

Youth offending teams: making the difference for children and young people, victims and communities

Final Report



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Foreword

In November 2014 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) announced that it would conduct a stocktake of 20 youth offending teams (YOTs) to give them a better understanding of how local youth justice services are being delivered and funded; and to inform future thinking about how the system can be improved to provide more support to young people and their communities.

To complement this exercise through providing a more qualitative contextual analysis, I and my fellow Board members also undertook a series of visits to YOTs to see first-hand where and how YOTs have evolved, to hear from the children and young people they work with, and to explore examples of good practice and innovation.

Over February and March 2015 we visited another 20 YOTs across the regions in England and Wales – from Torbay in the south west to Gateshead in north east. On each and every visit we were met with great enthusiasm, honesty and openness. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Board, to express my deep gratitude to all the YOT staff we spoke with; and to their local authority chief executives and directors of childrens' services with whom we did the same.

The landscape in which the YJB and YOTs operate, and the challenges we face, are very different now to when the youth justice system was set up fifteen years ago. Thanks to the YOTs and the multiple local agencies they work with, we now have a smaller group of children and young people who are at risk of entering, or who are already in, the youth justice system. But the issues that bring them to this point are much more complex to address, and the added pressures of seemingly constant reductions in the resources available to public services doesn't help.

The Board members and I were pleased to see that the YOTs we visited had adapted, and continued to make every effort to do so, to meet these challenges. Alongside their statutory casework, these YOTs did a great deal more - particularly in the field of prevention and diversion. We were struck by the breadth and quality of this work, and by the significant contribution that it can make to prevent children and young people from offending and reoffending.

I am an ardent supporter of the holistic, multi-agency approach on which the YOT model is based. It has been the cornerstone of a youth justice system that has helped the YJB achieve resounding success in reducing the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system; and in reducing the number of children and young people in custody to their lowest ever levels. In these times of austerity, this approach can also be described as 'investing to save' because it also positively impacts on the number of young adults in prison – thus stemming the 'revolving door' of release and re-incarceration. The fall in the numbers of children in youth custody can now be evidenced as contributing to the recent fall in numbers of the young adult age group.

This report outlines the key findings from our visits and I commend it to all those practicing and making policy in the youth justice system.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom McNally". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

The Rt Hon Lord McNally
Chairman
Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

1. Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 The YJB is a non-departmental public body created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to oversee, monitor and lead the youth justice system in England and Wales. The statutory aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people.
- 1.2 Youth offending teams (YOTs) are multi-agency partnerships that deliver youth justice services locally. The YJB sets standards in youth justice services and monitors YOTs' performance. YOTs are funded by their statutory partners and receive an annual grant from central government administered and overseen by the YJB.
- 1.3 Over February and March 2015 YJB Board members undertook a series of visits to a representative sample of 20 YOTs in parallel with and to complement the Ministry of Justice's 'stocktake' through providing a more qualitative contextual analysis. The purpose of the visits was to deepen our understanding of how YOTs have evolved, and to explore examples of good practice and innovation. This report outlines our key findings.

Key findings and conclusions

- 1.4 YOTs are the cornerstone of a youth justice system that has delivered outstanding successes in recent years in terms of the reductions in the number of children and young people at all stages of the system. The local, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary nature of YOTs, and the expertise and passion of their staff, make them uniquely qualified to deliver youth justice services.
- 1.5 Despite recent successes against national targets, in particular the reductions of first time entrants and use of custody, we know there is more to do to better understand the complex links between local activity and outcomes. To support this the YJB has developed a reoffending toolkit to help YOTs to analyse caseloads and target interventions, but we recognise there is scope to better understand the impact and benefits of YOTs' wider work with young people in the youth justice system.

Models

- 1.6 To a greater or lesser degree, the YOTs that we visited were becoming more closely integrated with other local authority services. YOT managers often managed other youth or family services as well as youth offending. The key reasons for integration included the fall in the number of children and young people in the youth justice system, the need to deliver financial savings and a desire to redesign services around an early intervention, prevention and family-based model.
- 1.7 While those we interviewed identified a number of benefits from integration, they also identified risks. There were concerns that the specialist risk-based services delivered by YOTs to a complex and high-risk group of children and young people could be diluted. There were also

concerns that integration with children's services could lead to less focus on youth justice in a department concerned more with safeguarding, or where the YOT sat in Community Safety, less focus on the needs of young people in a department concerned more with public protection.

