



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

Annual report: inspection of youth offending services (2019-2020)

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This report is based on the aggregated findings of our inspections of Youth Offending Teams conducted and provided by the youth inspection team, led by Alan MacDonald and supported by a team of operations, research, communications and corporate staff. The director responsible for this report is Dr Louise Falshaw. We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in the inspections on which this report is based. Without their help and cooperation, the inspections, and this report, 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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Chief Inspector's introductory overview

This has been an extraordinary year for all of us, and there was never any doubt that the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic would affect youth offending services and the youth justice system generally. I pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts made by frontline staff and managers to keep these vital services going, but the longer-term impacts on them – and, most significantly, on the children involved – are likely to be profound.

Like so many, we at the Inspectorate had to understand and adapt to changes as they happened. We suspended all site visits in March, and instead embraced the virtual world. We have been able to conduct inspections remotely since June, and have carried out a thematic inspection on the general impact of Covid-19 on Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) across England and Wales – all of which has yielded important lessons.

Recent trends in youth justice

The last 15 months have seen a continuation of the trends in youth justice that have been evident over the last decade. The number of children under 18 entering the youth justice system for the first time, through a conviction or caution, continues to fall and now represents a tiny proportion of the overall population of this age group – well under one per cent of all 10 to 17-year-olds in all the areas we have visited.¹

The numbers entering custody are even smaller and fell dramatically as youth courts closed during the Covid-19 pandemic. By July 2020, there were only 563 children under 18 in custody – 31 per cent fewer than 12 months previously² and only a fifth of the number in custody in 2003, when the figure exceeded 3,000. It is, therefore, all the more inexcusable that the support offered to the relatively small number of children leaving custody each year remains so poor – particularly for those in local authority care once they come out. Our joint inspection of the quality of support offered to children leaving custody last year showed that this had not improved in the five years since HM Inspectorate of Probation last inspected this issue. This is not good enough. So, from the spring of 2021, we will be introducing a specific new standard into our local inspections on the quality of resettlement work from custody. This will apply to every YOT that has had a child in custody over the year before inspection.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown did bring some temporary relief in terms of local crime rates. Anecdotally, and supported by local data in areas like London, there was a sharp drop in crime rates between April and June, but they have been on the rise again as these restrictions are changed or eased. There are signs in some of the YOTs we have inspected over the last year that teenage knife crime may be coming back under control, but the most recent national knife crime statistics show that knife crime continues to increase year on year. County lines drug supply activity and sexual and criminal exploitation of young people by older adults also remain real concerns, and have continued during the pandemic as organised criminals adapted their markets and delivery methods to a Covid-19 world.

Managing risk of harm

As YOT caseloads have shrunk, they have become more dominated by violent offences. These made up 50 per cent of the court cases of the 16 services we published inspection

¹ From data provided by the inspected YOTs.

² HM Prison and Probation Service. (2020). [Youth custody data](#).

reports on in the last year. They account for 30 per cent of all proven offences by children in the national statistics – an increase of 10 percentage points since 2009. Violence is also the most common type of offence in out-of-court disposals (47 per cent of the cases we looked at in these samples).

Although much of this violence may be against other young people, we've also found significant violence by children against parents, for example by older boys against single mothers, and this violence and controlling behaviour became worse during lockdown in some households. This is a worrying development. Further research and new interventions are needed to support the parents affected, to whom YOTs have as much a duty of care as they do to the child themselves.

The changing nature of the cohort of children being supervised by YOTs (much smaller but more violent) in turn impacts on the risk of harm they present to other people. National assessment statistics show that 85 per cent of children sentenced to a court order were assessed as presenting some form of risk to others, and 29 per cent were considered to present a high or very high risk of harm³. This accords with our own inspection data, where we found that 88 per cent of the post-court sample we inspected and 62 per cent of out-of-court cases presented a medium or high risk of harm.

It is for this reason that our inspections place significant emphasis on the effective assessment and management of risk of harm. So, it has been concerning to see that this remains the weakest area of performance across the 768 cases we have inspected over the last year.

While it is right that each child's own welfare and experience of trauma must be addressed – as reflected in the mantra 'child first, offender second' – a sizeable proportion of these children do also present a risk to others, including their own families. For that reason, it is important not to lose sight of the second part of this formulation, which can happen where YOTs become completely subsumed within children's services departments. In this case, they can lose their separate identity as youth offending teams, which we've found can have a detrimental impact on their performance.

This annual report summarises the results of our thematic inspection of how YOTs have operated since the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, but then goes on to focus on the inspections that we completed in the period before lockdown from June 2019 (Leeds YOT) to March 2020 (Birmingham YOT), which looked at the quality of case supervision before the pandemic struck.

Impact of Covid-19 on YOTs

First and foremost, local YOTs have kept their service functioning and put in place exceptional delivery arrangements, a remarkable feat when all the hurdles of the Covid-19 pandemic are considered. Contact with children was maintained from the onset of lockdown in March, and assessment of wellbeing and risk of harm was good. In addition, we found partnerships with police forces and children's services stayed strong and, in some cases, improved. Work continued at the same level as before lockdown, with panels meeting virtually.

Many YOT staff rose to the challenge, developing new and imaginative ways of keeping in touch with children, such as online messaging and video apps. Where necessary, contact was maintained by way of supervision meetings in public parks and gardens. Many YOTs also distributed food packages, toys and computers to their most vulnerable and isolated families.

³ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the youth justice system](#).

Of course, there have been challenges. Some children were unable to attend school for a variety of reasons, such as not being included in the Department of Education's (DfE) definition of vulnerability. YOTs reported long delays in accessing laptops promised by the DfE, and many children – almost a half of our inspection sample - did not have access to the IT or broadband they needed in order to be home-schooled.

Away from YOTs, we know that courts stopped sitting, resulting in a huge backlog of cases (a 55 per cent increase nationally)⁴ and increasing the amount of time children were spending on remand. This continues to be a challenge, as recovery from the pandemic is ongoing.

For the children themselves, lockdown has been a struggle for all, and our data can only provide a snapshot of what that has been like for many vulnerable and isolated young people. The pandemic has been another adverse experience among the many they have already confronted in their short lives. Covid-19 has amplified their needs and taken away familiar support – they, too, have had to rise to a challenge of their own.

Pre-Covid-19 performance

As with our last annual report, we found significant variation in the performance of the 16 YOTs inspected over the nine months leading up to March 2020, from a YOT that we rated 'Inadequate' against all of our standards (Cardiff YOT) to the first London YOT to be rated 'Outstanding' against our new standards (Camden YOT). Of the 16, we rated seven as 'Outstanding' or 'Good' overall, but nine as 'Requiring improvement' or 'Inadequate'.

As we have inspected different services this year from those included in our last annual report, it is not possible to directly compare the results, but it is concerning to see that scores for the quality of case supervision are lower in some key areas this year. In particular, there were poorer scores for the quality of planning around children's safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others for out-of-court cases, which we found to be sufficient in not much more than half of cases inspected over the past year.

Of the more serious cases coming from court, we also rated a smaller proportion as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' in their supervision, particularly in the way that the risk of harm children present to others is assessed, planned for and reviewed.

Last year we noted that cases dealt with out of court had become an increasing proportion of YOT caseloads. Recent inspections show this trend continuing, with 58 per cent of the YOT caseloads we have inspected over the last year made up of youth cautions or youth conditional cautions (official figures suggest this is 38 per cent nationally).⁴ A further portion of the inspected YOT caseloads were made up of community resolutions, but there is no published data on how widely these disposals are used at local authority level.

The quality of work with out-of-court cases continues to be lower than for court cases. Within this cohort of out-of-court cases, we still find that the quality of work undertaken with non-statutory community resolution cases is significantly lower than the quality of work with statutory youth cautions and youth conditional cautions. There are concerns about the work done to assess and plan for risks of harm associated with this type of case.

Is diversion from the youth justice system always in a child's best interests?

It remains a concern that we continue to find no correlation between our judgements of the quality of individual YOTs and key metrics like the rates of first-time entry to the youth justice system. Indeed, given the efforts that are going into improving the range of services provided by YOTs – including speech and language support, mental and sexual health

⁴ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Youth Justice Statistics: 2018-2019](#).

services, employment training and mentoring – it seems slightly perverse that one of the main measures of their success is deemed to be the number of children who do not get access to these services (because of a focus on getting the first-time entrant (FTE) rate as low as possible).

For many children, a referral by the YOT to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or speech and language services was the first opportunity for a formal assessment – despite concerns existing for some time. So, it may not always be in a child's best interests to dedicate so much effort to keeping them away from what the YOT can provide.

A policy of 'radical non-interventionism', as it was termed in social work circles in the 1970s, may avoid the danger of children becoming labelled as offenders. But it does little to provide them with practical help with their underlying needs and may, in reality, amount to something more like benign neglect, in the absence of any other support or structure in these children's lives.

The fact that an increasing proportion of all first-time entrants to the youth justice system are now coming into that system because of crimes serious enough to go straight to court (45 per cent of all FTEs in the year to March 2019, compared with 10 per cent in 2009) is a concern, and suggests that these children are not getting adequate preventative interventions earlier on. This needs to change.

Reoffending rates remain high despite falling caseloads

It is also of concern that youth reoffending rates remain high and again show little correlation with our judgements of YOS quality. Although national youth reoffending rates fell 2.5 percentage points, to 38.5 per cent in 2019, this was still higher than 10 years previously. And those children who do reoffend are doing more of it, with the frequency of reoffending rate now the highest it has been in the last 10 years.

Although funding of local YOTs has reduced over the past 10 years, statutory caseloads have fallen even faster. This means average caseloads per case manager are likely to be as small as they have ever been, and this has not been an issue in our interviews with staff over the past year. In these circumstances, should we be expecting more in terms of the impact of YOTs on reoffending rates, particularly from those we rate as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' regarding services and quality of assessment?

The conventional counter to this argument is that, while caseloads have been falling, the smaller volume of cases that remain represent a hardcore of more prolifically offending, but also more damaged and vulnerable children who are higher risk both in terms of their own safety and that of other people.

To some extent, our data does back this up. Of the 768 cases that we inspected across 16 services over the past year, 19 per cent were on child protection plans and 18 per cent were in local authority care. We also found that 24 per cent had some form of disability; 32 per cent had a mental health problem; and 47 per cent had a substance abuse issue.

But that makes it even more important that a high-quality service is delivered to each of these children, particularly the most vulnerable.

Children in care are receiving a poorer service

Yet, we often find the opposite. We estimate, for example, that over 4,500 children receiving a caution or starting a court order each year may be looked after, including nearly 700 starting custodial orders. As children move deeper into the criminal justice system, the proportion who are looked after increases – from seven per cent of out-of-court disposals to 19 per cent of first tier cases, to 32 per cent of community order cases, to 42 per cent of

those in custody. An analysis of the quality of supervision of children on YOT caseloads who are in local authority care, for example, shows that the quality of assessment, planning and reviewing of these cases was poorer than for children not in care on almost every standard.

YOTs have a vital role to play in tackling ethnic disproportionality

The other key cohort of young people that has received long overdue attention this year are children from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background. The Black Lives Matter debate has refocused public attention and concern on the disproportionate number of young black men, in particular, who enter the criminal justice system and their treatment by that system.

Although, in absolute terms, a tiny proportion of both white and black, Asian and ethnic minority children enter the youth justice system each year and the numbers are down significantly over the last decade, the small number who do enter are disproportionately likely to be black or Asian. As with children in care, that disproportionality increases in significance the further into the system you travel. In our inspections, 35 per cent of the out-of-court disposal cases we looked at were children from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background, compared with 43 per cent of custody cases (and compared with the 18 per cent of the general youth population they represent).

Our inspections are showing that YOT Management Boards are more conscious of this issue and are seeking to understand the problem, taking to heart David Lammy's maxim that services should either provide a reasonable explanation for the disparity or do something to end it.⁵ Our inspection data shows that black, Asian and minority ethnic children were receiving the same quality of service as white children, in terms of the quality of assessment, planning and delivery, with parents and carers equally involved from each group. But there is a wider role for YOSs in advocating with other local criminal justice and children's services or education partners to deal with the underlying factors that may be causing disproportionality further upstream, before cases reach the doors of a YOT, for example, in relation to exclusions from school or policing or sentencing practice.

Some conclusions

YOTs continue to play a vital role in the youth justice system, dealing with 26,700 of the most challenging and vulnerable children in the country.⁶

Some are doing an outstanding job of this, and continued to do so under the most challenging conditions when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. Others require significant improvement and have struggled to cope.

To be effective, each YOT must successfully straddle the criminal justice system and children's and wider youth services to meet the multiple needs of children while protecting the public and recognising the needs and wishes of victims.

That is a big ask, but for those that deliver, the benefits to the children in their care and to the wider communities they serve can last a lifetime.



