-based response to keep children safe from extra-familial harm, especially from exploitation and county lines. Supported by the University of Bedfordshire, it has been set up with the tools to provide for effective evaluation. Cases involving children at high risk of harm or of causing harm are discussed at complex adolescent harm meetings. We found that this process is adding value to the management of both post-court and out-of-court disposals.

The police work effectively with the integrated adolescent service to deliver interventions, share information about children, and address county lines and serious youth violence.

In line with the national protocol, one NPS probation officer is seconded to the service. As a limited resource, this individual provides guidance and support to case managers, rather than managing cases. In addition to the probation officer, the NPS has recently allocated a part-time probation services officer to the YJS. This individual will support YJS work in the youth courts. Transition decisions and arrangements were handled effectively in the cases we inspected.

The YJS features in the 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) interdependency group action plan. A member of the NEET support team participates in YJS team case discussions and will identify an approach and a NEET worker for

relevant children aged 17 years and above. At the time of our inspection, 30 children working with the YJS were NEET, and 14 had taken up the offer of support from a NEET worker. Work is being undertaken at a strategic level to minimise the use by schools of reduced timetables, and children under the age of 17 receive support to reduce their barriers to attending school.

Practitioners have a good understanding of, and work well with, the positive behaviour support service commissioned by Kent County Council's early help to provide intensive parenting support. We noted a number of referrals to this service among the cases we inspected.

Kent's out-of-court process is well established. Discussions at the out-of-court disposal decision-making panel are chaired effectively by the police youth justice team. Partners attending have a thorough understanding of the children being discussed. Disposal decisions are reached following frank and thorough discussions, and reflect the child's lived experience and wider behaviour, and the voices of the child and victim. Dedicated police staff deliver the disposals that have been discussed by the panel during a formal clinic session, so that children and families understand the terms being offered. All non-statutory disposals are complemented by an offer of support to the child and family (including community resolutions delivered in the community by police officers) as a preventative measure.

Involvement of children and their parents and carers

As part of our inspection, we asked children to rate the quality of the YJS service. Of the 16 children responding, 12 rated the YJS highly. Asked if the YJS had helped them stay out of trouble, 12 said that it had. Children's comments included:

"My YOT worker has been a genuinely nice person and has been easy to get along with, while also helping me through any issues"

and

"... they helped me in loads of other ways to channel my energy into other types of activities and exercises".

Good practice example

The introduction of (youth) participation apprentices is a strength. Funded by Kent CCG, they fulfil a full-time role, splitting their focus between the integrated adolescent service and study towards a youth service qualification. They reach out actively to children in the community and custody, to gather their views and ideas. Their work strengthens decision-making at a strategic and operational level. Their achievements include: completion of a survey of children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic; contributing to discussions at Kent's out-of-court disposal panel; helping to review the referral order process; and working with children and with SALTs, to improve written resources, including information to children to improve their experience at court.

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.

Outstanding

In making a judgement about staffing, we take into account the answers to the following four questions:

Are the necessary policies and guidance in place to enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

Practitioners have access to a comprehensive range of policies and guidance through a recently created online resource hub. These are reviewed and kept up to date. Some, such as the induction policy, have been co-created with staff, to strengthen their impact and usefulness.

Staff know how to find the policies and procedures they need, and understand those that apply to their roles.

Does the YOT's delivery environment(s) meet the needs of all children and enable staff to deliver a quality service?

Kent is a large county; some areas are served well by public transport but there is no consistency in this, and children living in more rural areas can find it difficult to access central buildings. Before the Covid-19 lockdown, children could be seen at a range of community venues. Some YJS practitioners were based at children's hubs; these are child-friendly spaces, where they can access a range of interventions, drop-in services and good cooking facilities.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on where children can be seen. In the main, buildings remain closed. However, practitioners continuing to have face-to-face contact with children can make specific arrangements to meet them at children's hubs. They also meet children in outside spaces or the child's home.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, most staff feel that they work in a suitable environment.

Do the information and communication technology (ICT) systems enable staff to deliver a quality service, meeting the needs of all children?

The YJS and adolescent early help team use different information management systems. Practitioners can access (on a read-only basis) each other's records, and partners embedded in the integrated adolescent service can contribute their information to AEH ICT systems. A small minority of partners would like a more joined-up case recording system.

An ICT incident in March 2021 affected access, with a slow and incremental recovery. However, the vast majority of staff across integrated adolescent services reported that their ICT systems support their work sufficiently well. The decision by the YJS to start using Core+ to record its work will provide a better resource of data to support strategic and operational planning.

Is analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

The YJS takes a thorough approach to improvement. Board members demonstrate their interest and knowledge through a mature, informed analysis of the variables underpinning performance data.

Discussions relating to performance, service reviews and audit are core agenda items at board meetings. These contribute to the continuous cycle of review and development. For example, an analysis of 'no further action' police decisions highlighted the prevalence of child-to-parent violence, which is now being incorporated into Kent's Outcome 22 development work.

The case audit process is firmly embedded. Practice reviews are meaningful and lead to improvements in systems and processes. The audit framework is revisited, with revisions tested as the service evolves. Currently, an approach to auditing the quality of contextual safeguarding is being piloted in one locality.

The YJS makes effective use of HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection standards and findings, to understand how well it is performing and to become inspection ready. The trauma-informed model was developed in response to the Inspectorate's public protection thematic inspection,¹⁶ and improvements were made to Kent's out-of-court disposal process after reviewing the findings from the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection out-of-court disposal thematic inspection.¹⁷

¹⁶ HM inspectorate of Probation. (2017). *The Work of Youth Offending Teams to Protect the Public*.