- 1.8 Local areas were also increasingly sharing, or considering sharing, youth justice services across local government boundaries. This ranged from sharing or co-commissioning discrete services to fully merged YOTs. The interest in sharing or merging youth justice services was particularly evident in metropolitan areas. The key drivers for this were the reduction in the number of children and young people in the youth justice system and the need to deliver financial savings.
- 1.9 It is our view that the location of YOTs within local authority structures and the extent of integration with other services or mergers across local government boundaries are questions best determined locally. To be effective YOTs must successfully straddle the criminal justice system and children's and wider youth services. YOTs must have a foot firmly planted in both camps to bridge the gap between the two.

Activity

- 1.10 The YOTs we visited were undertaking an impressive amount of work alongside their core work to deliver out of court disposals, provide a service to courts and manage court orders. We were struck by the breadth and quality of this work, and by the immeasurable contribution it makes to preventing offending and reoffending by children and young people.
- 1.11 All those we interviewed identified the core activity of a YOT as providing specialist oversight of the complex and high-risk group of children and young people in the youth justice system. This work includes quality individual assessment and intervention planning, as well as safeguarding and public protection. It requires specialist knowledge and skills, and YOTs have become expert at working with this group.
- 1.12 All the local areas we visited prioritised prevention and early intervention work to deliver services to children, young people and families. To some extent all YOTs were involved in this work. The majority were directly involved, describing prevention and diversion as "core business" and prioritising it alongside their core work.
- 1.13 We feel strongly that YOTs have an important role to play in prevention and diversion, but the location of prevention and diversion services within local authority teams should be determined locally. It is, however, crucial that YOTs are functionally integrated with prevention and diversion services so that they can contribute their considerable expertise.

Central government funding for local youth justice services

- 1.14 Those we interviewed stressed that YOTs have absorbed significant reductions in funding from their local partners as well as from central government in recent years. They felt that further reductions in funding from central government could result in YOTs focusing solely on statutory work at the expense of prevention and diversion and their more innovative work. They also felt that this could ultimately result in an increase in first time entrants to the youth justice system.

- 1.15 Many of those we interviewed felt that further reductions in central government funding would diminish YOTs' influence locally and therefore the profile of and focus on youth justice. There was also significant concern that further reductions would be seen by partners as reason to review and to reduce their contributions accordingly.
- 1.16 In our view there is a strong case for continuing investment by central government in local youth justice services. While we recognise there needs to be a better understanding of the relationship between funding and outcomes, we are concerned that reducing central government funding without understanding the potential impact risks undermining the successes achieved by the youth justice system in recent years.
- 1.17 We believe that central government funding gives central government and the YJB local influence. It demonstrates central government's commitment to and oversight of local youth justice services and its ring-fenced nature sends a clear message to local partners that the government takes youth crime seriously.

Leadership, strategy and governance

- 1.18 The YOTs we visited were well-integrated at a strategic level with other local partnerships, and were contributing significantly to national as well as local strategic aims and priorities. They were also well-represented across both the children's services and the community safety fields. Senior local authority managers often recognised and utilised YOT managers' skills to contribute to high-profile areas of work.
- 1.19 It is our view that to be effective YOTs need strong leadership. This means a strong management board, a strong manager and commitment from senior leaders at the local authority and among other local partners. Strong leadership is particularly important for a multi-agency partnership.
- 1.20 A strong board requires local partners to commit senior staff who can make decisions. In areas where senior figures chaired the board, we felt YOTs were stronger and had more influence. This was also the case where YOTs had profile with elected members and Police and Crime Commissioners.

