

Multi-agency work in youth offending services

HM Inspectorate of Probation

Research & Analysis Bulletin 2021/04

HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth offending services. Our *Research & Analysis Bulletins* are aimed at all those with an interest in the quality of these services, presenting key findings to assist with informed debate and help drive improvement where it is required. The findings are used within the Inspectorate to develop our inspection programmes, guidance and position statements.

This bulletin was prepared by Kevin Ball (Senior Research Officer) and Dr Robin Moore (Head of Research).

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in our inspections. Without their help and cooperation, the collation of inspection data would not have been possible.

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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Executive summary

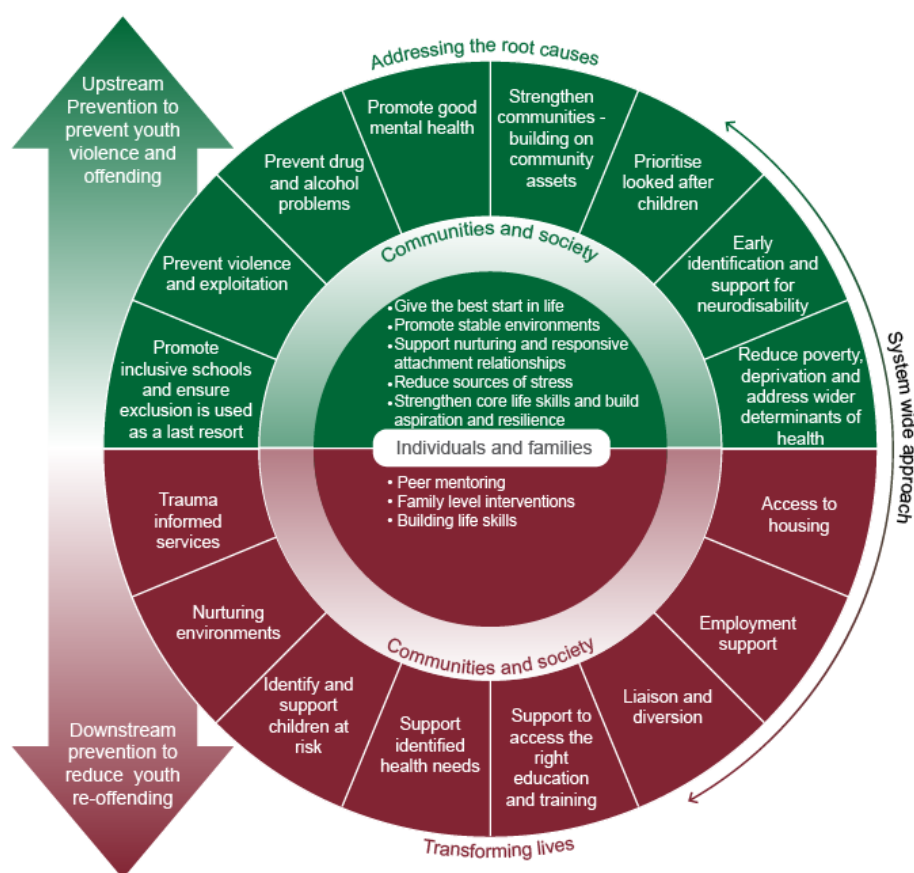
Context

The support required for children supervised by youth offending teams (YOTs) – those on court orders and those subject to out-of-court disposals – is typically too complex for a single agency to provide alone. Multi-agency working can thus bring significant benefits to YOTs, and more importantly to the individual children and to their parents and carers. Joint work can result in:

- greater effectiveness through sharing ideas and coordinating services
- greater efficiency through pooling resources and avoiding duplication of effort
- improved engagement and participation by the children and their families through creating new community opportunities and resources in their lives.

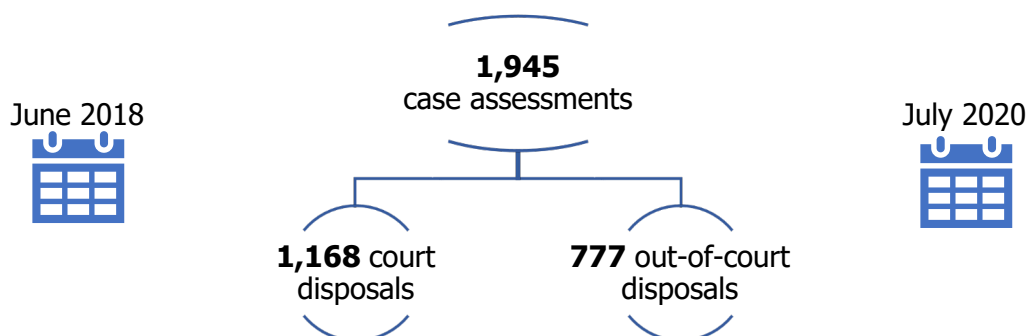
As Public Health England (2019a) concluded from their evidence review of offending and reoffending, 'the youth justice system has very little influence on almost all the causes of childhood offending, so it's very important that a range of organisations in local areas work together to help prevent children offending and re-offending'. Figure 1 shows the diversity of resources required to help all children realise their potential.

Figure 1: The CAPRICORN framework – collaborative approaches to preventing offending and reoffending in children (Source: Public Health England, 2019a)



Approach

The findings presented in this bulletin are based on 45 inspections of YOTs conducted between June 2018 and July 2020. Within each inspection, we examined the involvement of statutory and non-statutory partners and assessed individual cases (1,168 court disposals and 777 out-of-court disposals). In each case, our inspectors considered questions focused upon the multi-agency work, recording the reasons for their judgments alongside notable instances of good or poor practice.



Key findings and implications

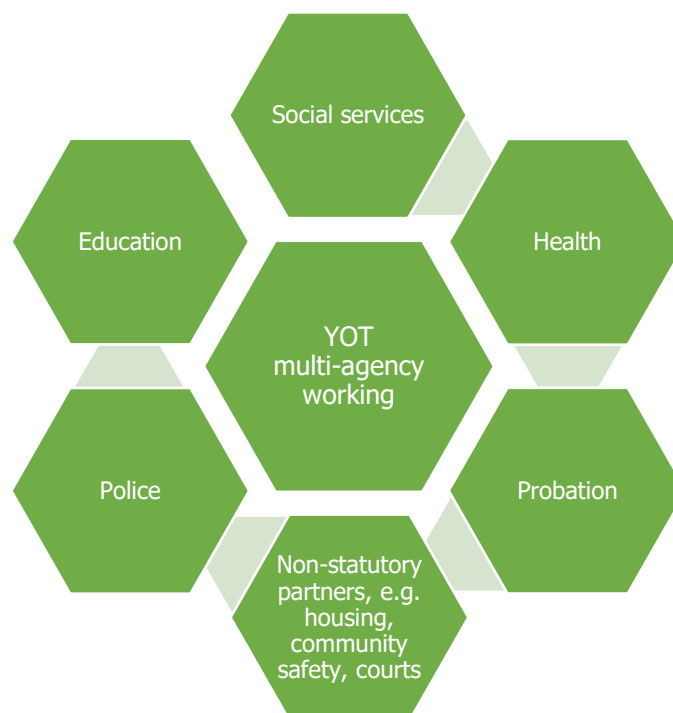
- Multi-agency work undertaken by YOTs was often of good quality, with appropriate involvement of relevant agencies, sufficient information sharing and tailored collaborative work to facilitate progress in the lives of children.
- In line with other research evidence, our inspection reports indicate that co-location of partner agencies supported effective multi-agency work in YOTs.
- While the YOT work promoted community integration and access to mainstream services in the majority of cases, this was less likely for those children with more previous sanctions and for children 'looked after'. This is a concern as these children can have complex needs, enhancing the requirement for integrated services and pathways of delivery, with interventions available at the individual, family and community levels.
- An important responsibility for YOTs is to work with other agencies in establishing a safe space for supporting children. In many cases, we judged YOTs to be working effectively with other agencies to help keep both the child and other people safe, particularly where the concerns were the greatest.
- However, there was a sizeable number of cases in which our inspectors concluded that insufficient recognition had been given to specific concerns and they disagreed with the 'low' safety and wellbeing and/or risk of serious harm classifications. Safety concerns can escalate over time, and well-focused, personalised and coordinated multi-agency activities have the potential to benefit both the children and wider society in the longer term.