¹⁷ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. (2018). *Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams*.



2. Court disposals

We took a detailed look at 38 community sentences and one custodial sentence managed by the YJS and interviewed the relevant case managers. We examined the quality of assessment; planning; implementation and delivery of services; and reviewing. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. For services to keep the child safe, we assessed the quality of planning, and implementation and delivery in the 35 cases where we expected meaningful work to take place. Similarly, for work to keep others safe, we assessed the quality of planning, and implementation and delivery in the 31 cases where meaningful work was required.

In this service, assessment and planning were assessed as 'Inadequate' because less than 50 per cent of cases met all our quality requirements for these standards. Implementation and delivery was rated as 'Good'; work was sufficient in 68 per cent of cases. Although reviewing focused sufficiently on desistance in 82 per cent of cases, and work to keep the child safe in 70 per cent, reviewing of work to keep other people safe met our requirements in only 59 per cent of the cases inspected. This led to an overall rating of 'Requires improvement' for this aspect of case management.

Overall, work to support desistance was effective. Trauma-informed practice and use of a strengths-based model of working were firmly embedded. Despite the constraints brought by Covid-19, youth justice workers used their knowledge and skills well to build relationships with families and take a holistic approach to meeting the child's needs. We saw variation between teams in the quality of practice and, overall, there was too little focus on supporting the safety and wellbeing of the child and to protect other people.

Strengths:

- The YJS recognised the link between building relationships and successful outcomes, and focused on this appropriately.
- Practitioners worked hard and creatively to maintain meaningful service provision, despite Covid-19 restrictions.
- A holistic, strengths-based and solution-focused approach was embedded as normal practice.
- A case formulation 4Ps approach (predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating and protective factors) was used routinely to understand the child's lived experience and how this influenced behaviour. This included asking 'why me?'; 'why now?'; 'why does it continue?'; 'what can I rely on?'
- In some of the most complex cases, youth justice workers were responsive and insightful, reviewing progress and working well in partnership with the complex adolescent harm management process to address escalating issues.

Areas for improvement:

- There was a lack of consistency in the quality of case management across teams.
- Youth justice workers did not analyse all the factors in a case deeply enough to understand how to support a child's safety and wellbeing, and protect victims.
- Underestimation of the risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child and other people affected the quality of planning to address these.
- Work to keep victims safe was not given enough priority.
- There was too little effective management oversight of casework.

Work with children sentenced by the courts will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections, we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards.

2.1. Assessment



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

Inadequate

Our rating¹⁸ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	62%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	46%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	41%

Youth justice workers routinely asked the 4Ps questions during their assessment. However, they were not using the answers consistently to inform more in-depth enquiries that would help them to understand fully the factors linked to the safety and wellbeing of the child and the need to protect other people.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Work to assess the factors linked to a child's desistance varied in quality.

YJS workers took a trauma-informed approach to assessment. They worked with the whole family, sometimes completing joint assessments with colleagues and partner practitioners to understand how to support desistance. Assessments focused well on

¹⁸ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

the child's strengths and protective factors, and their level of maturity and readiness to engage and comply with their sentences.

In the main, we found practitioners comfortable and skilled at asking questions about diversity, including sexuality and ethnicity. However, they did not always use this information to understand, for example, how a child's experience of being black, Asian or minority ethnic, or belonging to a particular community, impacted on their behaviour and desistance needs.

One inspector was pleased to note:

"The assessment contains a detailed analysis of all the factors linked to offending. It explores diversity issues (experience and impact of trauma) to understand the child's experiences. Information from partnership agencies has been considered that helped determine how best to work with the child. The child and her mother's voice were present in the assessment. All the factors related to desistance have been included in the initial assessment".

Conversely, in another case, we found:

"...insufficient understanding around previous behaviours and offending, as well as patterns of desistance. Key factors such as poor relationships with parents and childhood trauma are not explored and despite A not wishing to return to father's care due to historical neglect and physical chastisement, he is subject to curfew requirements at the address. There is insufficient attention paid to his educational attainment and the extent to which his desistance may be impacted by constrained choices from exploiters, despite having reasonable grounds decision from NRM".

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

There was no consistency in the quality of this work. Assessment identified clearly and analysed all the risks to the child in 19 of the 39 cases we inspected. The main areas of weakness related to the lack of analysis of measures already in place to protect the child and a tendency to underestimate the level of need in a case. Youth justice workers did not always use all the information available to them or speak to relevant partners. This may have hindered their ability to build an accurate and in-depth picture of factors relating to the safety and wellbeing of the child.

In some cases, where issues relating to domestic abuse or loss of family members were identified, the implications of these and related needs were not explored well enough.

One inspector noted the range of issues that needed further analysis in one case:

"There has not been enough information gathering from partnership agencies ... Areas of concern that have not been adequately explored include: exploitation (indicators of CCE [child sexual exploitation]); witnessing domestic abuse; emotional and physical abuse; substance misuse; and Alice's concern that her family is considering sending her to live in another country".

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

Work completed to understand how to keep other people safe was the weakest area of assessment.

Of the 34 cases where there was evidence of risk of harm to others, youth justice workers had identified clearly all the relevant factors associated with this in only 13 cases. Youth justice workers drew sufficiently on appropriate sources of information and involved other agencies where appropriate in only half of the cases inspected. They did not always consider sufficiently a child’s pattern of behaviour or the controls and interventions in place to manage and minimise the risk of harm presented by the child.

In some cases, there was too little defensible decision-making, which made it hard to understand the rationale for the chosen classification of the risk of serious harm. It was not always clear who the victims were, and a lack of analysis curtailed effective plans to prevent further victims. There was not a consistently effective analysis of sexually harmful behaviour, especially where this was not related to the index offence.