Partnership working

- 1.21 All those we interviewed identified strong local relationships between statutory and non-statutory partners as crucial to the effective delivery of local youth justice services. We were impressed by the commitment from local partners to work together under challenging circumstances.
- 1.22 The relationship with police services was particularly important, and we were encouraged by the number of YOTs that had developed strong relationships with Police and Crime Commissioners. Relationships with health services and probation services were often more difficult, but there were signs of improvement as new structures become established.
- 1.23 We feel that the statutory requirements for partners to cooperate at both a strategic and an operational level are important for the delivery of effective youth justice services. Youth justice partnerships have matured and adapted well to local needs over the past 15 years.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At the 2014 Youth Justice Convention, Lord McNally, Chair of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB), announced that YJB Board members would undertake a series of visits to YOTs in parallel with, and to complement, the Ministry of Justice's stocktake of YOTs through providing a more qualitative contextual analysis. The purpose of the visits was to deepen our understanding of how YOTs have evolved and to explore examples of good practice and innovation by providing a snapshot of 20 YOTs. This report outlines our key findings.

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

- 2.2 The YJB is a non-departmental public body created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to lead and support the operation of the youth justice system in England and Wales. The statutory aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people.
- 2.3 YJB Board members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice and have corporate responsibility for setting the YJB's strategic objectives. Board members are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and have a diverse range of experience and knowledge in areas relevant to youth justice, including local government, the voluntary sector, policing, the judiciary, education and health services.
- 2.4 Our vision is that every child and young person lives a safe and crime-free life and makes a positive contribution to society.

Youth offending teams

- 2.5 YOTs are multi-agency partnerships that deliver youth justice services locally. The Crime and Disorder Act requires that local partners cooperate to establish YOTs to coordinate the provision of local youth justice services. The statutory youth justice partners are:
- the local authority
 - police
 - probation
 - health
- 2.6 YOTs are funded by their statutory partners and receive an annual grant from central government administered and overseen by the YJB. On average this grant accounts for about a third of each YOT's funding.
- 2.7 The YJB also sets standards in youth justice services and monitors YOTs' performance against the following national performance indicators:
- first time entrants to the youth justice system
 - the binary reoffending rate

- the use of custody
- 2.8 In Wales there are a further three indicators:
- education, training and employment
 - accommodation
 - substance misuse
- 2.9 In 2013 with the Ministry of Justice we published *Modern Youth Offending Partnerships: Guidance on effective youth offending team governance in England*¹, and in March 2015 with the Welsh Government we published *YOT Management board Guidance: Guidance on effective youth offending team governance in Wales*². Both documents remain current and youth justice partners should continue to refer to them for guidance.

The visits

- 2.10 Over February and March 2015 we visited 20 YOTs across England and Wales. The YOTs were selected to provide a representative cross-section of the different types of YOT in operation and in particular to provide for a range of models, performance levels and geography. A full list of the YOTs we visited is included in Annex A.
- 2.11 At least one Board member and at least one YJB staff member visited each YOT. The visits consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews conducted over the course of a day. In all cases we met the YOT manager and a group of YOT practitioners. In almost all cases we met the chair of the YOT management board, the assistant director with responsibility for the YOT and the relevant director. In most cases we also met the chief executive of the local authority and in some cases local politicians.

Background to the visits

- 2.12 In recent years two factors have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on the local development of YOTs:
- the reduction in the number of children and young people in the youth justice system
 - the reduction in public spending on youth justice services
- 2.13 The reduction in the number of children and young people at all stages of the youth justice system has been the outstanding success of the YOT model and of the wider youth justice system. The *Youth justice annual statistics 2013/14*³ show that:

¹ https://www.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319291/youth-offending-partnerships-guidance.pdf

²

https://www.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418164/YOT_Management_Board_guidance_Wales.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/Government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2013-to-2014>

- the number of first time entrants has fallen 75% since 2003/04 and fell 20% last year
- the number of children and young people sentenced at court has fallen 64% since 2003/04 and fell 23% last year
- the average under-18 custody population has fallen 56% since 2003/04 and fell by 21% last year

2.14 The reduction in public spending has affected all youth justice partners as well as the funding YOTs receive from central government. The *Youth justice annual statistics 2013/14*⁴ show that total YOT funding from statutory partners and the YJB fell from £372m in 2009/10 to £302m in 2013/14 – a reduction of 19%.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/Government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2013-to-2014>

3. Models

“YOTs are an excellent example of a model that works for the benefit of children rather than agencies”

Andrew Gwynn, Service Director for Children, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

- 3.1 The way in which local authorities and their partners met and delivered the statutory requirements to secure local youth justice services, and to establish YOTs⁵, differed from place to place, but there were clear themes across the areas we visited.