- Analysis of inspectors' commentary indicated certain enablers and barriers to multi-agency work in YOTs. Key enablers included:
 - using all available sources of information in assessments that are analytical, holistically understanding the child's life and how their safety and wellbeing is linked to social context
 - pulling together the various assessments made by partners into a single document which identifies and summarises the sources, facilitating a shared understanding
 - involving all relevant agencies in planning activity with the child, with contingency planning identifying plausible risks of escalation and deterioration, and identifying the actions required by all agencies working with the child
 - a focus upon appropriate sequencing, when multiple areas of need are identified, to ensure that interventions are delivered in a way that will have the most impact
 - ensuring YOTs fully contribute to safeguarding processes, especially in relation to child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation
 - using multi-agency resources and expertise to support engagement and compliance, counteracting identified barriers
 - the YOT case manager acting as a champion for the child to other agencies and services.

1. Introduction

YOTs were established by the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998* as multi-agency partnerships hosted by local authorities. The Act imposes a duty to cooperate upon local authority children's services, the police, probation, and health services, recognising that all these agencies need to work together and play their part in preventing offending. Senior leaders from these agencies are expected to serve on YOT boards, and are expected to allocate enough staff to operationalise the YOT. Other statutory and voluntary agencies, who can add value to the lives of the children being supervised, as part of a 'whole-system approach', may be invited to participate in the YOT at board and operational levels.

Figure 2: YOT statutory and non-statutory partners



The work of YOTs has been transformed over the last decade as many children have been diverted from the courts into mainstream services, with a focus on supporting them to lead pro-social and healthy lives. The court disposals caseload for YOTs in England and Wales has fallen by 89 per cent from the 2007 peak of 110,815 children to 11,928 in 2019. Similarly, the number of children in prison has fallen by 72 per cent from the 2009 peak of 2,932 to 832. Over this time, the work of YOTs has largely shifted from court disposals and post-release supervision to preventative and diversionary work, including out-of-court disposals (community resolutions, youth cautions and youth conditional cautions). Around nine in ten YOTs have been reported to operate a point of arrest diversion scheme for children (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2019).

An evidence summary published by the Home Office defined partnership, or multi-agency, working as 'a co-operative relationship between two or more organisations to achieve a common goal' (Berry et al., 2011). The research indicated that multi-agency working was an effective way to tackle crime and disorder problems and identified the critical success factors as:

- **strong leadership** demonstrating the shared vision, values and norms of all partners
- **data sharing and problem focus** with regular information exchange and an analytically-led approach (involving researchers)
- **communication and co-location** of agencies and staff, with regular contact
- **flexible structures** involving all relevant agencies, with clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- **experienced staff** from all agencies, trained and skilled in partnership working.

Similarly, Public Health England (2019b) has promoted the following '5 Cs' as part of a place-based, multi-agency approach to violence reduction:

- **collaboration** – a whole-systems approach bringing together partners from a broad range of functions, creating a common understanding
- **co-production** with the perspectives of all partners informing the approach
- cooperation in data and intelligence sharing, overcoming any barriers
- **counter-narrative** – partnerships promoting positive narratives and aspirations, underpinned by the mobilisation of community assets
- **community consensus approach** – actively involving community members, reducing barriers to engagement, and addressing community-level factors.

It should not be assumed that good multi-agency working can be easily achieved. The performance regimes and policy expectations of partner agencies can conflict, and there can be misunderstandings and differing conceptualisations of children's issues. Organisational cultures can be highly divergent between those with an enforcement focus, and those with more of a welfare and support mission (King et al., 2018). Finally, multi-agency working can dilute individual agency responsibility for managing cases effectively; there can be a loss of drive and focus to achieve results (Higgins, Hales, and Chapman, 2016).

Key barriers and challenges have been summarised by Fraser and Irwin-Rogers (2021) as follows:

- organisations having different visions, priorities and agendas
- problems being understood and framed through different language, terminology and definitions
- competition over owning or receiving the credit for positive outcomes
- competition for scarce resources, compounded by short-term and narrowly defined funding streams
- high levels of stress and anxiety amongst staff, driving cultures of distrust and defensiveness.
- legal and ethical issues around sharing data,¹ and an over-reliance on decontextualised, partial data.

¹ Constraints in systems and processes for accessing and sharing information between agencies is a common theme in national and local child safeguarding reviews, resulting in agencies acting in isolation on the basis of incomplete information (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2021).

In our joint inspection of resettlement from custody (HM Inspectorate of Probation, Care Quality Commission and Ofsted, 2015), we found problems in multi-agency working. Key staff working with children did not fully understand one another's role, and they did not always value partner input or share information and plan together effectively. The lack of genuine multi-agency working was seen to be contributing to poor outcomes for children leaving custody. However, in the good examples of multi-agency effort, suitable accommodation had been secured for children, they were engaged in education, training or employment, and they were motivated to make a fresh start.

Similar findings emerged from our inspection of 'desistance' by children (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016). Desistance research indicates that 'genuine collaborative working', 'engagement with wider social contexts', and the 'creation of opportunities for change, participation and community integration' are critical success factors when working with children in conflict with the law. However, we found that YOT professionals often needed to broaden the scope of their work with children beyond a focus on the offence(s), developing more opportunities for children to engage in constructive activities in their communities.

When we examined public protection work in YOTs (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2017), our inspectors were impressed by the work undertaken through key partnerships to protect the public in cases involving high risk of serious harm. YOT professionals understood the risks surrounding children and made effective referrals to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).² Joint work with children's mental health services was also working generally well.

In our more recent research into supporting the desistance of children on court orders (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021), we found that in three-quarters of the cases inspected, children had three or more factors which were linked to their desistance. Combinations of factors increased for children 'looked after' and where there were heightened concerns regarding the safety of the child and the safety of other people. We found some significant gaps in provision of services to children on court orders, particularly in relation to housing, mental health services, and substance misuse support. The report notes the utility of the 'socio-ecological framework' (Johns et al., 2017) for understanding how a child's positive identity can develop and grow through the YOT worker building a trusting relationship and negotiating access to opportunities and resources (see Figure 3 below).

Effective multi-agency working is also key to providing 'contextual safeguarding'; the minimisation of the threats to children's safety and wellbeing that exist outside the family home. Firmin (2021) explains how partnerships are central to risk management in places managed by other agencies. For example, children gather and form relationships, which can be harmful, in high streets, local parks, youth clubs, sports facilities and transport hubs. The agencies that manage those locations and venues should be engaged by YOTs to help develop a focus upon child welfare and wellbeing in their operations.

² The MAPPA agencies have a statutory duty to have regard to the needs of the individual as a child. The YOT and children's services must be present at relevant meetings, so that there is a focus on appropriately safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child as well as managing the risk of harm to others.