In one case, we found that:

“The narrative across the case file for a high RoSH [risk of serious harm] judgement is insufficiently detailed or analytical to cover the range of harm-related behaviour displayed by Jude. There is no analysis relating to the safety of the vulnerable victim or potential for other victims to be ‘cuckooed’. Given the concerns about Jude’s living conditions, lack of external monitoring, connections with organised crime, and criminal exploitation, there is insufficient exploration of harm”.

2.2. Planning



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

Inadequate

Our rating¹⁹ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s desistance?	77%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	47%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	42%

We found examples of excellent planning to support desistance, and consistently good work to engage the child and their family in this work. However, there was not enough planning to manage the risk of harm that children posed to other people and to address specific risks to victims. As such, planning was rated as ‘Inadequate’.

Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child’s desistance?

The strengths-based approach to planning was used well. The YJS worked together with the child and, where appropriate, their family to decide how best to support

¹⁹ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

desistance. Planning reflected the child's readiness to engage and how to overcome barriers to completion.

In many instances, there was effective planning in relation to helping children access education, training and employment, and to address substance misuse issues. Planning considered the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child in 29 of the 39 cases, but we would have expected to see better planning to meet child's needs.

The majority of cases we inspected involved referral orders. Reparation and restorative justice were well thought through in many of these. However, in the 28 cases where the victim was known, their needs and wishes had been considered sufficiently well in the planning process in only 15 cases.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

There was need for planning to keep the child safe in 35 cases. Overall, this was not completed thoroughly enough.

Planning promoted the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks in 21 of the 35 cases. There was not enough joint planning with partners, especially with children's social care services, to take account of current or recent 'child in need' plans, or alignment with measures already in place to protect the child. There was a need for more detailed planning to address specific risks relating to situations and specific people. Too little consideration was given to what could change for the child in the future and how this could affect their safety and wellbeing. We saw effective contingency planning in only 13 of the 35 cases.

In one case, we found:

"There are references to the need to keep Jay safe within the family home; however, [there is] no clear plan of how this will be achieved and no cross-reference made to the child in need plan. Contingency actions include liaising with other agencies, such as children's social care services, probation and mental health services. However, the contingency plan does not set out specific measures that could be implemented as a result".

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

We expected to see effective planning to keep other people safe in 31 cases. Performance in this area of work was poor. Less than half of the cases we inspected met our requirements for each aspect of this work.

There was too little joint planning with other agencies, or reflection on the measures in place to restrict or control behaviour, such as restraining orders and criminal behaviour orders. There was a need to address specific concerns relating to victims in 29 cases, and planning to do this was sufficient in only 12 cases. Contingency planning was the weakest area of work.

In one case, an inspector noted that:

"There was a five-step programme in the plan to raise victim awareness, but no thought given to how this would be delivered to the child, who had severe autism and ADHD [attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder]. A serious youth violence mentor was offering support but there was no specific plan for what this entailed, and his involvement was not recorded in the plan. It was unclear which offences the plan addressed and who was involved in creating it. Planning did not take account of the restraining order, its content or period it covered".

2.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating²⁰ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	85%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child safe?	74%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	68%

The YJS worked consistently well with its partners to implement and deliver services to support desistance. We saw examples of good and effective work to keep children safe, but there was variation in the quality of practice to protect other people.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?

The quality of work to support desistance was outstanding.

Youth justice staff worked diligently and skilfully. The child was kept firmly at the heart of delivery, and the overarching strengths-based, family focus provided them with the support and encouragement they needed to achieve their desistance goals. The staff balanced this approach well with the use of formal compliance measures where these were needed.

Covid-19 restrictions inevitably curtailed the provision of normal services and interventions, and the YJS had to reduce its face-to-face work. However, intensive supervision and surveillance timetables were maintained and children were visited, in order to support their attendance at, and effective participation in, virtual referral panel meetings.

Children continued to complete work to prevent offending behaviour, such as sessions on loyalty and friendships, gang culture and victim awareness. They received practical help with their education, training and employment, and accommodation. They were able to meet WAWY workers without delay, to talk about their use of substances and access therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy. However, not all the factors identified during assessment were addressed sufficiently. Most notably, this included children who had needs relating to SLC or their emotional and mental health.

Partners worked well together to provide coordinated, comprehensive packages of support for desistance. Children's social care services, serious youth violence mentors and schools were key to effective joined-up working.

²⁰ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

The YJS gave careful thought to decisions about children who met the criteria to transition to probation services. In one case, a child reached the age of 18 shortly before sentence. Although he was eligible to transfer, the YJS and NPS reviewed the circumstances of the case carefully at his point of sentence. They decided, correctly, that the YJS, having built a positive relationship with the child and having extensive knowledge of his and his family's needs, should retain the case.

Youth justice workers focused on helping children feel a sense of achievement. One inspector wrote:

“There’s a consistent, balanced, well-sequenced approach employed in this case. The case manager is responsive to Arnie’s requests and I particularly like the discussion she had with him about ‘walking away with something’, which was a pivotal point and resulted in positive outcomes, such as a bank account, provisional driving licence and CSCS card”.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?

Work to support the safety and wellbeing of the child was good.

Service delivery was tailored to the needs of each case. The YJS made appropriate referrals to complex adolescent harm meetings, which added value to the joint management of the most vulnerable children. In some, a mapping exercise was completed, to try to get a better understanding of how to support the child. Family relationships and home environments were monitored and the YJS linked well with the integrated offender management team, in one case making a quick referral to provide a multi-agency response to concerns that the child was at high risk of being exploited.