Justin Russell

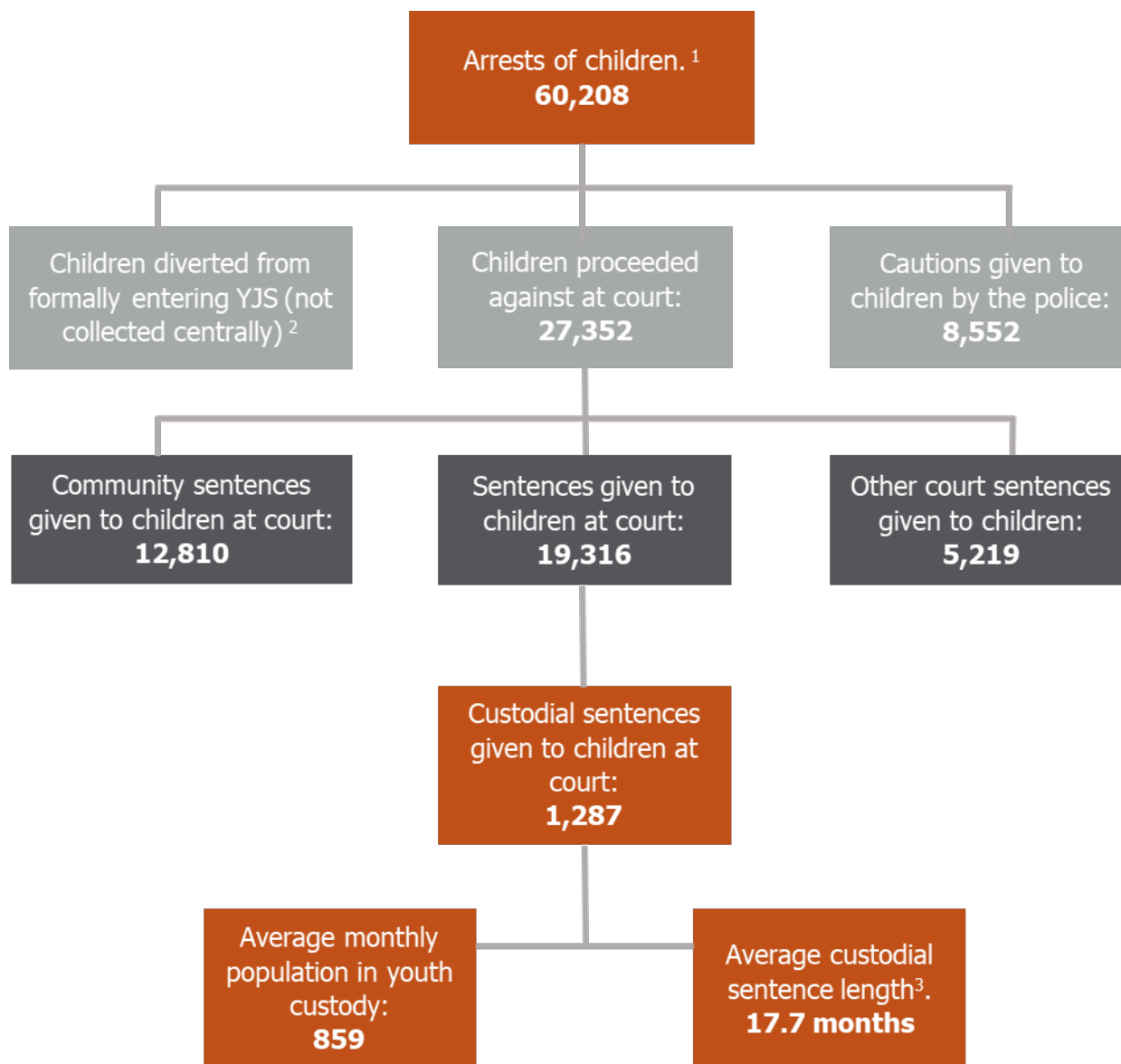
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

⁵ Lammy, David. (2017). [The Lammy Review. An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system.](#) London: Ministry of Justice

⁶ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Youth Justice Statistics: 2018-2019.](#)

Contextual facts

The flow of children through the youth justice system, year ending March 2019 (information provided by Youth Justice Service)



Notes on flow chart:

1. Excluding Lancashire police force. Lancashire police force could not provide data for the year ending March 2019.
2. The number of children diverted from formally entering the Youth Justice System through Community Resolutions (a type of informal out-of-court disposal) or schemes such as Triage is not currently known.
3. Average custodial sentence length refers to the full custodial term imposed (for sentences of a fixed length only), not just the period actually spent in custody.

Our youth inspections 2019-2020

Single and joint youth inspections

The following inspections were published between November 2019 and October 2020:

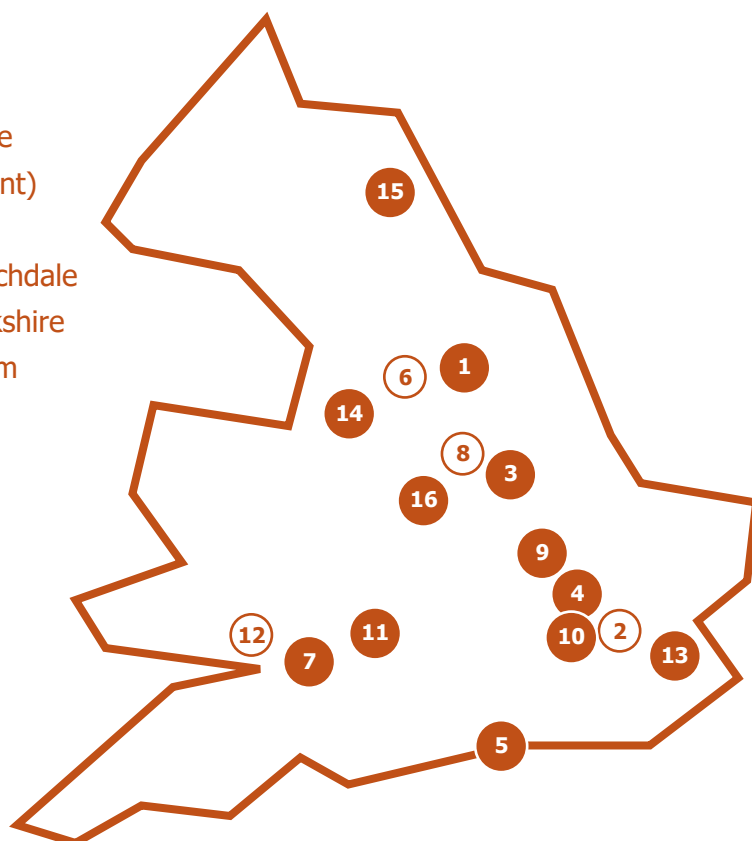
- single inspections involved inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Probation only
- joint inspections were led by HM Inspectorate of Probation and we were joined by colleagues from health, police, education and social care inspectorates.

1 Leeds	9 Luton
2 Croydon (joint)	10 Camden
3 Leicester City	11 Oxfordshire
4 Brent	12 Cardiff (joint)
5 Southampton	13 Medway
6 Bradford (joint)	14 Bury & Rochdale
7 Gloucestershire	15 North Yorkshire
8 Nottingham City (joint)	16 Birmingham

Joint Area Targeted Inspections (JTAI)

Ofsted leads on coordinating these inspections of services for vulnerable children. Our inspectors have joined colleagues from other inspectorates on the following JTAIs:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| • Halton | • Sefton |
| • Milton Keynes | • Plymouth |
| • Newport | • Portsmouth |
| • Bexley | • East Sussex |



Pilot for small YOT inspections

The Inspectorate conducted a pilot to test out the inspection approach for small YOTs:

- Solihull
- Stoke-on-Trent
- Wokingham
- West Berkshire

Inspection ratings 2019-2020

Ratings						1. Operational delivery				2. Court disposals				3. Out of court disposals			
		Service Inspected	Published	Composite score	Overall rating	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
☆	Outstanding	Camden YOS	12/05/2020	31	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
●	Good	Oxfordshire YOS	15/05/2020	28	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆	☆
●	Requires improvement	North Yorkshire YOS	17/09/2020	25	●	☆	●	☆	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆
●	Inadequate	Leicester City CYPJS	07/11/2019	24	●	●	●	☆	●	☆	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Bury & Rochdale YJS	09/06/2020	22	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●
		Brent YOS	18/12/2019	21	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Southampton YOS	23/01/2020	20	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆	☆	●	●	☆	●
		Gloucestershire YOS	28/01/2020	18	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	●
		Medway YOS	04/06/2020	18	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Croydon YOS	17/12/2019	16	●	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Leeds YJS	01/11/2019	16	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	☆
		Luton YJS	29/05/2020	16	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Nottingham City YJS	19/03/2020	15	●	●	●	●	●	☆	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Birmingham YOS	19/10/2020	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Bradford YOT	16/01/2020	7	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Cardiff YOS	02/07/2020	0	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Each YOT is given an overall rating on a four-point scale: 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires improvement' and 'Inadequate'. The scores from the individual standards are aggregated to produce the overall rating. Adding these scores produces a composite 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'.

The big picture

Changes in the youth justice cohort

In the year ending March 2019 (the most recent for which figures are available), the number of children receiving their first caution or court sentence fell by 18 per cent from the year before, continuing a 12-year trend in declining numbers of young people entering the youth justice system.⁷ The scale of this continuing drop has been vast, with the number of new statutory cases (all cases going through court) falling from a high of 110,815 in the year ending March 2007 to only 11,928 in the year ending March 2019. However, this fall does not take account of the increase in the number of non-statutory community resolutions, for which no published figures exist. The number of further offences by young people has undergone a similarly large fall, dropping 18 per cent in 2019 from the year before and from a high in 2008 of 117,368 to only 15,729 in 2019.⁷

The number of young people in custody remained largely stable over the three years to 2019, following a huge decline from its peak in 2009, dropping from a high of 2,932 young people in custody down to 832 in 2019. This number has fallen sharply again to a low of 563 prisoners under the age of 18 by July 2020.⁸ While all forms of custody have declined in use, the greatest fall has been in young people imprisoned in young offender institutions, which housed 74 per cent fewer young people in 2019 than they did in 2009. Over the same period, the use of secure training centres fell by 38 per cent and secure children's homes by 56 per cent. The proportion of young people imprisoned with a detention and training order has dropped over the last decade, while the proportion imprisoned on remand, and the proportion imprisoned through a Section 91 order have both increased.⁷

Reoffending by young people

While it is not possible to directly compare reoffending rates over long periods due to changes in the way this data is collected and analysed, and while the number of reoffences has dropped along with the number of young people in the youth justice system, there appears to have been little change in reoffending rates over the last decade, although the average number of offences for those who do reoffend has increased from an average of 3.05 offences per reoffender in 2009 to 4.05 in 2018. These figures conceal considerable variation in the levels of reoffending between different types of order. Out-of-court disposals such as youth cautions and youth conditional cautions had a reoffending rate of 26.6 per cent in 2018, while youth rehabilitation orders (YROs) and custodial orders had much higher rates, of 61.7 per cent and 69.3 per cent respectively.⁹ This is to be expected, as YROs and custodial sentences are much more serious sentences that are more likely to be used with those with more serious and entrenched offending behaviour than cautions. Cautions are more often reserved for low-level offending that does not reach the threshold for a court sentence. There is no published data on the reoffending rate or the frequency of reoffending of children who have received non-statutory community resolutions – an increasingly serious gap in the evidence base for youth justice.

Knife crime

While official police figures on recorded knife crime show a total of 46,265 offences in the year ending March 2020, these include adult as well as youth offences. Annual data on

⁷ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Youth Justice Statistics: 2018-2019](#).

⁸ HM Prison and Probation Service. (2020). [Youth custody data](#).

⁹ Ministry of Justice. (2020). [Proven Offending Statistics: January to March 2018](#).

hospital admissions shows that, between 2016/2017 and 2018/2019, the proportion of injuries caused by assault with a sharp object that were suffered by young people aged 10 to 17 increased slightly from 10.7 per cent (473 cases) to 12 per cent (614 cases).

Our recent YOS inspections have revealed some troubling gaps in the quality of work and provision of interventions for children involved in knife crime. Case managers sometimes need to carry out more comprehensive analysis and dig deeper into the circumstances of the offence. We have seen a YOS using an outdated knife crime intervention, and other YOTs that could not provide all eligible relevant children with a place on their courses. However, we have seen some good work. For example, we were impressed by Croydon YOT, whose solid multi-agency response was contributing to reductions in knife crime and gang violence. Nottingham YJS is delivering a knife crime awareness programme, with their work currently being evaluated by a local university.

We had intended to sponsor an original piece of research on knife crime this year, but the Covid-19 pandemic has paused that work. We hope to publish our findings on good and promising work by YOSs in 2021.

County lines

The county lines crime model involves organised criminal groups selling drugs in areas other than their own locality using dedicated mobile phone lines, 'deal lines', to take orders. County lines involves the criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults to transport drugs, weapons and money to and from out-of-area locations. Violence, including sexual violence, is a common form of coercion. Over 3,000 individual deal line numbers were identified by the National Crime Agency in 2019.

The National Youth Agency reported that county lines operations had capitalised on the Covid-19 crisis. They have found vulnerable children easier to locate and groom, as children have been spending more time in their home neighbourhoods and the lockdown saw a withdrawal of youth services, including YOSs, from communities.¹⁰

As YOSs enter the recovery period, they need to be equally agile in their response to criminal exploitation. A good example to follow is Camden YOT. This YOT was at the heart of a strong partnership with police, children's services and other key agencies. Staff shared intelligence in daily teleconference risk briefings and referred identified vulnerable children to appropriate sources of help, including its own specialist adviser, and interventions in police custody suites.

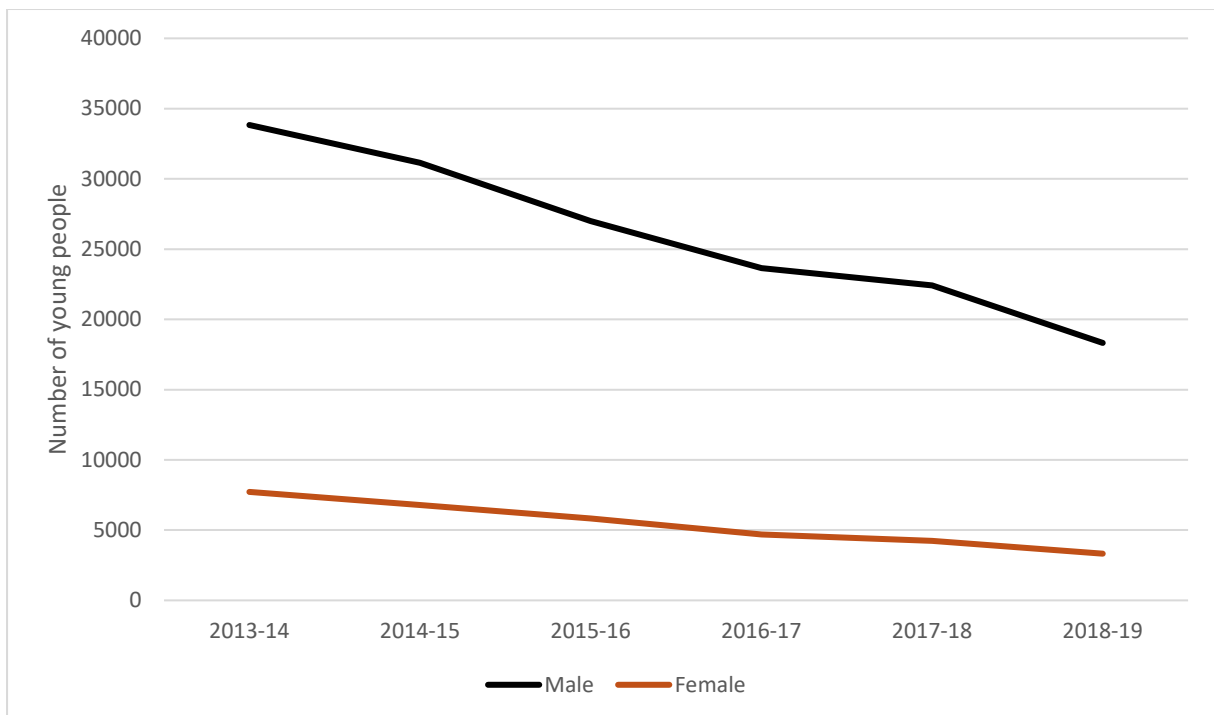
¹⁰ National Youth Agency. (2020). [Hidden in Plain Sight](#).