Figure 3: Positive identity development (Source: Johns et al., 2017)



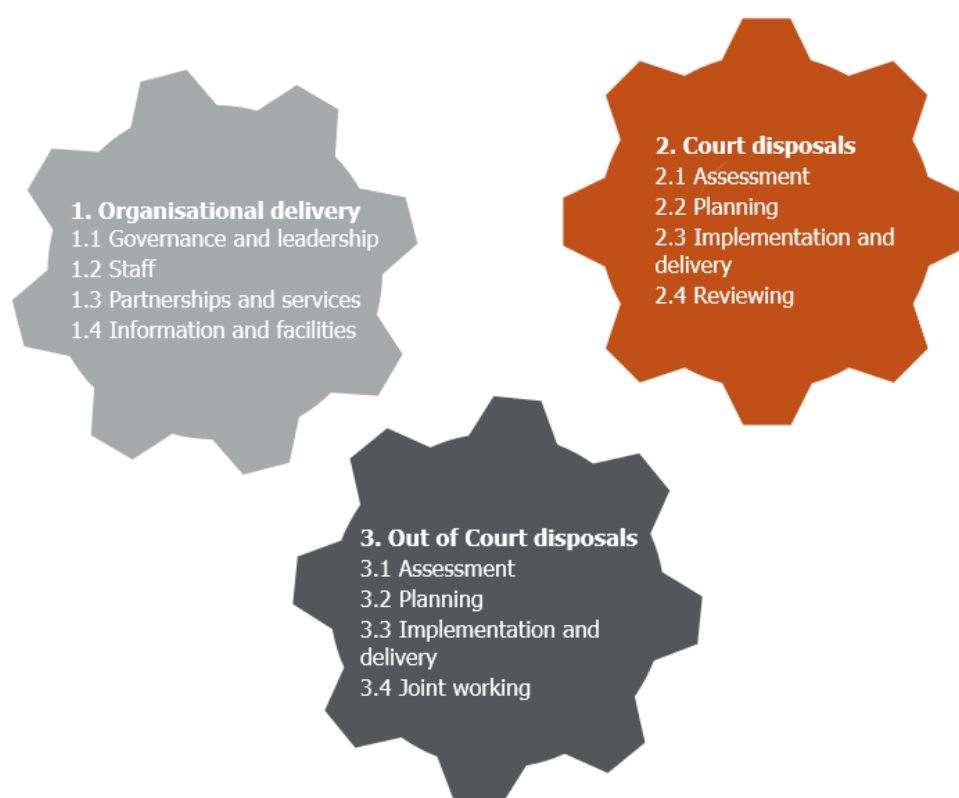
Much of the data in this report is based upon inspectors' judgements about the quality of practice in individual cases – both court disposals and out-of-court disposals. Our focus is on the multi-agency nature of YOTs: we seek to explain how well YOT partners work together in sharing information, joint assessment and planning, and the delivery of interventions and services.

When designing our inspection standards,³ we considered all the relevant evidence – encompassing findings from differing models, disciplines, types of research and jurisdictions – alongside our own inspection evidence and learning. We consulted with service providers, policymakers, and academic specialists to build a common view of high-quality youth offending services and what should be expected. Our standards are organised into three domains:

- domain one examines organisational inputs, including leadership, management, and pertinent to this report, partnerships with statutory and voluntary sector agencies
- domain two focuses on casework with those children convicted in the courts and serving a court order
- domain three focuses on out-of-court disposals, used with those children who have been diverted from courts or who have been assessed as requiring preventative work to help them avoid future contact with the criminal justice system.

³ The full standards framework can be found here: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/about-our-work/our-standards-and-ratings/>.

Figure 4: Inspection domains and standards



Within domain one, there are key questions and prompts covering the active participation of statutory and non-statutory partners, and their contributions to effective service delivery. The following narrative is included in the accompanying 'outstanding' rating characteristics:

1.1 Governance and leadership

Partnership arrangements are fully collaborative and outward-looking, maximising the benefits for children through the appropriate exchange of expertise, resources and knowledge. The YOT is represented on all relevant strategic groups, representation is consistent and those attending demonstrate appropriate decision-making authority. It is clear how all staff are to work together within the partnership arrangements, with strong collaboration and support, clear lines of accountability and the avoidance of duplication.

1.3 Partnerships and services

Collaboration with partners, providers and the local community is integral to how services are planned, ensuring that the services meet the needs of the children and allow for appropriate innovation. Opportunities to provide integrated services and pathways of delivery, particularly for children with multiple and complex needs, are well-developed.

Across our domain two and three standards, we emphasise the need to: consider the social and familial context of the child; share assessments, case information reviews and other intelligence with other appropriate agencies; and involve other agencies and services to keep the child safe, and to promote community reintegration post-supervision.

2. Findings

The findings presented in this bulletin are largely based upon the case assessment data from 45 YOT inspections conducted between June 2018 and July 2020. We inspected 1,168 court disposals and 777 out-of-court disposals.

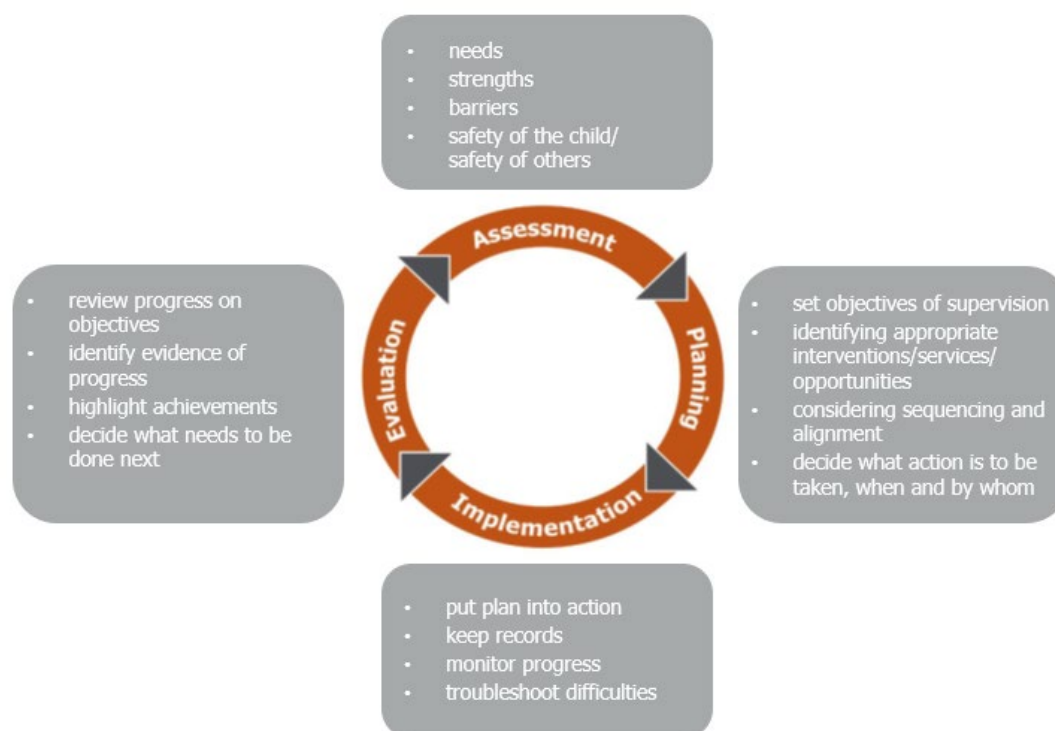
As set out in Table 1 below, there were some notable differences between the case profiles of the two samples. The children subject to court disposals tended to be older and have previous convictions. Heightened concerns regarding the safety of the child and the safety of other people were more likely (although around two in five of those subject to out-of-court disposals had a medium safety and wellbeing classification, and a similar proportion had a medium risk of serious harm classification; see Table B1 for the full breakdown). This reflects the more serious nature of the offences involving children sentenced in court, and the difficulties encountered by these children. Children in this sample were three times more likely to be 'looked after' by children's social services.