We found many examples of well-considered and coordinated work. For one, the inspector wrote:

“There is good joint work with the Looked After Children social worker and independent reviewing officer. They provided a coordinated response to Fiona’s placement instability, completing ‘return to home’ interviews to understand her prolific missing episodes. A SALT assessment identified some unmet needs and a CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] referral was made, to inform an education, health and care plan to help Fiona re-engage with education”.

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?

Work to keep other people safe overall was good. However, there was considerable variation in the quality of this work.

We saw examples of excellent risk management. In these cases, there was an effective flow of information between the police and YJS, and attentive monitoring of restrictive measures such as restraining orders. Serious youth violence mentors worked with children and partners alike to strengthen the joint response to the risk that children posed to others.

However, in some cases there was too little monitoring of children’s activities and living conditions, and a lack of urgency to take action to protect victims. Youth justice workers managed their cases in silo, without drawing on the support from partners or understanding the strength of so doing.

The following is an example of the need for more analysis to understand how to keep other people safe:

“The focus was more towards the risks posed to the child in relation to carrying a knife. The child reported that he frequently carried a knife due to conflict in the local community and this was not adequately investigated. There was no recognition that past trauma could be linked to this”.

In another case, the inspector noted:

“...no risk reduction work was undertaken; the driving intervention was not completed, nor work to understand how he targeted potential victims for burglary. The youth justice worker was unsure whether Dylan had access to a car, as the question was never asked”.

2.4. Reviewing



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

Requires improvement

Our rating²¹ for reviewing is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	82%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	70%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	59%

The quality of review relating to desistance work was consistently meaningful. The review of safety and wellbeing was good. However, reviewing did not focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe or necessarily lead to an appropriate response when circumstances in the case changed. This is reflected in the overall rating for reviewing of 'Requires improvement'.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

The quality of reviewing relating to desistance was outstanding.

The YJS was good at working with the child and families to understand and respond to changes in desistance. Youth justice workers also encouraged children to celebrate achievements in this area, even if this related to small improvements in their interest in activities. They monitored compliance well, increasing efforts to re-engage children, especially where their compliance had drifted because of restrictions brought about by Covid-19.

²¹ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Reviewing took place in a range of settings, including in family homes and during reflective team case discussions. These were attended by partners dedicated to the YJS, which provided a more joined-up response to changes in cases.

The SALTs were instrumental in helping youth justice workers to review and adapt their approach to strengthen children's engagement in planned activities.

In one particular case of note:

“The review focused on the child’s lived experience. The youth justice worker reviewed progress in work to support desistance, alongside what she had learned through the YJS’s survey of the experience of children who identify as black, Asian and minority ethnic. Having considered all this information, she proposed changes to the child’s plan of work”.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

The quality of reviewing to support safety and wellbeing was good.

We expected to see a review of safety and wellbeing in 27 cases. Reviewing identified relevant changes and responded to these in 18.

In 16 of the 27 cases, youth justice workers considered information held by other agencies to inform their reviews. In one case, we were pleased to see the quick referral made to the complex adolescent harm meeting process and NRM in response to intelligence from the police. In another, the inspector found:

“The statutory assessment review by the new case manager takes sufficient account of emerging safeguarding concerns. This results in appropriate referral to children’s social care and positive information sharing with local police and the violence reduction unit. Monthly reviews at the complex adolescent harm meeting contribute to a multi-agency approach, information sharing and exchange, and meaningful actions post-meeting”.

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

Work to review how to keep other people safe required improvement.

It was appropriate to review risk of harm to other people in 22 cases. Of these, reviewing was good enough in 13.

Youth justice workers were not taking enough note of information available from other agencies and did not complete consistently their reviews together with the child and their families. Reviews did not lead to corresponding changes in the YJS’s work to keep other people safe. The police were not asked consistently for new information to inform reviews, even where there were court-ordered control measures in place. In some instances, youth justice workers received important intelligence, or disclosures were made by the child, which they failed to act on.

In one case, an inspector wrote:

“There has not been adequate investigation throughout this case of the risks posed to others. These relate to Jake’s associates, that he carries a knife and his potential links to gangs and criminal exploitation. His experience of trauma and the link to violence not explored enough. Other agencies should have been involved in monitoring/reviewing the risks posed to others and haven’t been”.

3. Out-of-court disposals



We inspected 26 cases managed by the YOT that had received an out-of-court disposal. These consisted of four youth conditional cautions, eight youth cautions and 14 community resolutions. Some of the community resolutions had been decided and delivered outside the formal process. In Kent, these are referred to integrated adolescent services, to make sure that needs are assessed and families offered appropriate support. We inspected 10 such cases. We interviewed the case managers in 24 cases.

We examined the quality of assessment; planning; and implementation and delivery of services. Each of these elements was inspected in respect of work done to address desistance. For the 16 cases where there were factors related to harm, we also inspected work done to keep other people safe. In the 25 cases where safety and wellbeing concerns were identified, we looked at work done to safeguard the child. We also looked at the quality of joint working with the local police.

In only 54 per cent of cases inspected, our standards for assessment were met, resulting in a 'Requires improvement' rating for this aspect of work. Similarly, although there was a good level of sufficiency in the quality of planning to support desistance, planning to protect other people met our requirements in only half the cases we inspected, leading to an overall rating for planning of 'Requires improvement'.

The service worked consistently well to implement and deliver services to support desistance and the safety and wellbeing of the child, and met our expectations to keep other people safe in 69 per cent of cases. This earned a rating of 'Good'. Initially, joint working was rated as 'Requires improvement'. Following the meeting of our internal ratings panel, however, we used professional discretion to increase this to 'Good'.²²

In general, our case assessments indicated that Kent's out-of-court disposal work functioned well, especially work completed to support families after the delivery of an informal community resolution.