Governance - Children’s Services or Community Safety

- 3.2 The majority of the YOTs we visited sat within children’s services. The minority that sat within the local authority’s Community Safety Department did not identify this as a weakness and felt strongly that this was the right decision for their local circumstances. A number of YOTs had moved between children’s services and Community Safety since they were established. All agreed that YOTs needed to be engaged with both children’s services and Community Safety departments to be effective.

Case study: Newham

In 2012 the local authority decided to move the YOT from children’s services to Community Safety. The purpose of the move was to focus on performance and quality assurance of core youth justice services. All interviewees agreed that performance had significantly improved since the move. The YOT manager believed that relationships with children’s services had not suffered because the director of children’s services chairs the YOT management board, and because the YOT continues to work closely with children’s services.

Integration

- 3.3 To a greater or lesser degree all of the YOTs we visited were becoming more closely integrated with other services delivered by the local authority. YOT managers will now often manage other youth or family services as well as youth offending, and YOTs will often share office space with other local authority services. Gateshead, Kent, Liverpool, Sandwell and Warwickshire demonstrated the most integrated YOT models with youth offending services part of a wider team.
- 3.4 Local areas described the key reasons for integration as:
- the reduction in the statutory youth offending caseload

⁵ As set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, sections 38-39

- the need to deliver financial savings
 - a desire to redesign services around an early intervention, prevention and family-based model to improve access to services and outcomes
- 3.5 Integration was often part of a wider process by local authorities to redesign services around an early intervention, prevention and a more family-based model. The rationale for this development was also to ensure the sustainability of services in the face of significant reductions in public spending. The philosophical shift towards early intervention, prevention and family-based services was also driven by a recognition of the factors that cause offending and the desire to structure services around the needs of young people.
- 3.6 In terms of youth justice practice, a number of local areas identified benefits from integration, including:
- the YOT being less isolated from wider local authority services
 - easier referrals of young people to other local services
 - sharing good practice across teams
 - sharing performance and quality assurance across teams
- 3.7 But a number of local areas also identified risks. There were concerns that the specialist risk-based services delivered by YOTs to a complex and high-risk group of children and young people could be lost. There were also concerns that integration with children's services could lead to less focus on youth justice in a department concerned more with safeguarding, or where the YOT sat in Community Safety, less focus on the needs of young people in a department concerned more with public protection.

Case study: Kent

Kent County Council was undertaking a restructure of its youth services, including the YOT, to be implemented from April 2015. YOT practitioners would move to become part of multi-disciplinary teams covering particular districts. Each district team would include staff specialising in school attendance, youth work, early help, Troubled Families and youth justice. Operational delivery of youth justice services was the responsibility of the district team managers. The YOT manager is the strategic lead for youth justice and directly manages county-wide services, such as: intensive supervision and surveillance; referral order panels (including volunteer recruitment and training); and commissioned services.

In addition to the three reasons set out in paragraph 3.4 above, the YOT manager and chair of the management board also said that the integration aimed to increase children and young people's access to mainstream services, and to reduce the number of workers dealing with each young person.

Case study: Nottingham City

Nottingham City YOT operated through three local teams. Each team had a team manager focussed on strategic issues and quality assurance, and a practice specialist focussed on reflective youth justice practice, individual cases and staff development. Nottingham City's Early Help, targeted support and children's social care services were closely aligned under one director to ensure early intervention and cohesive working across service boundaries.

Nottingham City planned to bring its Family Intervention Project, Troubled Families scheme and YOT together under the same management structure to create a more comprehensive prevention service as well as to increase efficiency.

- 3.8 The national Troubled Families programme provides a framework for local agencies to work together through locally designed and delivered schemes on the challenges, including offending, faced by families across England. A recent Joint Inspection report found that YOTs are playing an important part in developing and delivering local Troubled Families schemes⁶. Our visits confirmed this finding and Gateshead was an excellent example of the contribution YOTs can make to the Troubled Families programme.