Table 1: Case profiles – court disposals vs. out of court disposals

	Court disposals	Out-of-court disposals
Girls	12%	18%
Aged 17+	58%	23%
Looked After Children	26%	9%
Mean number of desistance-related factors	3.8	2.7
High/very high safety and wellbeing classification	40%	15%
High/very high risk of serious harm	27%	5%
Mean number of previous sanctions	2.4	0.4

Judgements about the quality of YOT work by our inspectors are structured according to the ASPIRE model for case supervision (see Figure 5), which recognises that for delivery to be tailored to the individual child, both assessment and planning must be undertaken well. *AssetPlus* is the standard assessment tool used by YOTs in England and Wales; it was designed to combine the assessment of offending-related needs and risk of serious harm with the insights of the Good Lives Model of rehabilitation and desistance theory (Baker, 2014; Wong and Horan, 2021). As well as requiring practitioners to build a trusting and collaborative relationship with the child, assessment is dependent upon effective multi-agency working. A high-quality assessment should, where appropriate, draw upon the information, assessments, and expertise of other agencies/individuals such as children's social services, child psychologists, teachers, the police, youth workers, and the voluntary sector.

Figure 5: ASPIRE model



Findings are presented in this bulletin under the three broad themes of supporting the child's desistance, keeping the child safe, and keeping other people safe.⁴ The specific questions relating to the multi-agency work of YOTs are set out in Table 2 below. Inspector judgments are presented for the sample as a whole and, in some instances, broken down by the child's demographics (age, gender, and ethnicity), whether they are a Looked After Child, type of disposal, safety concerns (safety of the child and the safety of others), and number of previous sanctions. Logistic regression models were used to assess which sub-group differences were significant when accounting for the relationships between the variables.

Inspectors also recorded rationales for their judgments, alongside case summaries and notable instances of good or poor practice. This information was analysed and used to highlight enablers and barriers to effective multi-agency working, as well as producing the good practice examples in the bulletin.

⁴ See Annex A for further information about our inspection methodology.

Table 2: Case assessment questions relevant to multi-agency working

Theme	ASPIRE element	Prompt within standards framework
<i>Supporting the child's desistance</i>	<i>Implementation</i>	Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration including access to mainstream services?
<i>Keeping the child safe</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
	<i>Planning</i>	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?
	<i>Implementation</i>	Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-coordinated?
<i>Keeping other people safe</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	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?
	<i>Planning</i>	Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?
	<i>Implementation (court disposals only)</i>	Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated?

2.1 Supporting the child's desistance

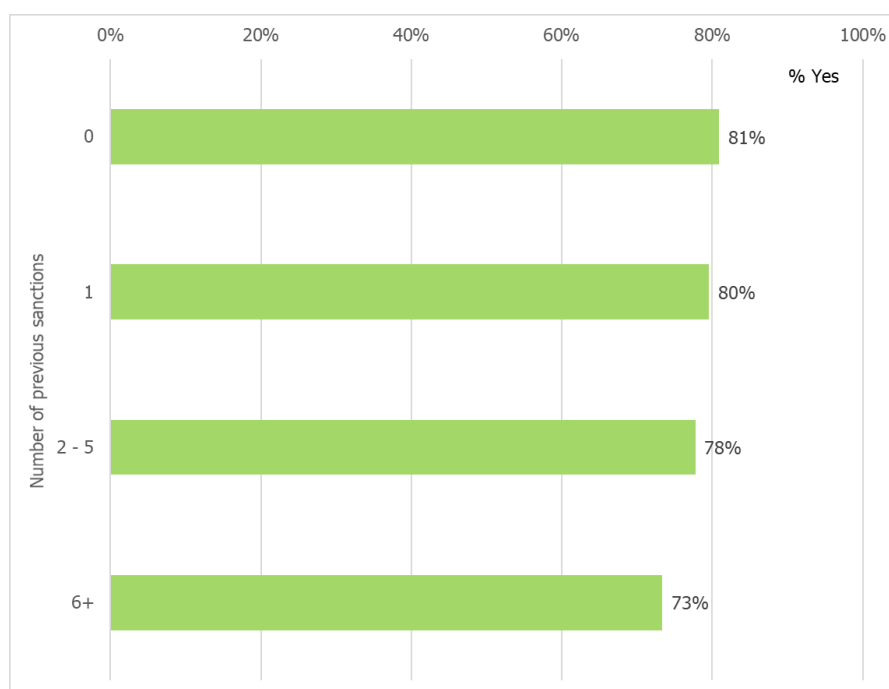
YOTs work with children to help them develop positive identities, and to ultimately lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives. Positive development and prosocial change can be facilitated through effective engagement with mainstream services, such as through education, training and employment opportunities, or leisure and sports activities. Thus, a key task for YOT leaders and practitioners is to establish strong and broad partnerships with community services to be able to encourage and refer children into appropriate pathways.

In about four in five cases (79 per cent; see Table B3 in Annex B), our inspectors judged that the YOT work with the child effectively promoted community integration and access to mainstream services.

Further analysis revealed differences in the quality of multi-agency delivery according to the number of previous sanctions. As shown by Figure 6, our inspectors were less likely to judge that delivery was sufficient for those children with the most previous sanctions.⁵ These children can have the most chaotic backgrounds and complex needs, enhancing the requirement for integrated services and pathways of delivery. There needs to be a focus upon: overcoming any potential obstacles; establishing stability where necessary to enable the child to begin to move forward; and ensuring that interventions are available at the connecting individual, family and community levels.

⁵ See Table B3 in Appendix B for a full breakdown of judgements for differing sub-groups.

Figure 6: Inspector judgements on service delivery supporting community integration, by number of previous sanctions



The multi-agency delivery was also less likely to be deemed sufficient for children 'looked after' (70 per cent, compared to 81 per cent for other children). This is of concern as these children, among the most vulnerable in our society, can often benefit from the opportunities provided through community services, interventions and activities.

Good practice examples

A wide range of multi-agency professionals supporting children's development

Leicester City were rated outstanding on our partnerships and services standard. Our inspectors were impressed by the breadth and depth of the partnerships. Co-location of key partners was a critical success factor, including a substance misuse worker, an education, training and employment worker, Connexions staff, educational psychologists, a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) worker, a liaison and diversion worker, probation officers, seconded police officers, and an integrated offender management coordinator. Of particular note was:

- the work to prevent school exclusions*
- the employment, training and education offer to post-16 children in contact with the YOT*
- the integration of a trauma-informed approach by the YOT through their joint work with CAMHS.*

Good partnership work to provide access to mainstream services

Derby youth offending service (YOS) had worked effectively with partners to develop clear and accessible pathways into mainstream and specialist services. All children were offered a health appointment, where they could discuss and receive help with any health-related matter. There was a particularly strong focus on emotional and mental health through the Futures in Mind project. This health initiative had funded a youth wellbeing worker, with the aim of reaching those who had the greatest difficulties in accessing services, due to emotional or mental health needs. Children who were given an out-of-court disposal had access to the same wide range of services, recognising that they often met the threshold for these services.

2.2 Keeping the child safe

In relation to keeping the child safe, our inspectors' judgements were as follows:

- three quarters (75 per cent) of assessments by YOT workers were deemed to have drawn sufficiently on all available information sources, and to have appropriately involved other agencies
- in 69 per cent of those cases where there were safety and wellbeing concerns, it was judged that other relevant agencies were appropriately involved in planning, with sufficient account taken of the plans of those agencies
- in 72 per cent of those cases where there were safety and wellbeing concerns, the involvement of other agencies in keeping the child safe was deemed to be sufficiently well-coordinated.

Further analysis revealed differences in the quality of practice according to the practitioner's assessment of the levels of concern regarding the safety and wellbeing of the child.⁶ As shown by Figure 7, our inspectors were less likely to judge that practice was sufficient in cases where the practitioner had assessed the concerns to be low.⁷ At the assessment stage, the sufficient involvement of other agencies fell to seven in ten of those cases with a low classification. In two in five (40 per cent; n=463) of these cases, our inspectors concluded that insufficient recognition had been given to specific concerns and disagreed with the classification.

In all of those cases where our inspectors judged the classification of safety and wellbeing concerns to be medium or above, they then considered the planning and implementation questions. In relation to implementation – and the coordinated involvement of other agencies – sufficiency fell from 78 per cent of those cases with a high/very high practitioner classification to 55 per cent of those cases with a low practitioner classification. There was thus a sub-group of children missing out on potentially beneficial multi-agency activity, with specific concerns having not been initially identified.