The information provided to the joint decision-making panel was timely and helpful, and disposal proposals were sound. The approach taken to support desistance was consistent and effective. Practitioners were skilled in taking a 'child first', family approach to understand children's needs and aspirations, and help to achieve these. Some of these children lived complex lives, and their offences had been committed in the context of wider worrying behaviour and lived experiences. Not enough was being done to understand and address the risk of harm they posed to others. While oversight of case management was often thorough and insightful, it did not meet the needs of about a quarter of the cases we inspected.

²² An increase from 'Requires improvement' to 'Good' was made on the following basis: the original rating for joint working was derived from our assessment of four cases. A more positive judgement in one case would have raised the overall score for this aspect of work to 75 per cent. The rating was changed to reflect this and to take account of the overall quality of the YJS's joint work to deliver out-of-court disposals.

Strengths:

- Overall, work to support desistance was of a high standard.
- The strengths-based, family approach used for out-of-court disposals enabled practitioners to take a responsive, holistic approach to their work.
- The YJS contributed good-quality information and recommendations to the out-of-court disposal joint decision-making panel.
- Practitioners tailored the implementation of each out-of-court disposal to the needs of the individual case, making sure that this was proportionate to the type of disposal.
- Work to implement informal community resolutions was of consistently good quality.
- Children were supported well to improve their access to education, training and employment.

Areas for improvement:

- Assessments were too narrow in their focus and lacked analysis of important information.
- There was too little focus on understanding the level and nature of need relating to safety and wellbeing, and the risk of harm that children posed to others.
- Planning did not include appropriate contingency measures to protect the child and others should circumstances in the case change.
- Overall, work to keep others safe required improvement.
- We had concerns that opportunities were being lost to divert children away from the criminal justice system and into services better able to meet their needs.

Work with children receiving out-of-court disposals will be more effective if it is well targeted, planned and implemented. In our inspections, we look at a sample of cases. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards.

3.1. Assessment



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

Requires improvement

Our rating²³ for assessment is based on the following key questions:

²³ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

	% yes
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	69%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	54%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	54%

Practitioners worked well with families to complete their assessments, and recorded these well. However, they did not identify and analyse sufficiently all the factors in a case, to gain an adequate understanding of where to focus their work, especially in relation to protecting the child and other people. Overall, assessment was rated as 'Requires improvement'.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

Practitioners were skilled at working with the child and their family to complete their assessments, to help them understand the child's lived experience, and their individual needs and aspirations. However, of the 21 cases where it was important to identify the structural barriers that a child faced, they achieved this in only 14. In 18 of the 26 cases inspected, assessment did not provide a thorough enough understanding of the child's level of maturity and readiness to change.

Although a small number were completed late, in 24 of 26 cases there was a clear, written record of the assessment.

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

The assessments identified clearly and analysed all the risks to the child's safety and wellbeing in only 14 of the 26 cases. In 19 of the 26 cases, we saw evidence that practitioners had drawn on all the relevant information available, such as other assessments and information held by partner agencies, to deepen their understanding of how to keep the child safe.

One inspector noted:

"The assessment draws on police and children's social care services information to provide a detailed account of Marty's adverse childhood experiences. This rightly leads to a medium classification. However, the concerns around Marty's exploitation are not sufficiently analysed and it is not clear whether these concerns are current or not".

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

There were indications that the child posed a risk of harm to other people in 25 of the 26 cases inspected. Practitioners had identified and analysed relevant factors, including risks to specific victims, in only 13 of these. In 10 of the 25 cases, practitioners had not drawn on information available from partner agencies or other assessments to help them make decisions about the level and nature of the risk that the child posed, and they tended to underestimate the need to protect other people.

Inspectors provided the following evidence:

“The assessment provides some information around Toni’s assault on her mum, and there is a good level of insight into the family dynamics. However, the assessment focuses on Toni’s wellbeing and lacks analysis around the risk she presents to her parents”.

“The offences included inciting a child to engage in sexual activity and attempting to distribute indecent images of a child. There was a level of sophistication and coercion in Michael’s behaviour, and the impact on his victim is likely to have been significant. However, the YJS underestimated the level of risk Michael posed to other people and assigned a low classification to this case”.

3.2. Planning



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

Requires improvement

Our rating²⁴ for planning is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does planning focus on supporting the child’s desistance?	88%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	64%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	50%

The YJS took a thorough approach to planning to support desistance but practitioners were not good at anticipating changes in the circumstances of a case, and this affected the quality of planning to support safety and wellbeing. Planning to manage and reduce risk of harm to others was poor.

Does planning focus on supporting the child’s desistance?

The quality of planning to support desistance was excellent.

Practitioners took a consistently thorough approach when planning how to support the child’s desistance. Plans were developed with the family, so that the child could be supported to achieve their objectives with the help of their parents or carers.

There was a good focus on relationships and, where possible, if children were already receiving support from the integrated adolescent service, they carried on working with the same practitioner to complete the work for their out-of-court disposal.

²⁴ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Practitioners considered how to help children access opportunities for community integration, and how mainstream services could continue to work with them as part of an exit plan, in 23 of the 26 cases inspected.

In one case, the inspector wrote:

“Planning adequately supports the child’s desistance. The planned interventions link to factors to support the child’s coping skills, understanding behaviours, substance misuse and the impact of offending on his future. The practitioner has identified the agencies to support desistance – mental health services, The Education People and Youth Café (Switch). The child’s family were engaged in this planning”.