The needs of children in the youth justice system

The most recent data available from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) is from 2018/2019 and shows that, in that year, total youth offending service statutory caseloads across England and Wales were down 19 per cent from the year before. This is part of a continuing trend of shrinking statutory caseloads that has been ongoing for at least a decade.

Statutory caseloads in 2018/2019 were nearly half the size that they were in 2013/2014. Proportionally, girls and young women now make up significantly less of the caseload: 15 per cent in 2018/2019 compared with 19 per cent in 2013/2014.

Figure 1: Gender of children on YOT caseloads



What does our inspection cohort look like?

In our 2019/2020 inspections, 88 per cent of the post-court cases we inspected were male and 12 per cent were female. For out-of-court work, 82 per cent of the cases were male and 18 per cent were female (to some extent the proportions are determined by our approach to selecting the case samples).

Overall, our aggregated inspection findings across both years of post-court work show that more females were in the care of the local authority and a higher number were likely to have been placed in care out of the local area. Girls subject to an out-of-court disposal were twice as likely to be in care as their male counterparts.

Girls were more likely to have received a referral order, whereas boys received more stringent disposals, with higher number of YROs and custodial sentences (the custodial cohort were 98 per cent male and 2 per cent female). A similar proportion of both groups received community resolutions (35 per cent male; 44 per cent female), but more boys were subject to a youth conditional caution. This may be because more boys had previously received an out-of-court disposal sanction. Girls were more likely to have committed

offences of violence (67 per cent for females and 46 per cent for males). Boys were more likely to have committed drug offences (12 per cent for males and 3 per cent for females).

Younger children aged 10 to 14 received the highest number of out-of-court-disposals, with only seven per cent of this age group being made subject to statutory court orders. The likelihood of receiving a post-court intervention increased with age. By the time children reached age 17 to 18, over half had received a court-imposed sanction.

Education

Children known to YOTs – both school age and over-16s – encounter challenges in accessing education, training and employment. Access to education was a problem for nearly two-thirds of the children sentenced to court orders in the cases we inspected. Although the situation was better for children subject to out-of-court disposals, access to education was still a problem for 47 per cent of the children in our case sample.

Levels of school exclusions for children on YOT caseloads were high, such as in Gloucester, and there was an over-reliance on the use of pupil referral units in Luton. YOT Management Boards were not always aware of exclusion 'hotspots' or had not developed strategies to address this issue. We found that some pupils placed in alternative education were unable to take GCSEs and there was not always enough suitable provision for children with complex needs.

We were concerned to find that children were not always receiving their legal entitlement to education and this was not being addressed strategically. In five of the 16 inspected areas, we made specific recommendations to local authorities to improve education provision to children.

Significant numbers of children had education, health and care plans, but their identified needs were not always reflected in YOT assessments and casework. Too often, the education, health and care plan had not been obtained due to poor processes between the YOT and education departments.

In Leicester, there was evidence of good work to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. Educational psychologists are linked to the YOT and work alongside colleagues who are based in the school, so that schools feel supported in managing children's behaviour. Each child who goes into custody is allocated an educational psychologist to ensure that their educational needs are being met, especially during the transition periods into and out of custody. There is a 'fair access panel', which is attended by senior leaders from all schools, including the academies. The YOT education worker attends the panel to advocate for the child, and the school must demonstrate that it has done all it can before it considers exclusion. The schools hold each other to account for any exclusions, and each school must seek support from the pupil referral unit before an exclusion is agreed.

Over-16s

In most YOSs, information, advice and guidance are available to young people over the age of 16 to help them find suitable education, training or employment (ETE). However, the impact of this support was sometimes limited. In one area, the proportion of YOS children over statutory school age who were not in ETE was 37 per cent, compared with two per cent in the general population¹¹. This sort of disparity was not uncommon and needs to be fully understood and addressed, particularly given the significance of education in supporting desistance.

¹¹ Data provided by the inspected YOT.

Good practice

Two of the inspected YOTs (North Yorkshire and Leeds) had commissioned services from 'The Skill Mill' (Skills4work), a project that engages children assessed as the highest risk and most vulnerable and who may struggle to find suitable provision to meet their needs. The project works with up to four young people at any one time, for up to a maximum of six months. Children work four days per week and then undertake functional skills and vocational qualifications one day per week (for example, in construction skills or health and safety). If opportunities for employment arise, they are supported into full-time employment or apprenticeships.

Children's social care

Looked after children make up a significant proportion of the cases we look at during our inspections and of all the children dealt with by the criminal justice system. Of the 24,000 young people starting a court order or caution in 2018/2019, we estimate that 4,500 may have been looked after children, including nearly 700 children starting custodial orders.

Of the cases we inspected over the past two years, 26 per cent of children subject to a court order had been placed in the care of the local authority at some point during their sentence. Furthermore, 21 per cent of children had been subject to a child protection plan or Section 47 enquiry at some point during their sentence. This group of children are particularly vulnerable and often the victims of trauma and exploitation. Of the inspected cases who were in care, 33 per cent involved children who also had a disability.

Close working between the YOS and children's social care is essential to ensure vulnerable children receive the right level of care and intervention at the right time. These children can pose a risk of harm to others while also being vulnerable themselves. Professionals need to be clear on their roles and responsibilities, particularly given the different legislative frameworks under which they operate. They need to balance welfare needs with an appropriate focus on offending behaviour and the risks to others.

We found that partnership work between the YOS and children's social care is inconsistent and not always effective in meeting the needs of children and keeping them safe. Roles and responsibilities are sometimes blurred. Even where authorities had signed up to a 'child first' or trauma-informed approach to understanding offending behaviour, the vulnerability of YOS children was not always recognised. YOS staff were not always present at strategy meetings and looked after children reviews when they would have had important information to contribute. As a result, joint planning was often weak and the delivery of interventions uncoordinated.

As a result of these failings, the quality of services delivered to children in the care system was not equal to the quality of those delivered to other children and was particularly weak for children placed in accommodation outside their local area.

Table 1: Aggregate ratings from 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 for 1,253 court cases inspected across 42 YOTs

	Assessment	Planning	Delivery	Reviewing
Children not in care	Good	Good	Good	Good
Children in care living inside the inspected area	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Children in care living outside the inspected area	Good	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

We saw an example of good practice in Leeds, where the YOT had secured funding to recruit a specialist looked after children worker, who not only worked directly with this cohort of children, but also delivered wider training to other agencies and partners on the specific needs of these children.

Children in custody

In the cases we inspected, the children sentenced to custody were different to other YOT cases in several ways (see Annexe 1). Our inspection data shows that:

- they were more likely to have been a looked after child (42 per cent compared with 21 per cent).
- they had more previous convictions, with 37 per cent having at least six previous convictions, compared with six per cent of the non-custodial population.
- they were older, with 33 per cent of these cases being 18 at the time their cases were inspected compared with 21 per cent of children sentenced to community orders.
- black, Asian and minority ethnic children make up 42 per cent of the custody cases compared with 34 per cent of the community sentenced children.

In addition, children sentenced to custody:

- have more safety and wellbeing concerns – these were assessed as high or very high by the case manager for 83 per cent of these children, compared with 46 per cent of children not sentenced to custody.
- have been assessed as posing a higher risk of serious harm to others, with case managers assessing the children sentenced to custody as posing a high or very high risk of harm to others in 85 per cent of cases compared with 23 per cent of the children sentenced to community orders.

Children sentenced to custody, therefore, have complex needs. They have often spent time in care, and there are higher levels of concern about their safety and wellbeing and risk of harm. They tend to be older, and at the point of transition to adult probation services. This poses additional challenges to youth justice services at the point of release. Although we found some examples of good practice, in general we were concerned about the support offered to children coming out of custody. Our joint thematic inspection of this issue with HMI Prisons, published in October 2019, showed very little progress since 2015. Because of

this, and to promote improvement at local level, from spring 2021 we will be inspecting and rating every YOT that has had custody cases on the quality of its work with those cases.¹²

Good practice

In Camden there is an Enhanced Constructive Resettlement programme, based on the five principles of constructive resettlement.¹³ This project, which is in partnership with New Horizons Youth Centre, has two resettlement workers who visit the children in custody every week, and are actively involved in the resettlement planning. This is supported by a clinical psychologist. This enhanced support continues on release back into the community. The offer of enhanced resettlement continues for those children who will transition to adult services to maintain a consistent attachment to a trusted adult.

Good practice

In Derby, all children sentenced to custody are referred to the Custody Scrutiny Panel. This multi-agency panel, which includes representatives from the custodial estate, works with the child from the start of the sentence to the end of licence. It scrutinises resettlement plans, and offers enhanced supervision and support for those children who need it.

Good practice

South and West Yorkshire Resettlement Consortium has been in place since 2014. Its remit is to improve resettlement outcomes for the children in the nine youth offending services in that area. This has included the introduction of resettlement clinics, improved multi-agency partnership work, increased advocacy for the children in custody and an accommodation agreement standard for children. In 2019, the consortium was awarded YJB Constructive Resettlement Pathfinder status to support other areas to develop a similar approach.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic children

The Lammy Review (2017)¹⁴ highlighted concerns that 40 per cent of the youth custody population were black, Asian or minority ethnic children. This figure has since risen to over 50 per cent, despite this cohort making up only 18 per cent of the youth population (10 to 17 years) in England and Wales.¹⁵ And that problem is not restricted to custody.

Twenty-six per cent of children who received an out-of-court disposal in our inspections were identified as black, Asian or minority ethnic and this rose to 41 per cent for post-court sentences (including custody).

There has been considerable movement in the ethnic characteristics of young people in the national YOT cohort. Since 2013/2014, the proportion of the caseload that identifies as white has dropped from 75 per cent to 70 per cent. In the same timeframe, the proportion

¹² HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2020). [Response to the consultation and ratings for inspection of youth offending services](#).

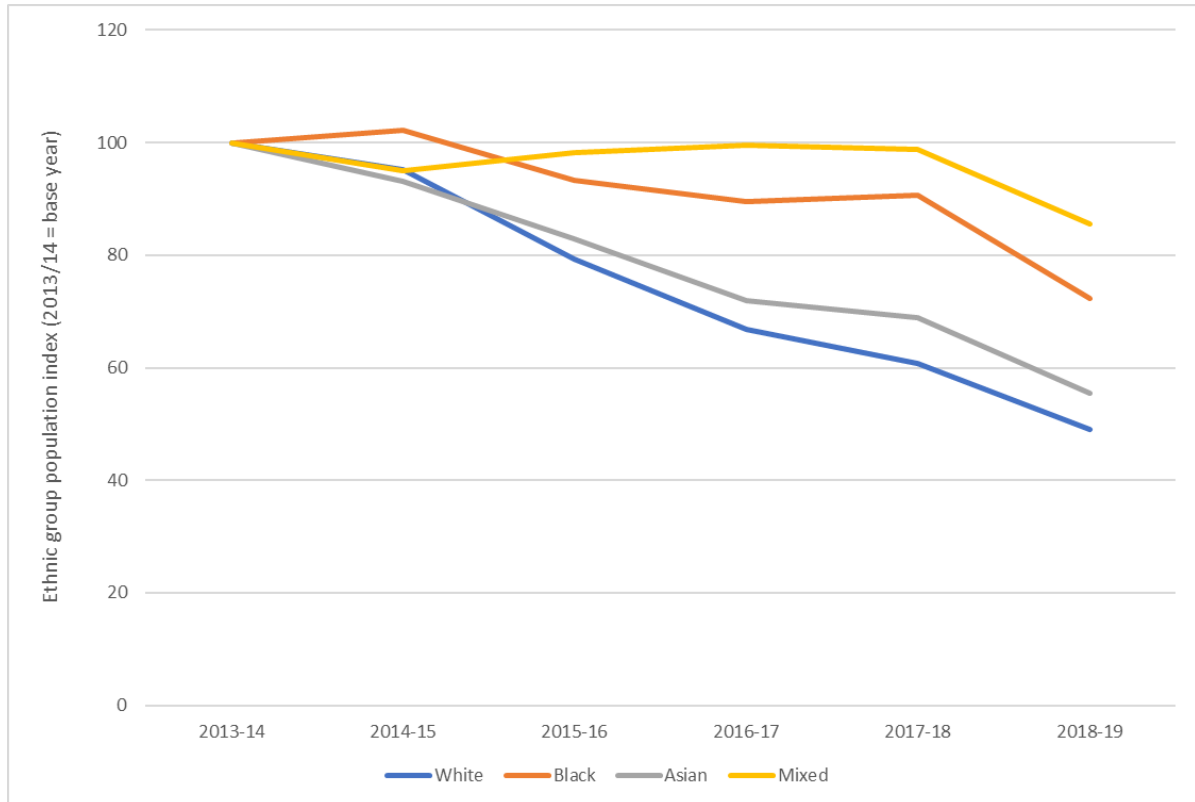
¹³ Youth Justice Board. (2018). How to make resettlement constructive.

¹⁴ Lammy, David. (2017). [The Lammy Review. An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system](#). London: Ministry of Justice.

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics. (2012). Census 2011.

of young people identifying as black has increased from eight per cent of the total caseload to 11 per cent and the proportion who identify as mixed ethnicity from five per cent of the caseload to eight per cent.