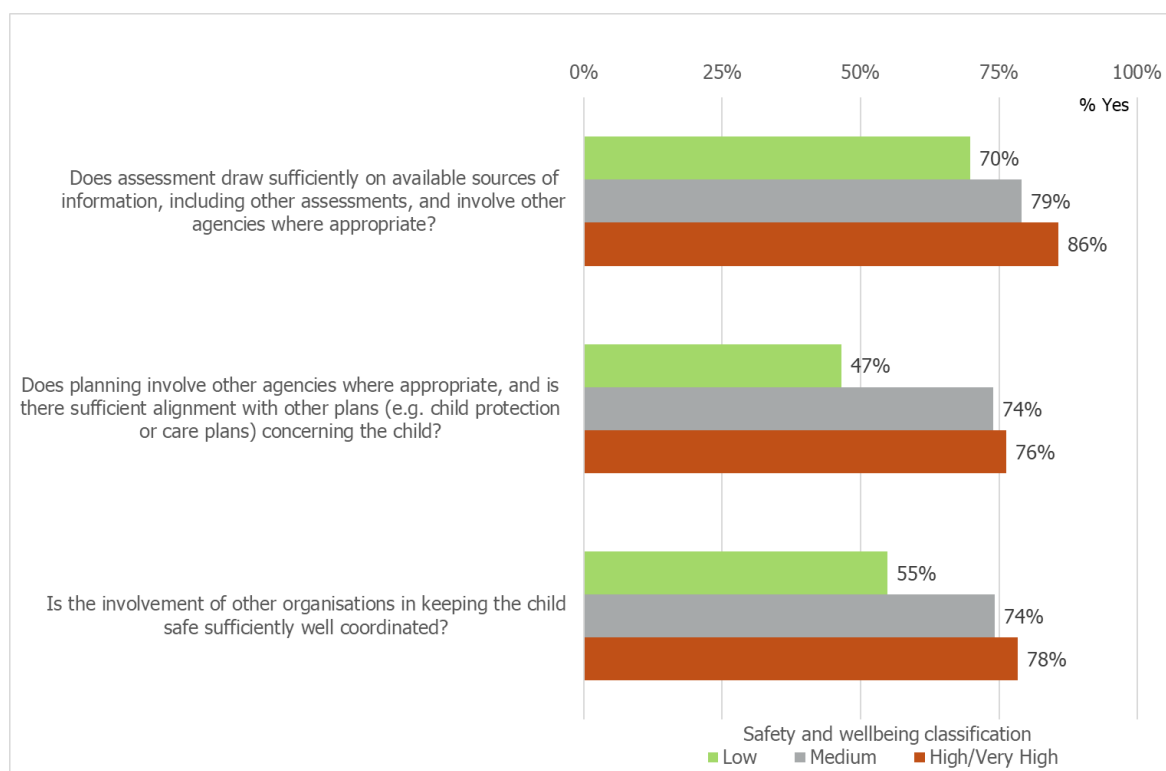
The sufficiency of implementation was similar for both court disposals and out-of-court-disposals for those cases where the practitioner had assessed the concerns regarding the safety of the child to be medium or high. In those cases where our inspectors disagreed with the classification of low, the coordinated involvement of other agencies was deemed to be sufficient in about half (49 per cent; n=86) of these out-of-court disposal cases, compared to about three in five (63 per cent; n=67) of these court disposal cases.

⁶ Every child being supervised by a YOT should have a classification of safety and wellbeing. There are four classifications:

- Low – there are no specific behaviours, events or people likely to cause an adverse outcome.
- Medium – some risk of safety and wellbeing concerns has been identified, but unlikely to cause serious safety and wellbeing adverse outcomes unless circumstances change. This level of risk can be managed under normal case management.
- High – there is a high risk that a potential negative safety and wellbeing outcome will occur, and the impact could be serious. The case may need increased case supervision.
- Very high – the negative safety and wellbeing concern could happen immediately, and the impact will be serious. The case will need increased case supervision.

⁷ See Table B4 in Appendix B for a full breakdown of judgements for differing sub-groups.

Figure 7: Inspector judgements on multi-agency work to keep the child safe, by practitioner classification of safety and wellbeing concerns*



* For cases with a low safety and wellbeing classification, our inspectors only made judgements on the planning and implementation questions when they judged that the classification should have been higher.

Good practice examples

Multi-agency co-location facilitating work to keep the child safe

Luton's Amber Unit, a team of police community support officers and youth workers co-located with the YOS, identified Jamie, a 15-year-old boy who had admitted to an assault, as suitable for their diversion programme. Jamie had been subject to two previous out-of-court disposals. He had a severe learning disability, was experiencing abuse at home, and was at risk from criminal exploitation. There were concerns regarding Jamie's anti-social behaviour, potential drug dealing, and risks associated with harmful sexual behaviour.

The YOS practitioner's assessment was thorough, pulling together all the relevant pieces of information and analysing it well. Through skilful engagement, the YOS practitioner ensured the assessment recognised all of Jamie's diversity needs. There was excellent liaison with education and children's social care. Subsequent planning between agencies was well-coordinated and there was appropriate reviewing activity when additional information came to light.

Good multi-agency planning to keep the child safe

In Essex, our inspector was impressed by work with Daniel, a 17-year-old boy with serious physical health needs. There was a strong correlation between the YOT plan and the child in need plan. The agencies had identified the same issues, and each agency was very clear who would complete which piece of work with Daniel. The multi-agency work included both safeguarding measures and restorative justice, potentially equipping him for a crime-free life as he entered adulthood.

Effective joint working to keep the child safe

In Manchester, the youth justice service (YJS) was working with Lucy who had received an out-of-court disposal. She was a vulnerable girl whose offending had been assessed as triggered by domestic abuse in the family. The case manager and social worker communicated well, and joint home visits were undertaken. When the social worker became aware of videos on social media that showed that the stepdad was in contact with the children and mother, steps were taken by social care to strengthen the written agreement, warning the stepdad and mum of the consequences of further contact.

2.3 Keeping other people safe

A minority of children in conflict with the law present concerns in relation to the safety of other people, including other children. The Youth Justice Board (YJB, 2020) estimate that two per cent of children who have been sentenced present a very high risk of serious harm to others, and about one in four (27 per cent) present a high risk of serious harm.⁸ Within our sample, the most common offences for those with a high or very high risk of serious harm classification were violent crime (46 per cent), robbery (13 per cent), burglary (seven per cent), and drugs offences (seven per cent). An important responsibility for YOTs is to work with other agencies, and with parents and carers, to try to establish a safe space to support these children towards positive, healthy and pro-social lives.

In relation to keeping other people safe, our inspectors' judgements were as follows:

- about seven in ten (72 per cent) of assessments by YOT workers were deemed to have drawn sufficiently on all available information sources, including any other assessments that had been completed
- in 70 per cent of those cases where there were some concerns regarding the safety of other people, it was judged that other relevant agencies were appropriately involved in planning
- in 72 per cent of those court disposal cases where there were some concerns regarding the safety of other people, the involvement of other agencies in managing these concerns was deemed to be sufficiently well-coordinated.