In another case, the inspector noted the challenge provided by the joint decision-making panel that led to a more supportive plan for the child:

“The original proposal was a ‘no further action’ disposal. However, it was decided by the panel that a community resolution would more appropriately reflect the impact on the victim, and reduce the likelihood of the child being involved in future incidents. The plan for intervention included: continued work with adolescent early help, including an assessment of the child and siblings; a session to reflect on the offence; and referrals to mainstream services to support desistance”.

Of the 20 cases involving a known victim, planning took sufficient account of their needs and wishes in 13.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

There was a need for planning to support the child’s safety and wellbeing in 25 cases. The quality of this work was good and it was normal practice to plan jointly and align plans with partner agencies.

However, practitioners did not take enough account of the fact that circumstances in a case can change rapidly, and plan for that eventuality. The quality of contingency planning was poor; only nine of the 25 cases identified specific measures to address potential escalating risks.

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

We expected to see planning to address the risk of harm that a child posed to others in 16 cases. There was a need to address specific concerns and risks relating to victims in 15 of these. We judged that planning to keep other people safe required improvement.

The absence of assessment to identify needs led to gaps in planning, and in some cases there was no planning at all to keep victims and other people safe. Planning promoted the safety of other people in nine of the 16 cases. It focused sufficiently on protecting victims in seven of the relevant 15 cases.

In one case, we noted:

“Both the victim and child attend the same school but there is no evidence of liaison with the school about how risks to the victim are to be managed. The child has been assessed as [presenting a] low risk of serious harm to other people and this should be medium. This and the inexperience of the case manager have impacted on effective planning to keep the victim safe”.

Practitioners involved other agencies in their planning in 10 of the relevant 14 cases.

Contingency planning was poor. Only three of the 16 cases where we should have seen this included appropriate action to be taken should circumstances in the case change. Many plans contained generic measures, such as speaking to the child or listing agencies involved in the case.

3.3. Implementation and delivery



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

Good

Our rating²⁵ for implementation and delivery is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?	92%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	80%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	69%

Implementation and delivery was the strongest area of out-of-court disposal work. The delivery of services to support desistance and the safety and wellbeing of the child were consistently effective. The overall rating for implementation and delivery was determined by the quality of work to keep victims and other people safe, which was good.

Does service delivery effectively support the child's desistance?

Practitioners worked well to make sure that children received appropriate support for their desistance. Service delivery reflected the individual needs of the child, and was strengths based and holistic. The need to build and maintain a relationship with the child and family, and to recognise the social context of their lives was given sufficient priority. The YJS continued to offer this service throughout the Covid-19 period, with children provided with the opportunity to engage in a range of mainstream services. All those who were assessed as needing support with education, training and employment received an appropriate offer of help. There was less support for children to help meet their mental health or SLC needs.

Most of the case we inspected included examples of effective and supportive practice. In one case, an inspector wrote:

"The planned interventions have been delivered to improve Jim's understanding and ability to manage his emotions. Appointments have taken place at school or in the family home. Jim's parents have been offered a referral to a positive behaviour support programme, which they have agreed to participate in. Jim has now been referred to speech and language services to receive additional support".

²⁵ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?

Service delivery supported the safety and wellbeing of the child in 21 of the 25 relevant cases.

In 21 cases, it would have been beneficial to have a multi-agency approach to keeping the child safe. We found an effective, coordinated partnership response in 14 of these, including with schools and children’s social care services.

In one case, the practitioner met teachers to ensure that the school was aware of the child’s vulnerabilities, and made sure that school staff had her contact details, so that they could share their concerns with her. An education, health and care plan is in place and the social worker has developed an online safety plan, which has been shared with the YJS. In another case, the practitioner has been a strong advocate for a child who found a recent change in educational provision difficult. Her involvement has led to a decrease in his exclusions from school.

Multi-agency strategy meetings and complex adolescent harm meetings added value to the support provided. For example, in one case an inspector wrote:

“In this case, interventions included sessions on knife crime, gang culture, and county lines and triggers awareness. The (youth) participation apprentice was involved in delivering this work. The family was offered a Buddi tag, which the child and his parents accepted. The missing and exploited and serious youth violence teams were involved to gather intelligence and monitor plans”.

Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?

There was a need to deliver services to protect other people in 16 cases we inspected. There was vast variation in the quality of work to keep other people safe but, overall, the level of sufficiency was good.

In well-managed cases, there was an effective, coordinated approach to protecting other people, including throughout the Covid-19 period. Partners such as CAMHS, WAWY and the police played key roles in helping to manage and reduce risk of harm. Cases were discussed at multi-agency meetings and practitioners worked well with families – for instance, to support them or arrange for children to move, to reduce their risk to others. In a small number of cases, however, there was far too little focus on managing risks as these became apparent in the case.

Work to protect victims was good enough in 12 of the 16 relevant cases. Children participated in relevant offending behaviour work, including victim awareness.

3.4. Joint working



Joint working with the police supports the delivery of high-quality, personalised and coordinated services.

Good²⁶

²⁶ An increase from ‘Requires improvement’ to ‘Good’ was made on the following basis: the original rating for joint working was derived from our assessment of four cases. A more positive judgement in one case would have raised the overall score for this aspect of work to 75 per cent. The rating was changed to reflect this and to take account of the overall quality of the YJS’s joint work to deliver out-of-court disposals.

Our rating²⁷ for joint working is based on the following key questions:

	% yes
Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision-making?	62%
Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal? ²⁸	50%

Where recommendations were made to the decision-making panel, they were appropriate and proportionate. The rating for joint work, however, was determined by our judgements in the four youth conditional cautions we inspected, two of which met all the requirements for this aspect of work. The scores allowed us to consider whether to apply professional discretion. After careful consideration, the internal ratings panel decided that 'Good' was a more appropriate rating, which reflected the YJS's overall performance for joint working more accurately.

