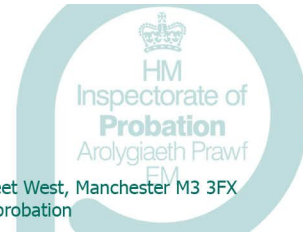




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<i>To:</i>	Chief Inspector David Gilbert, Chair of Bracknell Forest Youth Offending Service Management Board.
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<i>From:</i>	Alan MacDonald, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
<i>Publication date:</i>	11 May 2016

Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Bracknell Forest

The inspection was conducted from 18-20 April 2016 as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report is published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Context

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. We examined 14 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Bracknell Forest Youth Offending Service (YOS). Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

Summary

The published reoffending rate¹ for Bracknell Forest was 34.9%. This was worse than the previous year and better than the England and Wales average of 38.0%.

Overall, we found the quality of the work at Bracknell Forest YOS to be excellent. Staff were enthusiastic and committed. They worked hard to analyse the needs, vulnerabilities, risk of harm and reoffending of those sentenced by the courts, in order to plan the required work. There was a real understanding of how different aspects of the child or young person's life interacted with each other. We saw effective support provided alongside enforcement of necessary boundaries.

Commentary on the inspection in Bracknell Forest:

1. Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. The initial assessment of the child or young person was found to be comprehensive and well evidenced in all the cases sampled. There was good use of information and liaison with partner agencies to assess and review the likelihood of reoffending. Disability and diversity needs were always assessed. A speech and language screening was always

¹ The reoffending rate that was available during the fieldwork was published January 2016, and was based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the April 2013- March 2014 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

carried out. A timely self-assessment was completed, and the view of the child or young person and their parents/carers gathered. There was evidence of this being used well to inform assessments and reports. It was clear that the case managers had analysed the information and understood the children and young people with whom they were working.

- 1.2. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) or panel reports were provided to the court in six of the cases sampled; they were all well written, providing a clear outline of offending behaviour, the risk of harm the child or young person posed to others and an assessment of vulnerability. There was a good assessment of the reasons given for offending in all cases and clear recommendations for alternatives to custody were made. One inspector noted: *"the case manager had a really good understanding of the young person and her history. She was able to provide a clear and concise assessment of the young person, her triggers to offending, her vulnerability and her needs"*.
- 1.3. Following on from the assessment we expect to see a plan of work to help reduce the likelihood of reoffending. We saw evidence that case managers had sought the views of the child and young person to produce personalised plans. We saw outcome focused and prioritised plans in most of the cases sampled. We found, however, that some plans were not sufficiently focused on reducing reoffending, and some actions were not sequenced and did not have a clear priority attached to them.
- 1.4. Work to address offending behaviour was carried out in all of the cases inspected. Bracknell Forest had an offending behaviour programme in place called Stepping Up. This focused on older boys who were involved in, or had experience of, abusive relationships. It was presented as a healthy relationship programme and was non-accusatory in nature and was used with boys who did not have a conviction for domestic abuse. Reparation work at the animal rescue centre was noted as being of particular benefit to the young people.
- 1.5. We found that assessments were reviewed when required in almost all of the cases sampled. As part of the review the child or young person was asked about changes in circumstances, and which parts of the plan had been achieved during supervision with the YOS. Reviews were of a sufficient standard and took account of what had changed. We saw a good example where the case manager had included in the review the comments of the parents relating to their child's positive progress during supervision.

2. Protecting the public

- 2.1. We expect to see a detailed assessment of the risk of harm a child or young person poses to others. We were pleased to find that this happened in all of the cases. Case managers were alert to the need to take other behaviour into account, as well as formal convictions.
- 2.2. Having assessed the risks that the child and young person poses, the YOS should put plans in place to manage these risks. This was done to a satisfactory standard in more than three-quarters of the relevant cases sampled. Support services for specialist interventions such as mental health and children's social care were provided by partner agencies. On some occasions, however, we found a lack of clarity and coordination between the partner agency and the case manager.
- 2.3. Risk management plans should be reviewed regularly in order to keep them up to date. We were pleased to see that in all cases this was carried out to a satisfactory standard. The risk of harm to identifiable victims was effectively managed in all but one of the cases.

- 2.4. Management oversight of risk of harm was evident and effective in six of the nine relevant cases. Some plans which we considered not good enough had, however, been countersigned by the manager without addressing the deficiencies.