Further analysis revealed differences in the quality of practice according to the practitioner's assessment of the risk of serious harm. As shown by Figure 8, our inspectors were less likely to judge that practice was sufficient in cases where the practitioner had assessed the concerns to be low.⁹ At the assessment stage, the sufficient involvement of other agencies fell to about three in five (62 per cent) of those cases with a low classification. In one in

⁸ Every child being supervised by a YOT should have a classification of risk of serious harm, there are four classifications:

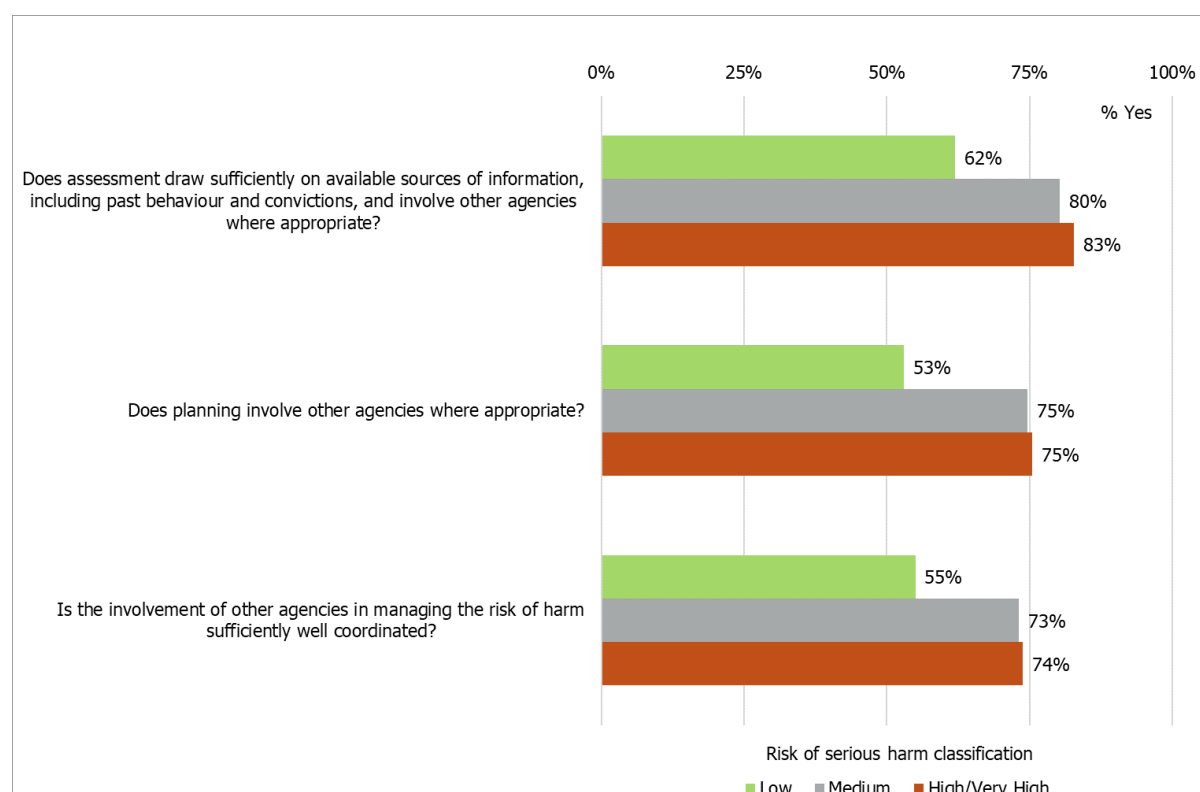
- Low - no specific behaviours, events or people likely to cause an adverse outcome.
- Medium - some risk of harm concerns have been identified, but is unlikely to cause serious harm unless circumstances change. Can be managed under normal case management.
- High - high risk that a potential risk of serious harm outcome will occur, and the impact could be serious. The case may need increased case management.
- Very high - the risk of serious harm concern could happen imminently, and the impact would be serious. The case will need increased case supervision.

⁹ See Table B5 in Appendix B for a full breakdown of judgements for differing sub-groups.

three (34 per cent; n=612) of these cases, our inspectors concluded that insufficient recognition had been given to specific concerns and disagreed with the classification.

In all of those cases where our inspectors judged the classification to be medium or above, they then considered the planning (all disposals) and implementation (court disposals) questions. In relation to implementation – and the coordinated involvement of other agencies – sufficiency fell from 74 per cent of those court disposal cases with a high/very high practitioner classification to 55 per cent of those cases with a low practitioner classification. Once again, there was a sub-group of children missing out on potentially beneficial multi-agency activity, with specific concerns having not been initially identified.

Figure 8: Inspector judgements on multi-agency work to keep other people safe, by practitioner's risk of serious harm classification*



* For cases with a low risk of serious harm classification, our inspectors only made judgements on the planning and implementation questions when they judged that the classification should have been higher.

There were some marked differences in the profiles of the children subject to the differing types of out-of-court disposal, including in relation to the practitioner's assessment of the risk of serious harm – with those subject to community resolutions more likely to have a low classification. Nevertheless, there remained a significant difference at the assessment stage when accounting for these differing profiles, with sufficient involvement of other agencies in less than half (47 per cent) of the community resolution cases compared to about three in four (76 per cent) of the conditional caution cases. While assessment should always be proportionate to the type of case, this cannot be at the expense of an appropriate multi-agency consideration of safety issues.

Good practice examples

Strategic partnerships to promote safety

In Dudley, a robust serious youth violence strategy had been established. The multi-agency Dudley Integrated Violence and Exploitation Reduction Team (DIVERT) was in place; a preventative initiative aiming to reduce antisocial behaviour, school exclusion, and offending and reoffending, as well as improve educational and wellbeing outcomes for children. There was also an adolescent risk panel to support the development of the partnership. Members of the adolescent risk panel were senior leaders from education and children's services with the power to commit resources and services for children who had been assessed as high risk regarding their harm to others, their safety and wellbeing, or their risk of reoffending. Most children discussed at this panel were known to the YOS.

The YOS also had in place a multi-agency integrated safeguarding management panel, which managed all medium and high-risk cases – in terms of the safety of the children themselves and the safety of other people.

Good multi-agency assessment to keep other people safe

In Camden YOT, conference calls relating to risk were held daily between a YOS manager and the police. The multi-agency safeguarding hub, youth service, children's social care, community safety, housing and a child sexual exploitation representative were all encouraged to participate in these calls. The police shared general intelligence relating to incidents in the borough, case intelligence on public protection, and details of children in custody in local police stations. The briefings were supported by an information-sharing agreement and guidance on the implementation of agreed actions.

A specific example of robust assessment was seen in the case of Peter who had not been convicted for harmful behaviour, but his connections with gangs, lifestyle concerns, and suspicions of weapon possession increased his potential to cause harm. The case manager also took account of Peter's previous aggressive behaviour at school and home. The assessment of 'high' risk of serious harm was appropriate, and the case manager's analysis and her work to promote her concerns with other agencies led to effective work and positive outcomes.

2.4 Enablers and barriers to multi-agency working

In each case, inspectors recorded rationales for their judgments. Analysis of this information revealed the following enablers and barriers to effective multi-agency working.

Enablers

- Assessments should incorporate all available sources of information and be analytical, seeking to understand the whole context of the child's life, and how the identified underlying and contextual issues are linked to the safety and wellbeing of the child and other people.
- The various assessments should be pulled together into a single document that identifies and summarises these diverse sources, facilitating understanding by all partners of the child they are working with.
- Planning should involve all relevant agencies to ensure that they all understand how promoting the child's welfare contributes to promoting safety and public protection.
- A sufficient focus is required on contingency planning, identifying plausible risks of escalation and deterioration, and agreeing the actions required by named representatives from other agencies working with the child.
- Where multiple areas of need are identified, good sequencing is essential to ensure that interventions are delivered in a way that will have the most impact. The involvement of multiple agencies at all stages is likely to lead to the best results for the child. The aim of all interventions should be clearly established, with the child benefitting from certainty and consistency.
- YOTs should contribute to safeguarding processes, especially in relation to child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation (such as county lines or gang involvement), through effective use of AssetPlus – its safety and wellbeing and risk of serious harm assessment and planning elements – and through their close relationships with the police and other criminal justice agencies.
- Where necessary, multi-agency work should offset any concerns around non-compliance by drawing upon resources which counteract identified risks and threats, for example, brokering secure placements.
- The YOT case manager should act as a champion to other agencies and services, for example encouraging children's services to include appropriate actions within a child in need plan or advocating an intervention from CAMHS.