Figure 2: Numbers and ethnicity of children on YOT caseloads



Where disproportionality occurs, YOS Management Boards were aware of the issue and keen to understand the reasons for it, both at an operational and strategic level. Some had clear monitoring and action plans in place. There were some good examples of Management Boards taking a proactive and positive approach but, despite this, we saw little evidence of improved outcomes for children.

Good practice

In Oxfordshire, one of the Management Board's priorities is to understand and mitigate disproportionality. The Board has carried out work to map this and has produced an action plan. The action plan includes visiting other YOTs that perform better in this area and undertaking 'blind' out-of-court disposal panels to try to mitigate unconscious bias. The Board is also undertaking a thematic review of custody to better understand why so many children from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are in custody.

Good practice

In Camden, children of black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage are disproportionately represented among those receiving the more restrictive or intensive sentences, including custodial sentences, and more likely to be remanded than their white counterparts. The YOT has committed itself to addressing this and has incorporated the issue into its Youth Justice Plan.

The service has convened and chairs an inter-borough London group to help understand and address relevant issues, and is working with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to develop an action plan for London to address disproportionality based on ethnicity. The YOT is also working with Highbury Corner Youth Court to scrutinise remand decisions to help address disproportionality issues. All practitioners have attended training in disproportionality and unconscious bias, and the YOT is trying actively to recruit referral panel volunteers with a black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage.

Although the data shows that ethnic minority children are disproportionately represented in YOT caseloads, analysis of our case inspection data suggests that the quality of support and supervision offered to these children by YOTs is not significantly different to that offered to white children. If anything, we found that quality for court cases was lower for children of white ethnic origin in 2019/2020 and was lower than in 2018/2019. (Though the picture was reversed for out of court cases).

Table 2: Aggregate ratings for 2019/2020 for 462 court cases inspected across the 16 YOTs

	Assessment	Planning	Implementation and delivery	Reviewing
White children	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Requires improvement
Black children	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Good
Asian children	Requires improvement	Good	Good	Good
Mixed heritage children	Good	Requires improvement	Good	Inadequate
Other	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate

Table 3: Aggregate ratings for 2019/2020 for 306 inspected out-of-court cases inspected across 16 YOTs

	Assessment	Planning	Implementation and delivery	Joint working
White children	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Good
Black children	Inadequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Requires improvement
Asian children	Good	Good	Good	Good
Mixed heritage children	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement	Requires improvement

Covid-19

In March, the Covid-19 pandemic saw monumental change in how YOTs had to deliver services to children. YOTs were required to continue to keep the public and children safe, while maintaining safe working practices for staff. In June and July, inspectors undertook a thematic inspection of this work. We held a number of focus groups and remotely assessed seven YOTs, looking at 70 cases in total.

Inspectors found that YOTs had worked with flexibility and commitment to respond to the impact of Covid-19. They had effectively managed the balance of responding to the risks and needs of children and families and keeping staff safe. Initial business continuity planning was effective, assisted by being designed to meet local needs and coordinated with local authority planning and command structures. As the situation changed, operating models were reviewed and adapted quickly. Despite some variation in the services provided, YOTs quickly moved to business as usual but delivered their work differently. Partnerships were sustained at a strategic and operational level.

Staff had risen to the challenge, working with dedication and commitment to keep some very vulnerable children as safe as possible. For those children who posed the greatest risk to others, face-to-face contact, but delivered using a side-by-side and outdoors method, had in the main been maintained.

Children's responses to the pandemic have broadly fallen into two groups. The smaller group have complied with restrictions and used the time to reflect on their future; the majority have struggled with the lockdown and this period has amplified their needs. For some, the pandemic was an additional trauma to an already extensive list. For all children, key aspects of support for desistance have gone.

As children in contact with YOTs were not included in the Department for Education's definition of a vulnerable child (unless they also had an education, health and care plan or were on a child protection plan), they were not automatically offered places in school during lockdown. However, we know that this group of children struggle with school and there can be high exclusion rates in normal times. In our sample, a tiny number of children attended school during lockdown, and 41 per cent of children did not even have access to schoolwork. It is not yet known what the long-term impact will be on these children.

The nature of service delivery had changed, and inspectors saw innovation and benefits that services intend to take forward. These include the benefits of phone contact with children when they are getting to know staff; adaptation of programmes to be delivered by partners or virtually; and parents becoming more involved in delivering work to address offending-related needs. Some areas provided interventions for parents to deliver and some parents reported that they valued this, as it gave them a better understanding of the work their child was doing with the YOT.

When there was a pre-existing face-to-face relationship between the case manager and child, this was able to move onto a virtual platform with ease, with most children preferring telephone contact when asked. Where the cases were new, the initial assessment completed by telephone was more difficult. However, those children inspectors spoke to reported that they valued building up the relationship by phone before meeting the case manager. They found that the first face to face meeting was then easier.

YOTs developed a mixed delivery model. This included some remote interventions, with case managers sending material out in advance and using phone contacts to discuss it, as well as case managers sourcing suitable video clips for discussion and moving pre-existing

programmes online. YOT staff undertook garden visits, bike rides and 'walk and talks' in local streets or parks. These were effective ways of engaging with children away from the traditional office environment. However, some staff did report that it was difficult to have conversations about confidential issues when walking on busy main roads, or where neighbours could overhear.

Violence against parents

There were two other issues where Covid-19 may have added to an ongoing concern. The first is teenage violence towards parents. Many YOTs were aware of this issue before lockdown and some already provided specialist support (for example in Hampshire and Medway). The requirement for children to stay at home during the lockdown period heightened tensions, with parents often at an increased risk from their children. Being at home together, without the usual space and time away from each other, meant relationships sometimes worsened, resulting in violence.

Researchers from the Universities of Manchester and Oxford¹⁶ carried out a survey of 104 parents with previous experience of child on parent violence and 47 social workers who worked with these families. They found that 70 per cent of the parents reported an increase in violent episodes during initial lockdown and 69 per cent of practitioners reported an increase in referrals for this issue, with 64 per cent saying the severity of these had increased.

While domestic violence received media attention and financial support for services to support victims, this type of offending did not, potentially placing parents at increased risk of aggressive behaviour from their child. Inspectors saw examples where YOTs identified this and were responding with increased contact from their parenting support workers.

Out-of-area placements of looked after children

A second area where the practice during onset of Covid-19 raised questions was in relation to looked after children. Vulnerable children were still placed in children's homes out of their home area during the period of lockdown and beyond. When this took place, the 'home' YOT, where the child was from, still asked the 'host' YOT, where the child was placed, to undertake the contacts while the child was there. As these contacts were remote, by telephone or other means, there was no reason the home YOT could not have continued to undertake these contacts with the child. This would maintain continuity for the child.

YOT staff and partners reported that there was much better attendance at case conferences and other multi-agency forums with the use of online virtual meetings, and many would like to see this method continue. However, it did highlight the issue of lack of access to different databases, such as children's social care, for certain YOT staff.

There are some issues that YOT managers and leaders will need to consider when planning for the future and the potential for further local lockdowns. These issues include IT and the 'digital divide' for staff and children – those who do and do not have access to laptops or broadband – and the impact of the backlog of cases that are starting to come through court.

Overall, YOTs had responded quickly and creatively, with the support of partner agencies, to meeting the needs of the children they supervised.

¹⁶ Condry, R., Miles, C., Brunton-Douglas, T. and Oladapo, A. (2020). [Experiences of Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence in the Covid-19 Pandemic](#). University of Oxford.

Pre-Covid-19 inspection findings

A) Overview

Figure 3: Proportion of overall ratings for the 26 YOTs inspected in 2018/2019 and the 16 inspected in 2019/2020

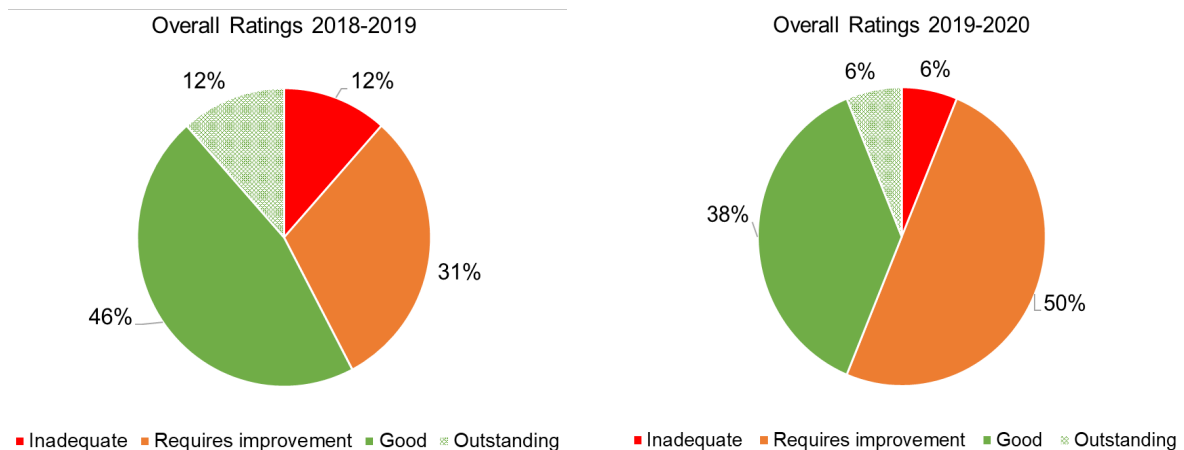
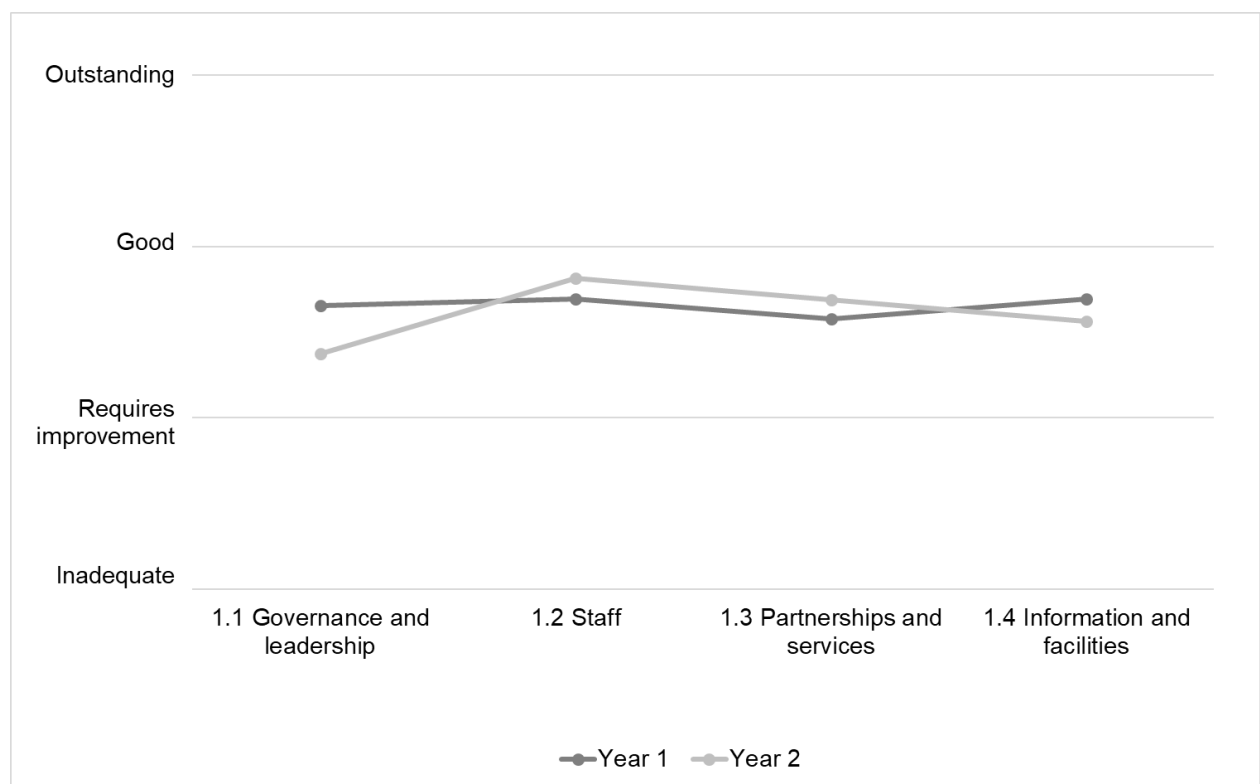


Figure 4: Average organisational delivery ratings for the 26 YOTs inspected in 2018/2019 and the 16 YOTs inspected in 2019/2020



Over the past 12 months we have rated governance and leadership 'Outstanding' in two services, and 'Good' in a further four. This equates to about 38 per cent of the services we inspected and means that the remaining 63 per cent were rated 'Requires improvement' or

'Inadequate'.¹⁷ These findings show that there is significant room for improvement in the effectiveness of YOS governance and leadership.

The key weaknesses identified related to:

- a lack of scrutiny applied to partnerships by Management Boards.
- limited understanding of the needs of children at a strategic level.
- staff not being aware of the strategic priorities and their role in achieving them.
- partnerships, including education, not sufficiently prioritising or meeting the needs of YOS children.

The quality of the management oversight of casework was assessed as lower in the YOTs inspected in the second year of this inspection programme. In 2018/2019, we assessed that management oversight was effective in two-thirds of cases. In 2019/2020, it was good enough in just over half of the inspected cases. Where management oversight was found to be insufficient, it lacked rigour and challenge: it did not offer clear direction, actions were not followed up, and there was no evidence that cases were escalated appropriately.

Although we did find examples of outstanding services in 2019/2020 – for example, Camden YOT, the first London or urban youth offending service to get this rating – we had very significant concerns about other major urban services, notably Cardiff, Birmingham and Bradford YOTs.

When we inspected Birmingham, which is the biggest YOT in the country, we looked at almost 100 cases and found practice to be inadequate in five areas due to the quality of work delivered to safeguard children and protect the public. Bradford, another large service, was inadequate across all of our supervision standards for court cases, with particularly poor findings in relation to the work done to keep children and the public safe. Similarly, we had serious concerns about the quality of work delivered by Cardiff YOT, which was assessed as inadequate on all 12 of our standards.