We did, however, have concerns about the potential negative consequences of the local practice of police making unilateral decisions to impose community resolutions. This created a danger that children were receiving community resolutions for emerging criminal behaviour, when it should have been recognised as being indicative of unmet needs. As a consequence, there were lost opportunities to divert children away from the criminal justice system, and into services better able to meet their needs.

Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision-making?

The YJS had not contributed to the out-of-court disposal decision in 10 of the cases we inspected. The police had delivered an informal community resolution and then referred the case to the integrated adolescent service for assessment and, if the family agreed to this, preventative support. In two of these cases, we were not assured that the child should have received a criminal justice disposal.

Of the 16 cases discussed by the joint decision-making panel, the information provided by youth justice workers was submitted in a timely way in 13 cases. In 14 cases, reports to the panel included appropriate and proportionate recommendations for the type of disposal to be offered to children. They suggested relevant interventions and, where they considered a youth conditional caution to be the right outcome, conditions appropriate for this disposal.

YJS reports did not always make it clear that the child understood that they had committed an offence and had admitted responsibility for this. We were not assured that all practitioners had enough understanding of out-of-court disposals to help children and their parents or carers understand the full implications of the disposal they were being offered. We expect to see evidence, even for community resolutions, that information has been shared about how the disposal is recorded and if and when it can be disclosed. We were satisfied that this had been done in 17 of the 26 cases inspected.

²⁷ 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. See Annexe 1 for a more detailed explanation.

²⁸ This question is only relevant in youth conditional caution cases.

We noted:

“Adolescent early help worker completed a thorough, timely assessment which fully informed the joint decision-making. Police had initially looked to impose a YCC [youth conditional caution] but the assessor suggested a YC [youth caution]. Worker clear with child, social worker and foster carers that the support was on a voluntary basis”.

In the vast majority of cases, there was a clearly recorded, informative rationale for joint disposal decisions.

Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?

The YJS kept police sufficiently up to date about progress made in the youth conditional caution in two of the three cases where they needed to do this. In both of these, the child completed all the requirements of the disposal successfully. Enough attention was given to compliance and enforcement in three of the four cases. Overall, there was too little communication between the police and YJS in two cases, leading to a fragmented approach to implementation.

Annexe 1: Methodology

HM Inspectorate of Probation standards

The standards against which we inspect youth offending services are based on established models and frameworks, which are grounded in evidence, learning and experience. These standards are designed to drive improvements in the quality of work with children who have offended.²⁹

The inspection methodology is summarised below, linked to the three domains in our standards framework. We focused on obtaining evidence against the standards, key questions and prompts in our inspection framework.

Domain one: organisational delivery

The youth justice service submitted evidence in advance, and the joint chairs of the board (Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, and Director of Integrated Children's Services) chaired a presentation covering the following areas:

- How do organisational delivery arrangements in this area make sure that the work of your YJS is as effective as it can be, and that the life chances of children who have offended are improved?
- What are your priorities for further improving these arrangements?

During the main fieldwork phase, we conducted 60 interviews with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. We held various meetings, which allowed us to triangulate evidence and information. In total, we conducted 12 meetings, including with managers, partner organisations and staff. We also observed an out-of-court disposal joint decision-making panel meeting. The evidence collected under this domain was judged against our published ratings characteristics.

Domain two: court disposals

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Of the cases selected, 60 per cent were those of children who had received court disposals six to nine months earlier, enabling us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and reviewing. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place. We examined 39 court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of 5), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

Domain three: out-of-court disposals

We completed case assessments over a one-week period, examining case files and interviewing case managers. Of the cases selected, 40 per cent were those of children who had received out-of-court disposals two to five months earlier. This enabled us to examine work in relation to assessing, planning, implementing and

²⁹ HM Inspectorate's standards are available here:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>

joint working. Where necessary, interviews with other people significantly involved in the case also took place. We examined 26 out-of-court disposals. The sample size was set to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of 5), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, sentence or disposal type, risk of serious harm, and risk to safety and wellbeing classifications matched those in the eligible population.

In some areas of this report, data may have been split into smaller sub-samples – for example, male/female cases. Where this is the case, the margin of error for the sub-sample findings may be higher than five.

Ratings explained

Domain one ratings are proposed by the lead inspector for each standard. They will be a single judgement, using all the relevant sources of evidence. More detailed information can be found in the probation inspection domain one rules and guidance on the website.

In this inspection, we conducted a detailed examination of a sample of 39 court disposals and 26 out-of-court disposals. In each of those cases, we inspect against four standards: assessment, planning, and implementation/delivery. For court disposals, we look at reviewing; and in out-of-court disposals, we look at joint working with the police. For each standard, inspectors answer a number of key questions about different aspects of quality, including whether there was sufficient analysis of the factors related to offending; the extent to which children were involved in assessment and planning; and whether enough was done to assess and manage the safety and wellbeing of the child, and any risk of harm posed to others.

For each standard, the rating is aligned to the lowest banding at the key question level, recognising that each key question is an integral part of the standard.

Lowest banding (key question level)	Rating (standard)
Minority: <50%	Inadequate
Too few: 50-64%	Requires improvement
Reasonable majority: 65-79%	Good
Large majority: 80%+	Outstanding ☆

We use case sub-samples for some of the key questions in domains two and three. For example, when judging whether planning focused sufficiently on keeping other people safe, we exclude those cases where the inspector deemed the risk of serious harm to be low. This approach is justified on the basis that we focus on those cases where we expect meaningful work to take place.