3. Protecting the child or young person

- 3.1. Often children and young people who offend are themselves vulnerable and we expect to see that their safeguarding needs have been thoroughly assessed, with plans in place to manage those needs. Case managers had taken time to identify and understand the vulnerabilities that were presented in two-thirds of relevant cases. Joint work to promote the safeguarding and well-being of the child or young person was good in most cases. We were pleased to find that, where required, staff liaised effectively with other specialist services. In cases where other specialist agencies held responsibility for specific interventions, case managers were still diligent, unwavering advocates on behalf of the children and young people being supervised. Staff clearly supported and promoted the well-being of the child or young person throughout the sentence.
- 3.2. The YOS was alert to the possibility of child sexual exploitation. Case managers routinely assessed this risk in relation to all the children and young people they supervised. This process could have been more effective if the child and young person were present when the screening took place, to make sure that all relevant information had been gathered and considered.
- 3.3. The safeguarding needs of children and young people change over time and must therefore be kept under review. We found that assessment and plans had been reviewed sufficiently in almost all of the cases sampled.
- 3.4. It was evident that case managers took a holistic approach to the work with children and young people, so that they were able to see that some could be at the same time both in need of protection as well as posing a risk of harm to others.

4. Making sure the sentence is served

- 4.1. Case managers took time to get to know the children and young people that they worked with and to develop trusting relationships. They identified diversity factors and barriers to engagement in relation to the children and young people they supervised. They sought to incorporate the findings into the assessments, plans and work undertaken. Discussions with case managers showed that effective use of home visits enabled them to understand the family dynamics of offending and the risk of harm to others. It was evident that the case managers viewed parents/carers as essential to the successful completion of the order. The child or young person and their parent/carer were sufficiently involved in the planning in all relevant cases. In addition, we saw more than one example of work to support parents/carers with their own needs where these were impacting on children and young people.
- 4.2. The YOS had access to resources from a substance misuse worker, health worker, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), a parenting worker and the Stepping Up programme. We saw evidence of these agencies' active and effective involvement in the cases we inspected. It is regrettable that the funding for CAMHS and the parenting worker has ceased and there is no alternate provision to meet this identified need.
- 4.3. Case managers made a consistent and substantial effort to support children and young people to comply with their sentence. If the child or young person failed to attend, compliance meetings were held to support their engagement, rather than resorting to formal breach action. In all cases we considered the response by the YOS to non-compliance to be appropriate.

Operational management

Management oversight was evident in all of the cases sampled. We saw comments from managers as part of a quality assurance process on assessments. Where a court report had been written we found a PSR gatekeeping form. In some, but not all, cases we felt that management oversight was effective in appropriately reviewing work and giving good advice on improvements needed. Case managers told inspectors that they were confident in the skills and knowledge of their managers. They were also positive about supervision and training, and the opportunities for development. They described Bracknell Forest YOS as an organisation that positively promotes learning and development.

Key strengths

- Good quality reports provided the court with relevant information to assist sentencing.
- The risk of harm to victims was effectively managed.
- Comprehensive and accurate assessments that inform effective plans.
- Good attention was paid to engagement with children and young people and their parents/carers, resulting in more effective interactions.
- Healthy relationships with children and young people supported case managers' ability to achieve the delicate balance between supporting compliance and enforcement.

Areas requiring improvement

- Plans to address the likelihood of reoffending should be sequenced in order of priority and focused on desired outcomes against which the case manager can readily measure progress.
- Child sexual exploitation screening should be completed with the child or young person present.
- Risk management plans should provide details of the roles and responsibility of each agency involved.
- Management oversight should be targeted to improve the quality of sentence and risk management plans.

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

If you have any further questions about the inspection please contact the lead inspector, who was Yvette Howson. She can be contacted at Yvette.howson@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 07825 453092.

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Note 1: As an independent inspectorate, HMI Probation provides assurance to Ministers and the public on the effectiveness of work with those who have offended or are likely to offend, promotes continuous improvement by the organisations that we inspect and contributes to the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Note 2: We gather evidence against the SQS criteria, which are available on the HMI Probation website - <http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation>.

Note 3: To request a paper copy of this report, please contact HMI Probation Communications at communications@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk or on 0161 240 5336.