Case study: Gateshead

The YOT played a key role in delivering the local Troubled Families scheme. The YOT Manager was the Troubled Families coordinator and managed the Family Intervention and Family and Community teams as well as the YOT. The YOT operated a 'co-allocation model' where all statutory cases were assigned to a statutory case manager and assessed against the Troubled Families criteria. If a case met the criteria it was co-allocated to a prevention case manager who created a Troubled Families 'team around the family'⁷. The case manager managed the statutory element of the case, but if there was unmet need at the end of the order the prevention case manager would continue to work with the young person and their family.

In addition to the three reasons set out in paragraph 3.4 above, the YOT manager and the assistant director cited the fact that the Troubled Families 'phase two' criteria were met by almost all YOT cases as a key reason for integration.

⁶ <http://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/01/Troubled-Families1.pdf>

⁷ This is likely to change under the extended Troubled Families Programme rolling out from April 2015 whereby all YOT families will meet the Programme's criteria.

Mergers and shared services

- 3.9 The local areas we visited were increasingly sharing, or considering to share, youth justice services across local government boundaries. This ranged from sharing or co-commissioning discrete services to fully merged YOTs, as was the case in Cwm Taf⁸ and Kingston & Richmond.
- 3.10 The interest in sharing or merging youth justice services was particularly evident in metropolitan areas. The chief executives of Barnet, Coventry and Harrow commented that their respective local authorities were exploring sharing or merging a range of services in the next few years.
- 3.11 Local areas described the key reasons for sharing or merging youth justice services across local government boundaries as:
- the reduction in the statutory YOT caseload
 - the need to deliver financial savings
 - the ability to build resilience and retain specialist provision
- 3.12 Several areas suggested they might consider mergers in the future, particularly if resources continued to decline or if political circumstances changed.

Case study: Kingston & Richmond

In 2013 the London Boroughs of Kingston and Richmond created a social enterprise company called 'Achieving for Children' to provide their children's services, including youth justice services. The boroughs considered themselves joint owners and commissioners of the company and both sat on the company's board as well as on the YOT management board. The chair of the management board noted that future financial pressures could see the YOT working in closer alignment with neighbouring YOTs.

- 3.13 In the case of the Isle of Wight, however, a historic merger of a number of YOTs had ended, but the YOT had developed a strong and beneficial relationship with a neighbouring area.

⁸ Combining Rhondda Cynon Taf YOT and Merthyr Tydfil YOT.

Case study: Isle of Wight

In 2011 the Isle of Wight withdrew from the former Wessex YOT that had served four local authority areas. In 2012 an OFSTED inspection found that the local authority's child protection arrangements were inadequate. Following the report the Isle of Wight children's services entered into a strategic partnership with Hampshire children's services. The YOT was included in the partnership. Hampshire YOT's head of service is also head of service of Isle of Wight YOT, and Hampshire's deputy director for children's services is the chair of both management boards. All of those we interviewed described an improvement at the YOT in recent years, and highlighted the way in which the YOT has tapped into the expertise of Hampshire YOT. The chief executive of the local authority described an enduring partnership between the two areas, and all agreed that the YOTs were now learning from each other.

Conclusion

3.14 It is our view that the location of YOTs within local authority structures and the extent of integration with other services or mergers across local government boundaries are questions best determined locally. To be effective YOTs must successfully straddle the criminal justice system and children's and wider youth services. YOTs must have a foot firmly planted in both camps to bridge the gap between the two.

4. Activity

4.1 The YOTs that we visited were undertaking an impressive amount of work alongside their core duties to deliver out of court disposals, provide a youth justice service to courts and manage court orders. We were struck by the breadth and quality of this work, and by the immeasurable contribution that it makes to preventing offending and reoffending by children and young people.

The contemporary youth justice cohort

4.2 As noted above in paragraph 2.13 above, the number of children and young people at all stages of the youth justice system has reduced significantly in recent years. A number of the YOT managers and practitioners we interviewed felt that the young people who are left in the system now are the most challenging to work with. This was due to, among other reasons, more complex family backgrounds, more mental health issues, more group or gang offending and more serious youth violence. There were, however, a minority of YOT managers who felt that it was more a case of services becoming better at recognising and dealing with complex issues.

4.3 What we do know is that the average number of previous offences for each young person in the youth justice system has risen each year since 2006/07. Over the same period, the average time spent in custody for those young people sentenced or remanded to custody has increased. There has also been an increase in the rates of assaults, restraints and self-harm in custody⁹.