An element of professional discretion may be applied to the standards ratings in domains two and three. Exceptionally, the ratings panel considers whether professional discretion should be exercised where the lowest percentage at the key question level is close to the rating boundary – for example, between 'Requires improvement' and 'Good' (specifically, within five percentage points of the boundary; or where a differing judgement in one case would result in a change in rating; or where the rating is based upon a sample or sub-sample of five cases or fewer). The panel considers the sizes of any sub-samples used and the percentages for the other key questions within that standard, such as whether they fall within different bandings and the level of divergence, to make this decision.

Overall provider rating

Straightforward scoring rules are used to generate the overall provider rating. Each of the 10 standards will be scored on a 0-3 scale as listed in the following table.

Score	Rating (standard)
0	Inadequate
1	Requires improvement
2	Good
3	Outstanding ☆

Adding the scores for each standard together produces the overall rating on a 0-30 scale as listed in the following table.

Score	Rating (overall)
0-6	Inadequate
7-18	Requires improvement
19-30	Good
31-36	Outstanding ☆

We do not include any weightings in the scoring rules. The rationale for this is that all parts of the standards framework are strongly linked to effective service delivery and positive outcomes, and we have restricted ourselves to those that are most essential. Our view is that providers need to focus across all the standards, and we do not want to distort behaviours in any undesirable ways. Furthermore, the underpinning evidence supports including all standards/key questions in the rating, rather than weighting individual elements.

Annexe 2: Inspection data

The answers to the key questions that determine the ratings for each standard are underpinned by answers to more detailed 'prompts'. These tables illustrate the proportions of the case sample with a satisfactory 'yes' response to the prompt questions. It should be noted that there is no mechanistic connection between the proportion of prompt questions answered positively, and the overall score at the key question level. The 'total' does not necessarily equal the 'sum of the parts'. The summary judgement is the overall finding made by the inspector, having taken consideration of the answers to all the prompts, weighing up the relative impact of the strengths and weaknesses.

Domain 2: Court disposals

2.1. Assessment	
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	% yes
Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	62%
Does assessment consider the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, utilising information held by other agencies?	64%
Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	92%
Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	72%
Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and their likelihood of engaging with the court disposal?	82%
Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice?	59%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	79%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	% yes
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	49%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	67%
Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	51%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	% yes
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	38%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	50%
Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to manage and minimise the risk of harm presented by the child?	50%

2.2. Planning

Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	% yes
Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	82%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child?	74%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	79%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	84%
Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s?	54%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	87%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	% yes
Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	60%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (e.g. child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	62%

Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	57%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	37%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	% yes
Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	45%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	41%
Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	41%
Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people?	42%
Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?	35%

2.3. Implementation and delivery

Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	% yes
Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	87%
Does service delivery reflect the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents/carers or significant others?	87%
Does service delivery build upon the child's strengths and enhance protective factors?	92%
Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers?	92%
Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration including access to services post-supervision?	76%
Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	97%
Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate?	80%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	% yes
Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	83%

Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-coordinated?	68%
Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	% yes
Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	68%
Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	69%
Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated?	60%

2.4. Reviewing

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	% yes
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors linked to desistance?	82%
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building upon the child's strengths and enhancing protective factors?	82%
Does reviewing consider motivation and engagement levels and any relevant barriers?	86%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement, and are their views taken into account?	82%
Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to support desistance?	71%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	% yes
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to safety and wellbeing?	67%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in promoting the safety and wellbeing of the child?	59%
Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	65%

Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	% yes
Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to risk of harm?	59%
Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm?	65%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their risk of harm, and are their views taken into account?	59%
Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	65%

Domain 3: Out-of-court disposals

3.1. Assessment	
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	% yes
Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including the child's acknowledgement of responsibility, attitudes towards and motivations for their offending?	72%
Does assessment consider the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, utilising information held by other agencies?	81%
Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?	81%
Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?	67%
Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change?	69%
Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice?	76%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?	88%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	% yes
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?	54%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	73%

Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	% yes
Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?	52%
Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including any other assessments that have been completed, and other evidence of behaviour by the child?	60%

3.2. Planning

Does planning focus on supporting the child's desistance?	% yes
Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?	81%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child?	88%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?	76%
Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?	81%
Does planning take sufficient account of opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services following completion of out-of-court disposal work?	88%
Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s?	65%
Is the child and their parents/carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?	88%
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	% yes
Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?	80%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (e.g. child protection or care plans) concerning the child?	78%
Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	36%

Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	% yes
Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?	56%
Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	71%
Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?	47%
Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?	19%

3.3. Implementation and delivery

Does service delivery support the child's desistance?	% yes
Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?	88%
Does service delivery reflect the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents/carers or significant others?	92%
Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers?	92%
Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work of the YOT?	96%
Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services?	92%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?	% yes
Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?	84%
Is the involvement of other agencies in keeping the child safe sufficiently well utilised and coordinated?	67%
Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?	% yes
Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?	75%
Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?	69%

3.4. Joint working	
Are the YOT's recommendations sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision-making?	% yes
Are the recommendations by the YOT for out-of-court disposal outcomes, conditions and interventions appropriate and proportionate?	88%
Do the recommendations consider the degree of the child's understanding of the offence and their acknowledgement of responsibility?	75%
Is a positive contribution made by the YOT to determining the disposal?	75%
Is sufficient attention given to the child's understanding, and their parents/carers' understanding, of the implications of receiving an out-of-court disposal?	65%
Is the information provided to inform decision-making timely to meet the needs of the case, legislation and guidance?	81%
Is the rationale for joint disposal decisions appropriate and clearly recorded?	93%
Does the YOT work effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal?³⁰	% yes
Does the YOT inform the police of progress and outcomes in a sufficient and timely manner?	67%
Is sufficient attention given to compliance with and enforcement of the conditions?	75%

³⁰ This question is only asked in youth conditional caution cases