In these three services, we found that there had been challenges in terms of YOT leadership. Two had experienced multiple changes in head of service in a short timeframe, leading to a lack of stability. In one YOT, there had been insufficient capacity within the senior leadership team, leaving managers pulled in several different directions to keep things going. This made delivering the YOS Youth Justice Plan and monitoring improvements very difficult. While staff were mostly doing their best in their work with children, they were not receiving the support they needed to guide and improve their practice. An absence of consistent management scrutiny of performance meant that deficits had not been identified or effectively addressed.

In services where governance and leadership were rated 'Inadequate', there were few effective systems for identifying, capturing and managing issues and risks. Mitigating actions had not shown enough impact. There was no clear escalation policy or processes to remove barriers to effective joint working at operational and senior levels. There was minimal evidence of learning being used to drive improvement, and action to improve services was not taken when it was required. There was limited understanding of the needs of the children supervised by the YOS. Profiling lacked sophistication and information was not used sufficiently well. Children's needs were not being addressed, and children were unable to access some services in a timely way or at all. There was minimal quality assurance or evaluation of the services delivered. Consequently, leaders and managers did not adequately

¹⁷ In some instances, due to the rounding up or down of figures, the total may not be equal 100 per cent.

monitor the quality of provision and address shortfalls or deteriorations in services or outcomes achieved by children known to the YOS.

By contrast, where governance and leadership were 'Good' or 'Outstanding', Boards had active oversight of the formulation and implementation of the Youth Justice Plan. They used a wealth of local data and information from the YOS and partners intelligently to: help measure the success of strategic initiatives; identify and address risks to the delivery of these initiatives; and identify further areas for consideration and learning.

In these services, all statutory partners were represented on the Board. There was good attendance from Board members, who were of at the right level of seniority to make decisions and commit resources. There was joint ownership of the delivery of the Youth Justice Plan, which set the direction for service delivery, and all relevant partners understood their individual agency's role and responsibility in preventing and/or reducing offending.

The role of head of service

In addition to strong Management Boards, good and outstanding YOTs had strong and stable managers. We have found that the head of service role for a YOT is critical to high performance. They are responsible for coordinating the delivery of local youth justice services in conjunction with partner agencies and for managing the operation of the YOS according to the Youth Justice Plan. The head of service manages the YOT staffing, finances and resources. Through their attendance at strategic meetings, they make sure that YOS children are considered in the agendas of other agencies. They are responsible for driving up performance and delivering high-quality services across the YOS, improving outcomes for children, supporting their safety and wellbeing, and prioritising the protection of victims and the public.

The head of service is also the key link with statutory partners such as children's services, police, probation and health, as well as other stakeholders such as the courts and the voluntary sector, promoting collaboration and joint working. Guidance on effective modern youth offending partnerships recognises the challenges that can be experienced in bringing agencies together to meet the needs of children in the youth justice system and the role of the head of service in addressing this. It says that heads of service 'should not be 'buried' within the management structure of any of the partner agencies', and they should have 'clear access as appropriate to the local authority chief executive, if differences between agencies are impeding the work of the youth offending team'.¹⁸

In poorly performing YOSs, we found that changes in head of service or unsuitable interim arrangements had a negative impact on the quality of services. In one YOT, we found the post had been covered for a period by a manager from a housing team and then by another manager from children's social care who had a large portfolio and could not dedicate enough time to the YOT.

In most services with good or outstanding performance, there had been a consistent head of service who demonstrated a strong understanding of the role, function and working of the service. They were integrated into the wider social care senior management team and well supported by the partnership.

¹⁸ Youth Justice Board. (2014). [Modern Youth Offending Partnerships – Guidance on effective youth offending team governance in England](#).

YOT funding

Funding for YOTs has dropped significantly over the last 10 years, by 39 per cent from 2011 to 2019, with a consistent year-on-year fall in funding from the two largest sources, the central YJB grant and local authority contributions.¹⁹ Only funding from Police and Crime Commissioners (beginning in 2015) and the Welsh Government (for Welsh YOTs only) have remained broadly stable. There are some national funding streams that individual YOTs can apply for, such as the Anti-Knife Crime Community Fund, MOPAC funding and the Early Intervention Fund. Inspectors saw examples of this funding being used for specific work with children.

Although funding has fallen, the volumes of children and young people officially entering the youth justice system, and therefore on YOT statutory caseloads, have fallen even further. Generally, this has protected the amount of YOS spending per case under statutory supervision, keeping caseloads manageable and protecting some of the specialist services embedded within them (though not the wider range of local authority youth services, for which a recent YMCA survey suggests funding reduced 71 per cent in real terms between 2010/2011 and 2018/2019).²⁰

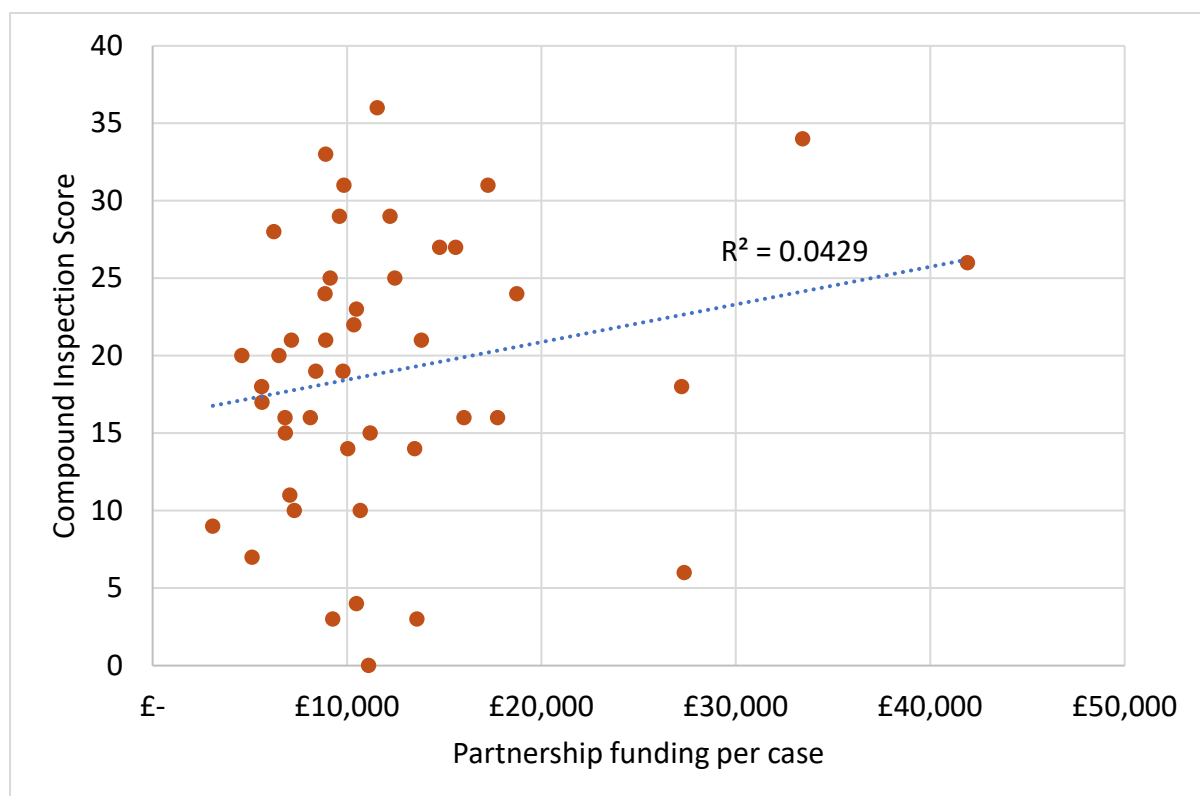
In the 16 YOTs we inspected in 2018/2020, there was a range of caseloads per case manager and, in marked contrast to our probation inspections, few YOT workers reported that their caseloads were unmanageable. Cases can vary in complexity and length, however, from a relatively straightforward community resolution to a high-risk child being released from custody. Across the 16 YOTs we inspected, we found a large variation in the amount of funding available to them. Funding for one YOT was the equivalent of £5,109 per case under supervision based on YJB data (the lowest of the services we inspected) but the highest was the equivalent of £27,204 per case supervised²¹. The YOTs we have rated 'Inadequate' over the past two years have not necessarily been those with the lowest spend per child; in fact, overall, we did not see any correlation between the cost and quality of services delivered.

¹⁹ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Youth Justice Statistics: 2018-2019..](#)

²⁰ YMCA. (2020). [Out of service.](#)

²¹ This calculation does not include non-statutory community resolution cases for which there is no national data, but which can make up a significant proportion of some caseloads.

Figure 5: Relationship between case funding and inspection ratings^[OBJ]



B) Supervision of court cases

Most children are sentenced in youth courts. These are special magistrates' courts for children aged between 10 and 17. A youth court has either a district judge or three magistrates. The magistrates who sit in youth courts must be specially trained. They are less formal than magistrates' courts and the children are called by their first names. Offences considered summary, or 'either way' offences can be dealt with by the youth court. The Crown Court is used for sentencing more serious 'indictable' offences.²²

There are three main community sentences a court can give. These are referral orders, youth rehabilitation orders, and reparation orders. The youth court can also impose a detention and training order, which can last from four months to two years and contains a custodial element.²³ For the most serious offences, sentencing is carried out by the Crown Court, which can impose a longer period of custody.²⁴

Over the last 10 years, there has been a significant reduction in the number of children being sentenced at court. Children were sentenced by a court on 19,300 occasions in 2019, the most recent year for which figures are available. This is 78 per cent lower than 10 years ago. The proportion for each sentence type has remained broadly the same, with most sentences being community sentences (66 per cent), and seven per cent being sentenced to custody. Of the community sentences, 65 per cent were referral orders, 34 per cent were youth rehabilitation orders, and one per cent were reparation orders.

²² Offences are categorised as summary, either way or indictable based on the seriousness of the offence.

²³ Gov.uk. [Community sentences if you are under 18](#).

²⁴ Section 91 and Section 92 sentences are longer than two years and can only be imposed when the offence is identified as a grave crime.

The remaining 27 per cent of sentences included fines, conditional and absolute discharges and other less common disposals. In most cases, YOTs are not involved in these sentences.²⁵

In the last 10 years, there has been a 10 per cent rise in sentences for children for violent offences. This is a very broad range of offences. It includes common assault, which is generally considered less serious, grievous bodily harm and possession of a weapon. The main offence types last year for sentenced children were violence against the person (30 per cent of offences), theft and handling and criminal damage.²⁵

Our inspectors look at a range of cases that have been sentenced by the court at each YOT. This includes referral orders, which were the most frequently occurring court order inspected, and custody cases, which were 14 per cent of the cases we inspected. YOTs often report that, while court caseloads have gone down, the complexity of the cases has risen.

Inspectors found that, across the last two years, just over a quarter of court cases inspected were assessed as high risk of harm to others, and there was an increase in cases assessed as presenting high safety and wellbeing concerns, with this being 34 per cent in our 2018/2019 inspections, increasing to 39 per cent in 2019/20. There has also been a slight increase in the percentage of cases we inspect that receive a court disposal for violent offences and an increase in the percentage of children identified as black, Asian or minority ethnic, with this rising from 28 per cent in 2018/2019 to 40 per cent of post-court cases in our 2019/2020 inspections.

Our inspectors have been concerned to see a significant increase in the time it is now taking from the commission of an offence by a child to their court hearing and sentence. This is mainly due to the police process of 'released under investigation',²⁶ with the removal of police bail sometimes resulting in children being released under police investigation for long periods, in some cases as long as a year.

These delays in cases coming to court are likely to have been further lengthened as a result of the C-19 pandemic, which led to the temporary closure of many courts. Youth court backlogs had increased 55 per cent by the end of June 2020 compared with a year previously. This increase ranged from 33 per cent in Yorkshire and Humberside to 97 per cent in South London.²⁷ We expect YOTs to see a sharp increase in court-related work from the autumn of 2020, as these backlogs are reduced and children subject to release, under investigation, are charged with offences.

These lengthy delays make it harder to complete assessments and interventions, as the child will not remember the details of the offence, such as how they were feeling or why they did it. They create long-term anxiety for the children involved as they wait for outstanding charges to be dealt with, making it difficult to get their lives back on track.

In every YOT inspection, we look in detail at a sample of cases that have been sentenced by the court. Each of these cases is assessed against four key standards relating to the quality of the initial assessment, the plans that were drawn up, how well those plans were then delivered, whether and how progress against these plans was reviewed and action taken when the young person's circumstances changed.

In our 2019/2020 inspections, we found that three large urban YOTs were all performing poorly in relation to this post-court work. These were Birmingham, Bradford and Cardiff. As

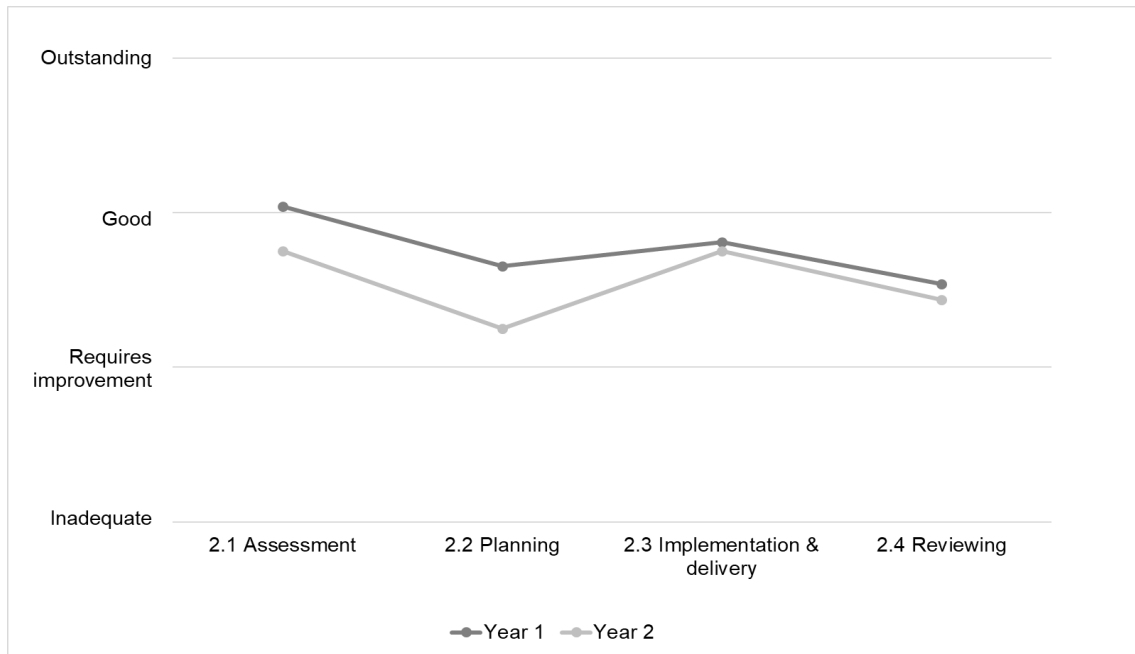
²⁵ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Youth Justice Statistics 2018-2019](#).