Youth justice practitioners

4.4 On each of our visits we met a group of practitioners to discuss their work. The passion, dedication and breadth of expertise and experience shone through at each of these meetings. We met social workers, probation officers, police officers, health professionals, substance misuse officers, housing officers, victims officers and family officers, among many others.

4.5 The teams that we met were truly multi-agency and multi-disciplinary but possessed distinct identities, united by their commitment to and passion for working with a challenging group of children and young people, victims of youth crime and their communities. Their work makes the difference.

Core youth justice activity

4.6 All those we interviewed identified the core activity of a YOT as providing specialist oversight of the complex and high-risk group of children and young people in the youth justice system. This work includes quality

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/Government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2013-to-2014>

individual assessment and intervention planning, as well as safeguarding and public protection. It requires specialist knowledge and skills, and YOTs have become expert at working with this group.

Prevention and diversion

- 4.7 First time entrants to the youth justice system are one of the indicators against which we monitor YOTs' performance. YOTs share responsibility for youth crime prevention with other services, including:
- Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)
 - children's and wider youth services
 - centrally commissioned liaison and diversion services in England
 - Troubled Families services in England
- 4.8 All the local areas we visited prioritised prevention and early intervention work to deliver services to children, young people and families. To some extent all YOTs were involved in this work. The majority were directly involved, describing prevention and diversion as "core business" and prioritising it alongside core work. Practitioners at Gateshead went as far as to describe prevention as their "belief system".
- 4.9 Such YOTs tended to be more closely integrated with wider youth and family services, including, in England, Troubled Families. For example in Gateshead the YOT's prevention team was larger than its statutory team. The YOT undertook the bulk of the prevention work in the area and was pivotal in delivering Troubled Families.
- 4.10 A number of YOTs were delivering enhanced community resolutions and triage schemes. These interventions diverted young people from the formal youth justice system while dealing effectively with their behaviour and commanding the confidence of the police and other partners.
- 4.11 Less integrated YOTs tended to be less involved with prevention and diversion work which was carried out elsewhere in the local authority. In Kirklees the YOT only worked directly with statutory cases, but seconded two fulltime case managers to the local authority's prevention team to deal with community resolutions. In this way the YOT's expertise and budget indirectly contributed to local prevention and diversion work, and the YOT's focus was on interventions at a critical time. All those we interviewed at Kirklees were supportive of the responsibilities for prevention and diversion work.

Case study: Milton Keynes

In Milton Keynes prevention work had moved from the YOT to prevention and early intervention teams in 2012. The YOT Manager, for similar reasons as in Kirklees, had been sceptical about prevention work sitting with the YOT and at the time had supported this move. Milton Keynes had noticed a rise in FTEs that coincided with prevention services leaving the YOT. While there is no evidence to suggest a causal link between the two, there was broad consensus, including the YOT manager, that at least some prevention work should return to the YOT. This was to be discussed at the next YOT management board meeting.

- 4.12 There was a similar picture in Nottingham City, where prevention was moved out of the YOT in 2008, but returned approximately 18 months ago in recognition of the YOT's profile and expertise.
- 4.13 Welsh YOTs receive additional funding from the Welsh Government's youth crime prevention fund for schemes aimed at diverting children and young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. Both the Welsh YOTs we visited (Cwm Taf and Wrexham) were heavily involved in prevention and diversion work. Cwm Taf used this money to undertake prevention work in-house and a proportion to commission prevention services which were operationally managed by the YOT.

Case study: Cwm Taf

In Cwm Taf prevention activity was a wraparound service. Interventions were aimed at preventing children and young people from entering the youth justice system in the first place but also at preventing re-entry at the end of a statutory intervention. As part of exit strategies there were clear pathways back into prevention services. The YOT manager noted that the focus of the work was not only rehabilitation but also reintegration into mainstream services and the local community.

This was in line with the YJB's joint reintegration and resettlement programme with the Welsh Government. It is a key part of our joint strategy, *Children and Young People First*¹⁰.