Barriers

- Overconflation of screening and assessment can lead to key issues being missed.
- Assessments can be hard to follow and contradictory when they are made up of disparate documents from various agencies, hindering a common understanding.
- Identified areas are not always followed through to the planning stages, meaning that the child's needs are not met. The missing elements in the plan are often from other agencies' assessments.
- Contingency planning can be poor or entirely missing from YOT plans, failing to identify the actions that could be taken by differing agencies.
- Children's services are not always engaged with the YOT. While this can be due to a lack of awareness of their role by case managers, in some instances a more strategic approach from leaders is needed to build or strengthen relationships.

3. Conclusion

There is widespread understanding in the youth justice field that no single agency can provide all the necessary support for children in conflict with the law to find their way to healthy, pro-social and fulfilling lives. Multi-agency working is thus at the heart of well-managed youth justice services, with YOTs having been multi-agency partnerships in law, and in practice, since their inception in the late 1990s.

A key task for YOTs is to establish strong and broad partnerships with community services to be able to encourage and refer children into appropriate pathways. In about four in five of the cases we examined, our inspectors judged that the YOT work with the child effectively promoted community integration and access to mainstream services, supporting their development and pro-social change. However, this multi-agency delivery was less likely to be deemed sufficient for those with more previous sanctions and for children 'looked after'. This is a concern as these children can have complex needs, enhancing the requirement for integrated services and pathways of delivery, with interventions available at the individual, family and community levels.

An important responsibility for YOTs is to work with other agencies in establishing a safe space for supporting children. In many cases, we judged YOTs to be working effectively with other agencies to help keep both the child and other people safe, particularly where the concerns were the greatest. However, there was a sizeable number of cases in which our inspectors concluded that insufficient recognition had been given to specific concerns and they disagreed with the 'low' safety and wellbeing and/or risk of serious harm classification. This had a knock-on effect in terms of the sufficiency of the coordinated involvement of other agencies at the planning and implementation stages, with these children missing out on potentially beneficial multi-agency activity. Safety concerns can of course escalate over time, and well-focused, personalised and coordinated multi-agency activity has the potential to benefit both the children and wider society in the longer term.¹⁰

Looking across the cases examined by our inspectors, common enablers and barriers to effective multi-agency working were identified. The enablers highlight the importance of taking an analytical, holistic and outward-looking approach, fostering a common understanding. There is clear value in thinking creatively about how agencies with a welfare or educational focus can contribute to engaging the child and their families, promoting positive development while at the same time paying attention to any safety concerns.

Moving forward, there are also opportunities to build upon the developments in the digital delivery of youth justice work which have been prompted during the Covid-19 pandemic. In our report on YOT work during the pandemic (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020), we noted that lack of access to good ICT in some YOTs was a barrier to effective work, including effective multi-agency work. An investment in up-to-date laptops and smartphones, mobile printers, and WiFi boosters will enable YOT practitioners to enhance multi-agency working and direct work with children. The urgency of digital exclusion for so many children has also been highlighted by the pandemic (for example, Holmes and Burgess, 2021). Those children who are in conflict with the law are more likely to come from

¹⁰ See Williams and Franklin (2021) for an analysis of the costs upon children's services in relation to later crisis support compared to earlier interventions.

low-income households where the need is greatest. A digital investment in these children would reap huge benefits for them and for society.

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Annex A: Methodology

The findings presented in this bulletin are based on data from 45 youth inspections completed between June 2018 and July 2020 (fieldwork weeks), with the reports for 41 of these being published (as set out in Table A1 below).¹¹

Table A1: Youth inspections, June 2018 – July 2020

YOT	Month of report publication
Derby	August 2018
Hampshire	September 2018
Hertfordshire	September 2018
Bristol	September 2018
Sandwell	November 2018
Essex	December 2018
Warwickshire	December 2018
Blackpool	December 2018
Barking and Dagenham	December 2018
Hounslow	January 2019
Manchester	February 2019
Wandsworth	March 2019
Wrexham	March 2019
Western Bay	March 2019
Oldham	April 2019
Lambeth	April 2019
Sefton	May 2019
East Riding	May 2019
Liverpool	June 2019
South Tees	June 2019
Walsall	June 2019
Dudley	June 2019
Lancashire	July 2019
Sheffield	August 2019
Surrey	August 2019
Newham	September 2019
Leeds	November 2019

¹¹ Solihull, Stoke on Trent, West Berkshire, and Wokingham were pilot small YOT inspections and did not result in a published report.

YOT	Month of report publication
Leicester City	November 2019
Croydon	December 2019
Brent	December 2018
Bradford	January 2020
Southampton	January 2020
Gloucestershire	January 2020
Nottingham City	March 2020
Camden	May 2020
Oxfordshire	May 2020
Luton	May 2020
Medway	June 2020
Bury and Rochdale	June 2020
Cardiff	July 2020
Birmingham	October 2020

Domain one: organisational delivery

For each inspection, the YOT submitted evidence in advance and delivered a presentation by key staff members in relation to the following:

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

During the main fieldwork, interviews were conducted with case managers, asking them about their experiences of training, development, management supervision and leadership. Various meetings were held which allowed for the triangulation of evidence and information, including meetings with managers, partner organisations and staff.

Domain two: court disposals

The cases selected were those of children who had been given court disposals and had been under YOT supervision for approximately six to eight months. This enabled work to be examined in relation to assessing, planning, implementation and reviewing.

The overall sample size in each inspection was set out to achieve a confidence level of 80 per cent (with a margin of error of five percentage points), and we ensured that the ratios in relation to gender, type of disposal, and risk of serious harm level/safety and wellbeing classification matched those in the eligible population.

Domain three: out-of-court disposals

Similarly to domain two, inspectors examined the assessment, planning and implementation stages of delivery. The cases selected were those of children who had commenced out-of-court disposals (community resolutions, cautions and conditional cautions) in the

previous three to five months, with similar statistical and case-type considerations to domain two.

All sampled cases were allocated to individual inspectors. To support the reliability and validity of their judgements against our standards framework, all cases were examined using standard case assessment forms, underpinned by rules and guidance.¹²

Analysis

In this bulletin, logistic regression has been used to analyse case assessment data related to all disposals, examining which sub-group differences were significant when accounting for the relationship between the variables. The independent variables were entered using a forward stepwise approach, incorporating the most significant variables in turn (statistical significance <0.5) and then removing them at a later stage if necessary (significance >0.1).

This approach was considered appropriate as the analysis was exploratory in nature and there was no clear evidence as to the relative importance of various independent variables. Associations which were found to be statistically significant are highlighted in the bulletin, i.e. those unlikely to have occurred randomly or by chance.

Outcomes for children were outside the scope of the analysis; our standards framework focuses upon those key 'inputs' and 'activities' which are the drivers of positive outcomes. We are planning to match our case assessment data with appropriate outputs/outcomes data, enabling further analysis and validation of the inputs → activities → outputs → outcomes logic model.

In each case, inspectors recorded rationales for their judgements on YOT multi-agency working. Key enablers and barriers to effective work in the areas under study were identified through randomising the cases (to ensure that experiences from a variety of YOTs were considered) and undertaking thematic analysis, using the NVivo software. Analysis continued until it was believed that the 'saturation point' had been reached, that is, no further major themes were likely to emerge from the data.

¹² The reliability and validity of judgements was further supported through training and quality assurance activities.