²⁶ 'Released under investigation' started to become practice in 2017 and has largely replaced 'released on police bail'.

²⁷ Provisional data from Crown Prosecution Service, 2020.

these were all large YOTs, their poor performance has had an impact on the overall performance data for 2019/2020, which we found to be lower than in 2018/2019.

Figure 6: Average court disposal ratings for the 26 YOTs inspected in 2018/2019 and the 16 YOTs inspected in 2019/2020



Across all our inspection standards we assess each case against three key sets of criteria:

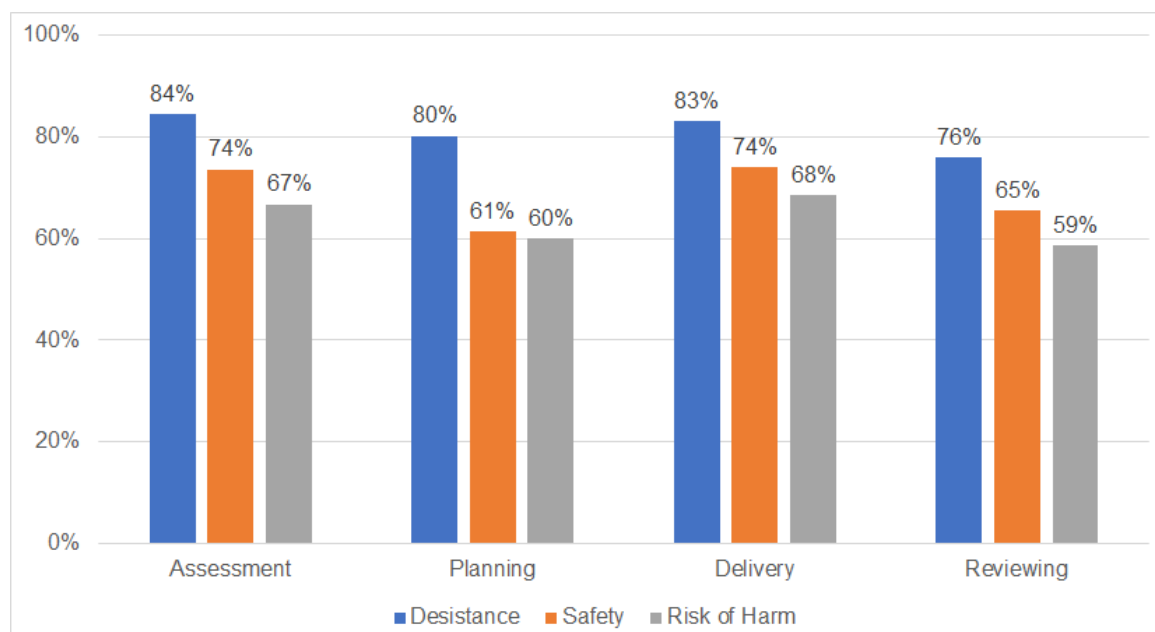
Desistance: were all the factors that might be linked to a child’s offending – both negative and potentially protective – identified and planned for?

Safety and wellbeing: have all the risks to a child’s safety and wellbeing been identified and addressed?

Risk of harm to others: have all the child’s potential risks to other people been planned for and tackled?

As with our 2018/2019 inspections, we found in 2019/2020 that YOTs were good at assessing, planning and delivering interventions in relation to desistance factors, but less good at doing this for safety and wellbeing and risk of serious harm factors. In fact, all aspects of managing risk of harm to others were assessed more negatively in 2019/2020. Consequently, we have recommended providing training on assessing and managing risk in six of our reports this year – one of our most frequent recommendations.

Figure 7: Percentage of cases rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for desistance, safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm for court cases 2019/2020



Assessment

Overall, we found the quality of assessment of the risk of harm to others was good, with eight of the 16 services rated as good or outstanding and only two as inadequate. In most cases, assessments gave sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice were considered. Although assessments in 2018/2019 clearly identified and analysed any risk of harm to others posed by the child in about three-quarters of cases, this fell to just under two-thirds in the services inspected in 2019/2020.

Planning

When considering planning, inspectors look at a range of planning documents, not just the pathways and planning document from the YJB-approved assessment tool 'AssetPlus'. The quality of planning for safety and wellbeing and risk to others in post-court cases was lower in our 2019/2020 inspections than in our 2018/2019 inspections. As some YOSs move to more 'child-friendly' plans, it appears that issues relating to risk of harm to others and safety and wellbeing are not being included in these plans, and elements of this important work are not being captured in the planning process. Planning was being written for what the child would do while subject to YOT intervention but did not specify the work the YOT and other agencies would also be doing to keep the child or the public safe. In the cases where there was some contingency planning, this often just involved reviewing the assessment document and discussing with the manager, and did not include clear, practical planning that would make a difference to the child or the victim, or potential victim.

In 2019/2020, nine YOTs were either 'Inadequate' or 'Requires improvement' in relation to planning, with only two 'Outstanding'.

In our 2018/2019 inspections we found that planning focused sufficiently on keeping people safe in two-thirds of cases and attention was paid to the needs and wishes of the victim in a similar proportion. This fell to 60 per cent for planning in 2019/2020. Across the two years, planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people in 69 per cent and 65 per cent of cases respectively, but did not always set out

necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage identified risks (59 per cent and 51 per cent).

Implementation and delivery

Having assessed the quality of initial assessment and planning, our individual case assessments then go on to inspect whether these plans were delivered in practice. Did the child receive all the interventions they were assessed as needing, for example in relation to their education or health requirements? Was the sentence properly enforced? Were breaches followed up? Did the child attend the appointments they were meant to and follow the conditions attached to the order – for example, in relation to keeping away from named locations or individuals or meeting curfew requirements?

For implementation and delivery, of the 16 YOTs inspected in 2019/2020, three were found to be 'Outstanding' for post-court cases and only two were 'Inadequate'. Although implementation of services to promote desistance would on its own have been rated 'Outstanding', with over 80 per cent of the cases we inspected satisfactory on this criterion, the quality dropped to 'Good' for risk of harm to others. The main reason for this was the protection of actual or potential victims, where inspectors noted that work in this area was not always delivered to a sufficient standard.

There was very little difference between the findings from our 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 inspections in relation to implementation and delivery of services to support keeping other people safe. Overall, the implementation and delivery of services was judged to support the safety of other people effectively in 68 per cent of cases in 2019/2020 and sufficient attention was given to the protection of actual and potential victims in 65 per cent. Staff and inspectors judged there to be adequate services available to assist in managing and minimising the risk of harm to others in 70 per cent of cases. Enforcement action was taken appropriately in 83 per cent and 87 per cent of relevant cases.

Reviewing

Reviewing of a case is required where there is a significant change of circumstances, or within six months from the start of the order. The overall picture for reviewing was very mixed, with half of the YOTs inspected rated 'Requires improvement' or 'Inadequate' against this standard. This was often due to the assessment tool, AssetPlus, being only partially reviewed, with a mixture of old and new information contained in the document, making it more difficult to determine the current situation for the child. The weakest area of practice across post-court cases was reviewing risk of harm to others.

In both 2018/2019 and 2019/2020, reviewing of desistance was good, as was reviewing of the child's safety and wellbeing needs. However, reviewing of the risk of harm that children may present to others was rated 'Requires improvement' in 2019/2020. Overall, we judged that the reviewing process focused sufficiently on keeping other people safe in 66 per cent of cases in 2018/2019 but in only 59 per cent in 2019/2020. Disappointingly, reviewing did not always lead to necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to manage and minimise the risk of harm. We found this to be done well enough in only 52 per cent of cases in 2019/2020.

Out-of-court disposals

The last 10 years have seen a welcome shift in policy towards diverting children from a formal court process for less serious offences, given research evidence that this can make children more likely to reoffend.²⁸

For a child questioned for a less serious offence, with few, if any, previous cautions or convictions and willing to admit responsibility for the incident, the police will have a range of options on how to proceed. These will vary from force to force, but can include 'street restorative justice', where the police officer may require a child to make amends for their offence immediately, such as by giving back a stolen item; a cannabis warning, where the child has to attend a cannabis awareness programme; or a youth caution, where the sanction is officially recorded but the child does not necessarily have to complete any work. For a youth conditional caution and a second youth caution, there is a requirement for the child to be referred to the YOT and an assessment to be completed. In other cases, it will be a matter of local policy which children the police refer to the YOT and what the offer of intervention will be for that child.

While 10 years ago, the focus was on statutory, out-of-court alternatives – such as youth cautions or youth conditional cautions, which still result in a criminal record – more recently, the emphasis has shifted to police and YOTs agreeing on non-statutory, informal alternatives to court, often called 'community resolutions'.

The move to divert children from court, where appropriate, is very welcome. In services like Bury, Oxfordshire, Rochdale and Wrexham, inspectors have seen creative and innovative intervention programmes to meet the needs of these children and prevent further offending. However, this work is being delivered in a vacuum of national guidance and evaluation. This has resulted in what we described last year as a 'postcode lottery' in the use of out-of-court disposals, with wide variation in the policies and processes that govern local schemes. In one area inspected, for example, there was no limit to the number of out-of-court disposals a child could receive, and inspectors saw an example where a child had been given seven youth restorative disposals (Surrey). In other areas, there was a strict limit of one of this type of disposal at any age from 10 to 18 years (South Tees).

Court cases and out-of-court cases

Compared with our 2018/2019 inspections, we found that the quality of supervision for out-of-court cases was lower in the cases we inspected in 2019/2020. The proportion of cases we considered to be satisfactory was lower in some important areas.

While we found that local services were good at assessing, planning and delivering interventions in relation to desistance factors, they were less good in relation to safety and wellbeing and risk of serious harm factors, with all aspects of managing risk of harm to others assessed as slightly lower in 2019/2020. Our recommendation on the need for training on assessing and managing risk, therefore, applies equally to out-of-court disposal cases and court cases.

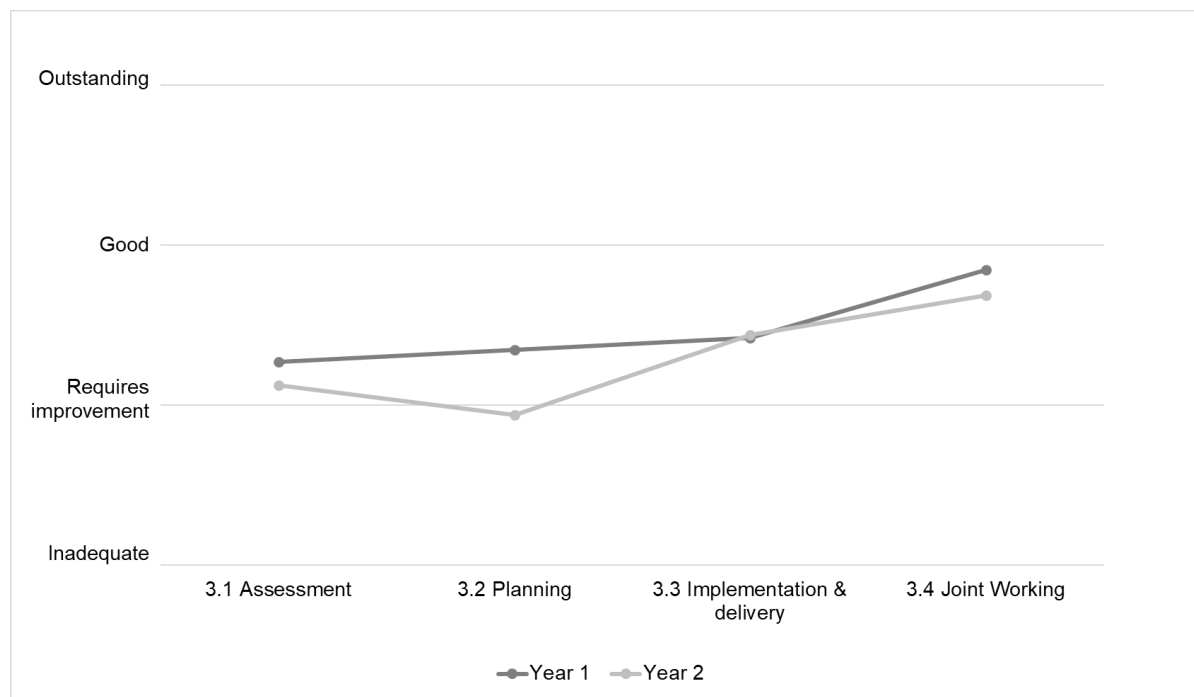
Compared with post-court cases, work to manage the risk of harm to others was done much less well in out-of-court cases. This led us to judge assessment to be 'Inadequate' in seven

²⁸ Centre for Justice Innovation. (2019). [Youth diversion evidence and practice briefing: minimising labelling](#)

services for out-of-court cases, compared with two findings of 'Inadequate' for assessment in post-court cases. Planning for out-of-court cases was 'Inadequate' in eight YOSs, compared with five for post-court cases. In some areas, the use of an in-house assessment tool did not assist case managers in making appropriate assessments, especially where there was not the capacity to record a classification of risk. However, inspectors did find examples where the in-house assessment tool had enabled good assessment and planning. Assessment was 'Outstanding' in two YOTs for out-of-court work and four for post-court work.