Annex B: Analysis outputs

Table B1: Case profiles

		Court disposals		Out-of-court disposals		All disposals	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
All cases		1,168	100%	777	100%	1,945	100%
Age	10-14	91	8%	277	36%	368	19%
	15-16	399	34%	312	41%	711	37%
	17+	668	58%	175	23%	843	44%
Gender	Male	1,025	88%	633	82%	1,658	86%
	Female	135	12%	141	18%	276	14%
Ethnic group	White	735	65%	533	71%	1,268	68%
	Black	194	17%	84	11%	278	15%
	Asian	61	5%	56	7%	117	6%
	Mixed	114	10%	66	9%	180	10%
	Other	21	2%	11	1%	32	2%
Disabilities	Yes	315	31%	160	26%	475	29%
	No	700	69%	459	74%	1,159	71%
Looked After Child	Yes	290	26%	67	9%	357	19%
	No	807	74%	678	91%	1,485	81%
Safety and wellbeing classification	Low	187	16%	276	44%	463	26%
	Medium	507	44%	258	41%	765	43%
	High/Very High	456	40%	97	15%	553	31%
Risk of serious harm	Low	251	22%	361	57%	612	34%
	Medium	590	51%	239	38%	829	47%
	High/Very High	310	27%	30	5%	340	19%
Number of previous sanctions	0	397	35%	525	74%	922	50%
	1	238	21%	120	17%	358	19%
	2-5	359	32%	66	9%	425	23%
	6+	130	12%	3	0%	133	7%

Table B2: Responses to case assessment questions

		Court disposals		Out-of-court disposals		All disposals	
		n	% yes	n	% yes	n	% yes
Supporting the child's desistance	Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration including access to mainstream services?	1,125	82%	751	75%	1,876	79%
Keeping the child safe	Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?	1,166	80%	772	67%	1,938	75%
	Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans concerning the child?	945	72%	481	64%	1,426	69%
	Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-coordinated?	936	74%	481	66%	1,417	71%
Keeping other people safe	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?	1,059	77%	583	63%	1,642	72%
	Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?	901	71%	347	67%	1,248	70%
	Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated?	840	72%	-	-	-	-

Table B3: Supporting the child's desistance

		Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration including access to mainstream services?	
		n	% Yes
All cases		1,876	79.1%
Disposal	Community resolution	290	71.4%
	Caution	117	68.4%
	Conditional caution	344	80.5%
	Referral order	634	83.6%
	Youth rehabilitation order	353	78.5%
	Custody	138	81.9%
Age	10-14	353	77.9%
	15-16	688	77.8%
	17+	812	80.9%
Gender	Boys	1,603	79.2%
	Girls	262	78.2%
Ethnicity	White	1,226	78.6%
	Black	261	80.1%
	Asian	117	76.9%
	Mixed	173	81.5%
	Other	32	81.3%
Disabilities	Yes	450	78.2%
	No	1,126	83.2%
Looked After Child	Yes	318	70.4%
	No	1,459	80.9%
Safety and wellbeing classification	Low	453	79.9%
	Medium	743	79.8%
	High/Very High	524	83.2%
Risk of serious harm	Low	599	80.6%
	Medium	806	80.6%
	High/Very High	314	80.6%
Number of previous sanctions	0	901	80.9%
	1	343	79.6%
	2 - 5	409	77.8%
	6+	124	73.4%

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that the sub-group differences were statistically significant (based upon logistic regression analysis).

Table B4: Keeping the child safe

		Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information?		Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?		Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-coordinated?	
		n	% Yes	n	% Yes	n	% Yes
All cases		1,938	75.0%	1,426	69.2%	1,417	71.5%
Disposal	Community resolution	302	59.9%	182	54.9%	178	58.4%
	Caution	123	63.4%	76	64.5%	71	63.4%
	Conditional caution	347	74.9%	223	71.7%	232	72.8%
	Referral order	649	77.8%	480	70.4%	481	72.8%
	Youth rehabilitation order	372	81.2%	324	72.5%	322	73.3%
	Custody	145	87.6%	141	74.5%	133	82.0%
Age	10-14	367	70.6%	271	65.3%	267	72.3%
	15-16	708	75.1%	528	70.3%	529	72.0%
	17+	840	76.7%	607	69.7%	603	70.6%
Gender	Boys	1,652	75.7%	1,199	69.6%	1,196	71.6%
	Girls	276	70.7%	219	67.1%	211	71.1%
Ethnicity	White	1,265	74.5%	925	69.1%	922	71.1%
	Black	277	74.4%	218	68.3%	211	70.1%
	Asian	117	71.8%	68	72.1%	67	74.6%
	Mixed	180	81.1%	138	73.2%	139	74.1%
	Other	32	75.0%	25	68.0%	27	74.1%
Disabilities	Yes	473	78.9%	388	72.9%	381	75.6%
	No	1,156	78.1%	800	71.1%	796	74.4%
Looked After Child	Yes	357	74.2%	328	64.9%	303	70.3%
	No	1,480	75.1%	1,020	69.8%	1,038	71.8%
Safety and wellbeing	Low	463	70.0%	155	47.1%	153	54.9%
	Medium	765	79.5%	657	74.0%	658	74.2%
	High/Very High	550	85.6%	514	76.3%	508	78.1%
Risk of serious harm	Low	611	72.3%	348	65.2%	343	68.2%
	Medium	827	80.0%	665	73.5%	677	74.3%
	High/Very High	339	86.4%	313	73.5%	299	77.9%
Number of previous sanctions	0	917	73.9%	590	68.0%	599	69.8%
	1	357	72.5%	276	67.8%	276	72.1%
	2-5	424	78.3%	361	75.3%	359	74.9%
	6+	133	84.2%	124	66.9%	116	71.6%

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that the sub-group differences were significant (based upon logistic regression analysis).

Table B5: Keeping other people safe

		Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information?		Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?		Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well-coordinated? (court disposals only)	
		n	% Yes	n	% Yes	n	% Yes
All cases		1,642	71.7%	1,248	70.2%	840	71.5%
Disposal	Community resolution	202	47.0%	106	59.4%	-	-
	Caution	93	54.8%	53	62.3%	-	-
	Conditional caution	288	76.0%	188	72.3%	-	-
	Referral order	576	75.5%	440	70.9%	409	71.9%
	Youth rehabilitation order	346	75.7%	323	72.4%	302	67.5%
	Custody	137	84.7%	138	71.0%	129	79.8%
Age	10-14	302	71.2%	217	74.7%	74	78.4%
	15-16	596	71.8%	446	69.3%	293	77.1%
	17+	725	71.9%	568	68.7%	464	66.8%
Gender	Boys	1,402	72.0%	1,101	70.0%	754	71.5%
	Girls	230	69.6%	141	71.6%	81	72.8%
Ethnicity	White	1,058	72.7%	780	69.5%	516	71.7%
	Black	247	74.1%	199	68.8%	145	71.7%
	Asian	100	65.0%	75	69.3%	43	65.1%
	Mixed	152	69.1%	122	75.4%	90	77.8%
	Other	28	57.1%	25	76.0%	18	55.6%
Disabilities	Yes	431	73.5%	346	69.4%	235	71.5%
	No	959	75.7%	712	72.9%	501	72.9%
Looked After Child	Yes	330	73.6%	287	69.0%	222	68.0%
	No	1,231	71.2%	895	69.8%	568	72.7%
Safety and wellbeing	Low	339	66.1%	168	60.1%	79	60.8%
	Medium	661	77.9%	539	71.6%	361	70.6%
	High/Very High	519	80.0%	476	76.7%	387	75.2%
Risk of serious harm	Low	415	61.9%	168	53.0%	80	55.0%
	Medium	786	80.3%	697	74.6%	481	73.2%
	High/Very High	326	82.8%	318	75.5%	267	73.8%
Number of previous sanctions	0	742	70.6%	501	71.7%	255	73.7%
	1	307	68.4%	242	67.4%	168	73.2%
	2 – 5	386	75.9%	333	73.3%	278	71.6%
	6+	123	78.0%	117	65.8%	111	67.6%

N.B. Shaded cells indicate that the sub-group differences were significant (based upon logistic regression analysis).