Ratings for out-of-court case supervision

Figure 8: Average out-of-court disposal ratings for the 26 YOTs inspected in 2018/2019 and the 16 YOTs inspected in 2019/2020



Assessment

Some YOSs had developed their own assessment tools for out-of-court disposals, and when these were done well, the assessments completed were of a good standard. However, in-house tools were also more likely to be insufficient when incomplete, with the most frequent gap being a clear explanation for risk of harm to others and safety and wellbeing concerns. For assessment in out-of-court work, only one of the YOSs inspected in 2019/2020 was found to be 'Outstanding'; disappointingly, seven were 'Inadequate'.

Assessments clearly identified and analysed any potential risk of harm to others posed by the child in only 51 per cent of out-of-court cases we inspected in 2019/2020. In many cases, we found that assessments focused only on the immediate offence that had resulted in the out-of-court disposal, rather than on the child's previous history.

Planning

Inspectors look at a range of planning documents, not just those contained in AssetPlus. It was good to see that many YOTs have developed their own planning documents, which are more child-friendly and understandable to the individual child. For planning for out-of-court

disposals inspected in 2019/2020, again, just one of the YOTs inspected was found to be 'Outstanding' and, disappointingly, seven were 'Inadequate'.

Planning focused sufficiently on keeping people safe in only 55 per cent of out-of-court cases we inspected in 2019/2020. In around a third of cases, planning did not give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s. Contingency planning setting out what was to be done if risks increased was done well enough in only 38 per cent of cases.

As we saw with post-court cases, as some YOTs move to more 'child-friendly' plans, it appears that issues relating to risk of harm to others and safety and wellbeing are not being included in these plans. The plans are focusing more on what the child will do, and elements of this important work are not being captured in the planning process, specifically what the YOT will do in partnership with other agencies to manage the risks to the child and to the public.

Implementation and delivery

Interventions for out-of-court disposals are intended to be brief and low intensity but should still be personalised to the child and delivered well. They might involve one or two sessions with a drugs worker, completing a letter of explanation to a victim,²⁹ or helping the child to access other mainstream services. Whereas for statutory youth conditional cautions a child will be legally required to complete the activities outlined in the plan and can be referred to the youth court if they fail to do so, the activities included in an informal community resolution are mainly voluntary and there is no penalty for failing to complete them. However, in some areas, failure to complete the activities in a community resolution could result in being referred back to a decision-making panel for an alternative disposal. There is no national data on completion rates for different forms of out-of-court disposal. This is a serious gap in our knowledge of their effectiveness.

We found that YOTs have generally continued to do a good job in tackling the underlying factors that may be linked to a child's offending, with three-quarters of the out-of-court cases we inspected in 2019/2020 being satisfactory on this. However, the implementation and delivery of services to support the safety of other people was satisfactory in only 62 per cent of cases. The main reason for this was that protection of actual or potential victims was not always delivered to a sufficient standard.

Joint working

Our final rating standard for out-of-court disposals relates to the quality of joint working between YOSs and police for youth conditional cautions, which in general we found was good. Around three-quarters of the cases we inspected in 2019/2020 were satisfactory in terms of how effectively the YOT was working with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal.

In our joint thematic inspection of out-of-court disposals published in 2018,³⁰ we noted the good practice of multi-agency decision-making panels. It was pleasing to see the continued use of such panels in our 2019/2020 inspections, although the quality of the YOTs' input to these panels varied significantly.

Our inspections showed that the structure and membership of out-of-court panels also varied, from just police and YOT, to panels that comprised partner agencies such as victim workers, community volunteers and third-sector agencies. There was further variation in relation to when decisions were made and how much information was available to the panel.

²⁹ YOTs often use letters of explanation rather than letters of apology.

³⁰ HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. (2018). [Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams](#).

Many YOTs complete the full assessment before the panel, while others complete an information-based screening before the formal assessment is completed.

Given the increasing importance of out-of-court disposals, we consulted earlier this year on a new YOT inspection standard that will enable us to rate YOTs specifically on their arrangements for effective out-of-court provision and the policies and processes that underpin this. This will go live from the spring of 2021 and will replace the existing joint working standard.³¹

Community resolutions

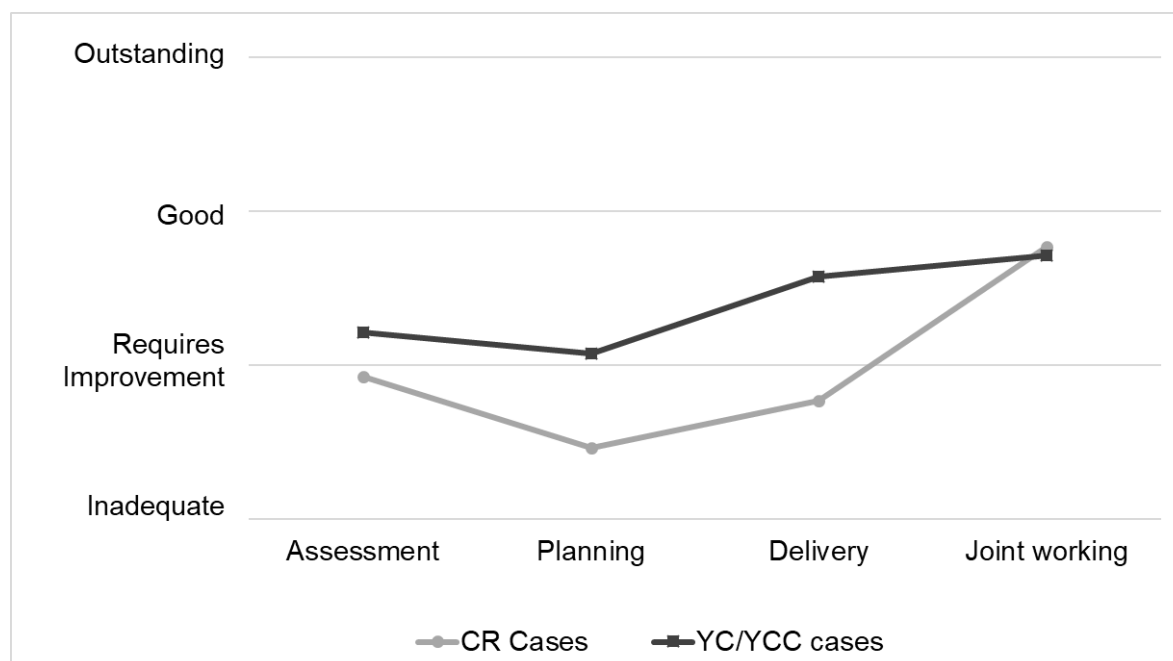
Community resolutions is the generic term used to describe the police disposal for low-level offending that is not formally recorded on the Police National Computer. They are referred to differently, depending on local policies, and can be called triage, youth restorative disposal, or something else. For a community resolution to be administered, the child must admit their involvement in the offence and be willing to receive the disposal. The advantage for the child is that they do not incur a formal criminal record for the offence, although they may be recorded as an offender on the police database. They are not recorded as a first-time entrant if they receive a community resolution.

Many YOTs have responded to the increase in community resolutions and are providing screening and assessment for these children to identify if they are at risk of further offending. This is either done through a check on partner agency databases, or by a YOT screening tool. If the child is identified as having any factors that place them at risk of further offending, the YOT may provide a programme of intervention to support that child. The delivery of a community resolution may depend on that intervention, or it could be entirely voluntary.

Intervention following a community resolution should be short, sometimes as little as one assessment session. The work, such as on substance misuse, is delivered by a partner agency. Alternatively, the YOT may deliver up to three months of intervention with the child, which might include re-engagement back into education, support in managing emotions, or work to increase the child's self-esteem.

³¹ HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2020). [Response to the consultation and ratings for inspection of youth offending services](#).

Figure 9: Average ratings across the four out-of-court standards for community resolutions compared with statutory out-of-court disposals 2019/2020



As in our 2018/2019 inspections, we found that our scores for the quality of work with out-of-court cases were often pulled down significantly by poorer quality supervision of informal community resolution cases, particularly in relation to the safety and wellbeing of the child and the risks they posed to others. Looking in detail at the scores across all of our key questions (see Annexe 1), we found that, on almost all of them, the proportion of community resolution cases we rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' was significantly less than for youth caution or youth conditional caution cases. Less than half of them were adequate in relation to a number of questions related to keeping the young person themselves or the wider public safe.

In our joint thematic inspection of out-of-court disposals in 2018, conducted with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), we noted that there is no systematic national monitoring of the number of community resolutions used, nor how many children go on to receive further disposals or convictions after receiving one of them. We went on to recommend that the Ministry of Justice and YJB should 'include community resolutions in criminal justice system reoffending statistics and evaluate their effectiveness in reducing offending and improving outcomes for children'.³²

While it is pleasing to see the YJB is now asking for data on community resolution disposals in the individual YOT data returns,³³ over two years on from that report there is still no national data on the use or effectiveness of this increasingly important part of the youth justice system. We found that community resolutions made up 37 per cent of all the out-of-court cases we inspected in 2019/2020, though there was a very wide variation (between zero and 100 per cent) between YOTs.

³² HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. (2018). [Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams](#).

³³ Youth Justice Board. (2020). [Data Recording Requirements for Youth Offending Teams \(April 2020 to March 2021\)](#).

Some insight into their use, however, can be gleaned from the inspection data we now have on the 812 out-of-court cases inspected across 42 YOTs since 2018.

Almost a third (30 per cent) of community resolutions we inspected, for example, were given for drug offences (likely to be for cannabis possession); 40 per cent were for offences of violence; and eight per cent were for criminal damage. Within each of these broad offence categories there can be a wide range of offences. Drug offences can include possession of cannabis for personal use, and possession with intent to supply. Likewise, violence against a person can be a common assault offence, consisting of a push, or a serious violent offence. Community resolution offences are usually only administered for the less serious end of these offence types.

Table 4: Comparisons of offence types for community resolutions (CR) compared with statutory youth cautions (YC) or youth conditional cautions (YCC)

Offence type	CR	YC	YCC
Violence against the person (including affray, violent disorder and threatening behaviour, even where there is no actual physical assault)	40%	44%	54%
Sexual offences	2%	0%	2%
Burglary	3%	0%	4%
Theft and handling stolen goods	9%	13%	4%
Criminal damage (excluding arson)	8%	15%	4%
Drug offences	30%	18%	9%
Motoring offences	3%	3%	3%
Other offences	5%	5%	19%

We found that most children who receive a community resolution have not been in trouble before (80 per cent had no previous sanction), compared with 54 per cent who received a youth caution, although 20 children in our sample (nine per cent) had between two and five previous sanctions. A third of children who received a community resolution were assessed as low risk in relation to their own safety and wellbeing, and 50 per cent posed a low risk to others, although in nearly a third of cases the safety and wellbeing levels and risk of harm to others were not clearly recorded.

Annexe 1: Case data splits

Comparison between children receiving a custodial sentence and those receiving a community sentence (demographics), based on HM Inspectorate of Probation case assessment data.

	Custody (N=462)	Community sentence (N=306)
Gender		
Male	88%	82%
Female	12%	18%
Age		
10–11	0%	2%
12–14	7%	32%
15–16	34%	43%
17	35%	22%
18+	23%	0%
Ethnicity		
White	55%	61%
Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic	41%	34%
Other	2%	1%
Not clearly recorded	2%	4%
Looked after child		
Yes	24%	9%
No	76%	91%
Disability		
Yes	25%	22%
Not clear	10%	15%
No	65%	63%
Number of previous sanctions		
0	39%	73%
1	21%	18%
2–5	30%	9%
6–10	6%	0%
11–20	2%	0%
20 +	1%	0%

Comparison between children receiving a custodial sentence and those receiving a community sentence: assessment of risk of harm and safety and wellbeing concerns.

Risk of serious harm to others		
Low	23%	46%
Medium	49%	39%
High or very high	27%	4%
Not clearly recorded	1%	11%
Safety and wellbeing concerns		
Low	15%	36%
Medium	43%	38%
High or very high	40%	16%
Not clearly recorded	1%	10%

Court case data

Assessment	2018/2019	2019/2020
The assessment sufficiently analysed how to support the child's desistance	85%	84%
The assessment sufficiently analysed how to keep the child safe	76%	74%
The assessment analysed how to keep others safe	75%	67%

Planning	2018/2019	2019/2020
Planning sufficiently focused on supporting the child's desistance	82%	80%
Planning sufficiently focused on how to keep the child safe	69%	61%
Planning sufficiently focused on how to keep others safe	68%	60%

Implementation and delivery	2018/2019	2019/2020
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported the child's desistance	79%	83%
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported keeping the child safe	74%	74%
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported to keeping others safe	71%	68%

Reviewing	2018/2019	2019/2020
Reviewing focused sufficiently on the child's desistance	76%	76%
Reviewing focused sufficiently on keeping the child safe	69%	65%
Reviewing focused sufficiently on keeping others safe	66%	59%

Out-of-court case data

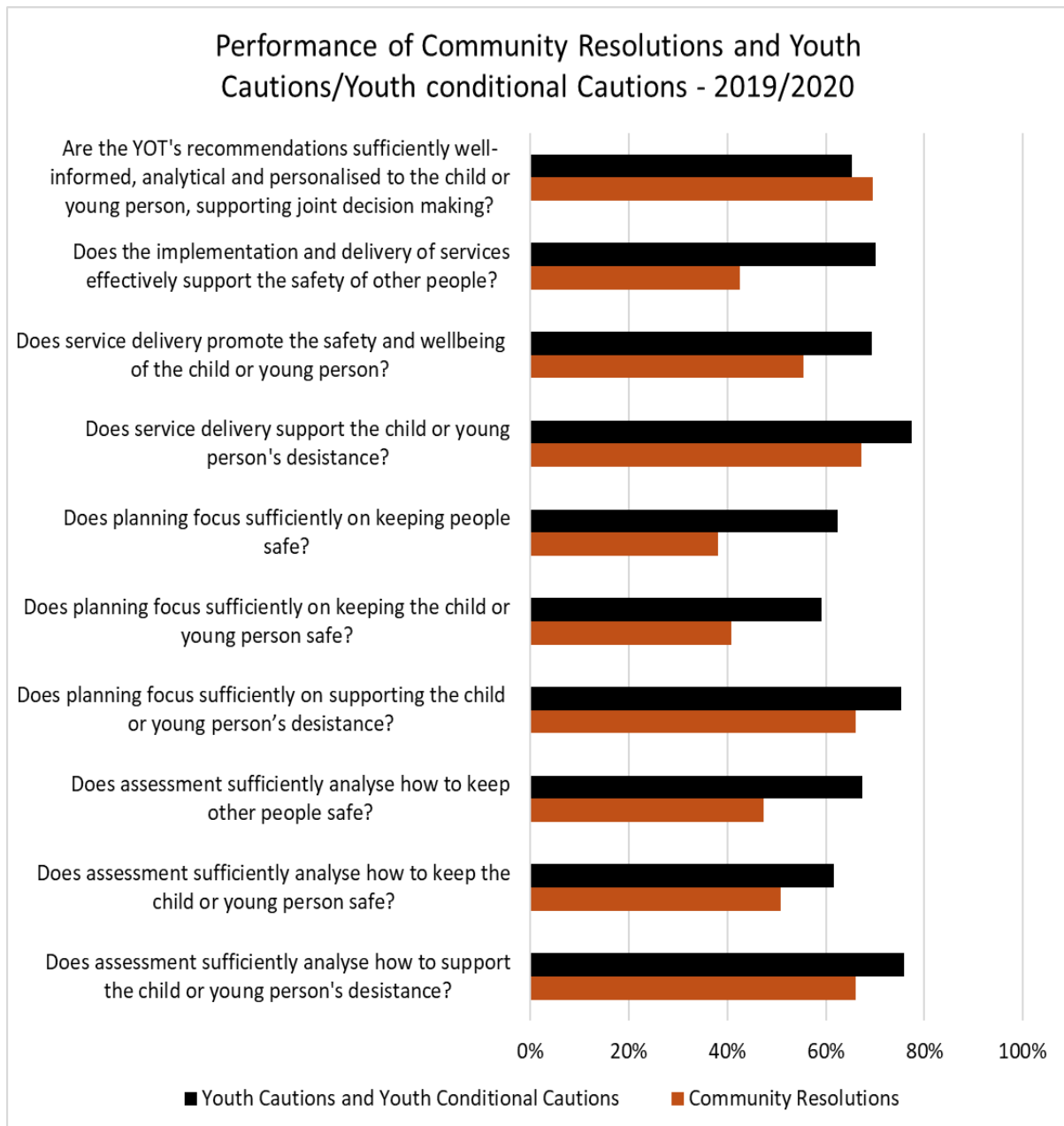
Assessment	2018/2019	2019/2020
The assessment sufficiently analysed how to support the child's desistance	74%	73%
The assessment sufficiently analysed how to keep the child safe	60%	59%
The assessment analysed how to keep others safe	61%	59%

Planning	2018/2019	2019/2020
Planning sufficiently focused on supporting the child's desistance	78%	73%
Planning sufficiently focused on how to keep the child safe	64%	53%
Planning sufficiently focused on how to keep others safe	64%	55%

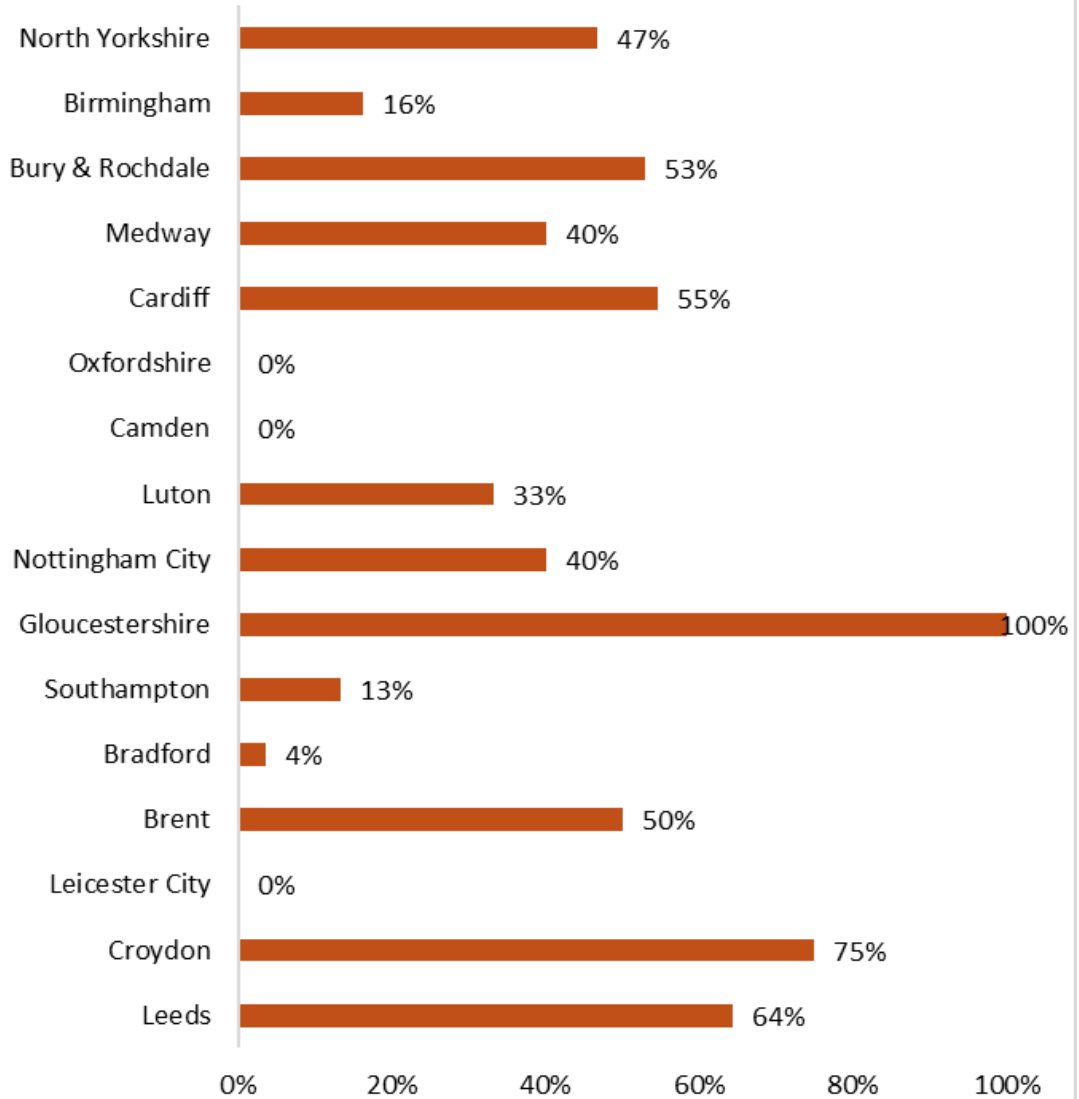
Implementation and delivery	2018/2019	2019/2020
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported the child's desistance	79%	75%
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported keeping the child safe	71%	66%
Implementation and delivery of services effectively supported to keeping others safe	66%	62%

Joint working	2018/2019	2019/2020
YOS recommendations are sufficiently well informed, analytical and personalised to the child, supporting joint decision making	73%	67%
The YOS worked effectively with the police in implementing the out-of-court disposal	79%	74%

Community resolutions



Community Resolutions as a percentage of all inspected out of court disposals - 2019/2020



Annexe 2: Description of a Youth Offending Team

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) work with children and young people, from as young as 10 up to 18 years of age, who break the law. These children have either been sentenced by a court or have come to the attention of the police but not been charged.

In this case, they would have their offending dealt with out of court. YOTs work with all these young people to try to help them live better lives and ultimately stay away from crime.

They:

1. help young people at police stations
2. provide support at court
3. supervise young people on a community sentence
4. keep in contact with young people while they're in custody and help them settle back in the community when they leave
5. deliver interventions to help young people make different life choices.

YOTs are statutory partnerships – that is, they must work together by law – and they are multi-disciplinary, so they can 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 and local health services working together to help these young people. Most YOTs are based within local authorities. Some are fully integrated into local authority services such as children's services; some have merged across local authority boundaries; and some remain standalone.

This is determined locally, and, in our experience, there is no one model that leads to good inspection outcomes. These are achieved by strong and knowledgeable youth justice leadership delivered through the multi-disciplinary Management Board and YOT management team.

YOT 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).

Annexe 3: Description of youth inspection methodology

In spring 2018, we introduced changes to the way we inspect. We began to inspect YOTs against a new set of published standards.

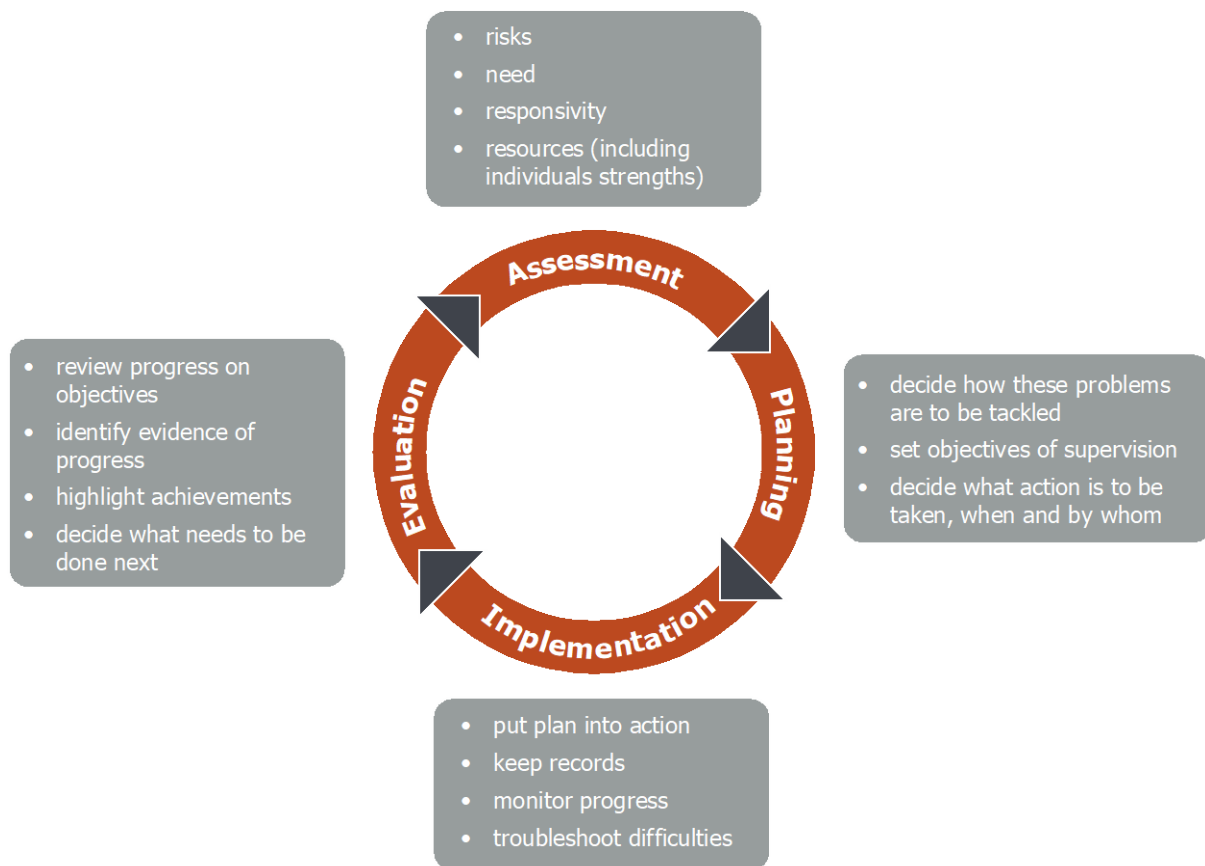
This new set of inspection standards reflect the high-level expectations that government and the public have of YOTs. They are grounded in evidence, learning and experience and focus on the quality of delivery. Without good-quality inputs (such as professional staff and comprehensive services) and activities (such as case assessment and effective interventions), YOTs are less likely to meet their aims. The inspection standards framework is summarised in the diagram below and described in further detail on our website. Our approach to inspecting YOTs involves us focusing on three aspects of delivery, which we call domains.

Figure 1: Inspection domains and standards



Domain one (organisational delivery) covers how well the organisation is led, managed and set up. Domains two and three cover the quality of work in individual cases. Domain two focuses on court disposals and domain three focuses on out-of-court disposals. Domains two and three cover the enduring expectations of YOTs: supporting desistance, protecting the public and keeping the child or young person safe. The service delivery standards in both domains are based on the well-established and recognised ASPIRE model for case supervision (Assessment, Sentence Planning, Implementation, Review and Evaluation).

Figure 2: The ASPIRE model



How we judge performance

We rate performance against all of the four standards in each domain (as shown above). For each standard in domains two and three, we ask up to three key questions about the quality of supervision and inspectors record what percentage of the cases they review are satisfactory against these questions. In the domains, each key question is integral to effective case delivery, and sufficient attention needs to be given to all of them. The rating for the standard is therefore determined by the key question that generates the lowest percentage score in terms of the proportion of cases meeting that criteria. Our standards also include a 'hurdle' that all inspected bodies must pass; where there is insufficient assessment of child safeguarding issues, there must be a judgement of insufficient for assessment of harm. Ratings at the standard level enable providers of YOTs to see clearly where they are performing well and where they can improve.

Each YOT is given an overall rating on a four-point scale: 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires improvement' and 'Inadequate'. The scores from the individual standards are aggregated to produce the overall rating. Scoring rules are used to generate the overall YOT rating. Each of the 12 standards are scored on a 0–3 scale in which 'Inadequate' = 0; 'Requires

improvement' = 1; 'Good' = 2; and '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'.

We give an overall rating for each YOT, as we believe that a composite rating for each inspection drives improvements where needed. An overall rating provides a measure of the quality of youth offending services, complementing any output and outcome measures established by government. The standards and ratings were developed over a 12-month period, through workshops and consultations with stakeholders, academics and providers. On the whole, they were well received and have been largely accepted as the benchmark for quality practice in service delivery.

Annexe 4: Ratings table for inspections 2018-19 and 2019-20

View a live ratings table of our inspections of youth offending services on the [HM Inspection of Probation website](#).