Work with courts

- 4.14 YOTs have a statutory duty to provide a service to courts for children and young people involved in criminal proceedings¹¹. The vast majority of the YOT managers and practitioners we spoke to were proud of the service

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/Government/publications/youth-justice-strategy-for-wales-children-and-young-people-first>

¹¹ Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 38(4)

that they delivered to their local court and pleased with the feedback that they received from the judiciary on the quality of their reports and advice.

- 4.15 The relationship between YOTs and their local court is a crucial one. It is vital that the judiciary can rely on YOTs to give them quality advice and a professional service to inform their decisions.

Restorative justice

- 4.16 Almost all the YOTs we visited prioritised restorative justice and work with victims of youth crime. A number of YOTs were rightly proud of their practice in this area.
- 4.17 Coventry, Gateshead, Kingston & Richmond, Liverpool and Nottingham City YOTs were working towards the Restorative Justice Council's Restorative Service Quality Mark (RSQM), but in many other YOTs restorative principles were fully embedded in practice. In a number of cases YOTs played a leadership role across the local authority and other youth justice partners, using their expertise to train police officers, staff in schools, staff in children's homes and foster carers. We were pleased to see many YOTs using the restorative justice development grant¹² to further this important work.

Work with families

- 4.18 As noted above, work with families was becoming increasingly important for the YOTs we visited, driven by a better understanding of the needs of young people and drivers for offending, improving outcomes and more recently, in England, by the Troubled Families programme. In Gateshead the YOT had analysed its caseload and found that in 38% of cases child to parent violence was an issue. The YOT created two domestic violence posts to work with young people and their families. In Harrow the YOT commissioned a third sector organisation to deliver a parenting course to the parents of Somali-origin young people.

Case study: Warwickshire

Warwickshire YOT had developed an innovative parent mentoring programme to support the parents of the young people they worked with. YOT parenting practitioners trained parents of the young people they had worked with in the past to become mentors for other parents of young people who came into the YOT, helping them to appreciate the benefits of engaging with the service. Supported by the service the parent mentors had extended the model to run a support group in the community.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/Government/news/victims-of-youth-crime-get-greater-access-to-restorative-justice>

Gangs and serious youth violence

4.19 A number of YOTs identified gangs and serious youth violence as a priority, especially in more deprived metropolitan areas. In Newham the YOT actively targeted young people at risk of gang involvement by working at the local A&E to offer advice and support. The YOT also visited local primary schools to deliver a junior citizenship scheme to children before they move to secondary school. Nottingham City YOT seconded two members of staff to the local 'Vanguard' project based at a local Police station and aimed at disrupting gang activity in the city. This project contributed to the government's ending gangs and youth violence strategy.

Education, training and employment

4.20 Many of the YOTs we visited prioritised helping young people into education, training and employment (ETE). In Essex the YOT had four education workers and access to an education psychologist. In Kirklees the YOT had a fulltime learning disabilities nurse who had trained staff at the YOT to do initial screening. In Milton Keynes the YOT had two part-time speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) therapists who assessed and responded to young people's needs in this area. Milton Keynes is a national leader in SLCN practice.

Case study: Wrexham

Wrexham YOT was integrated into the life long learning department. The reason for this was a belief by those we interviewed that if a young person can gain knowledge and skills they can lead a crime free life. Education was a key focus for the YOT Manager and the YOT employed an education officer who was also a member of an education hub including the schools youth work team and education social work team. All practitioners were trained in SLCN and the YOT had won awards for its practice in this area.

Looked after children

4.21 A number of YOTs noted an increased focus on their looked-after children (LAC) caseload, and in some areas a high number of LAC transfers from other local authorities. Kent and Redbridge in particular host a number of children and young people with LAC status from other areas, and were focussed on improving outcomes for this group. Both Coventry and Kingston & Richmond had dedicated LAC social workers in recognition of the specific needs of this group of children and young people, and the need to develop closer links with children's social care teams.

Child sexual exploitation

4.22 Child sexual exploitation was a high and emerging priority in all of the areas we visited, and the vast majority of YOTs were contributing to this work. In Torbay the YOT worked closely with the child exploitation team,

and in Coventry, Warwickshire and Liverpool YOT managers were leading this work for the local authority because of their multi-agency experience.

Case study: Liverpool

In Liverpool the YOT manager was tasked with undertaking a child sexual exploitation mapping exercise for the local authority. She used her expertise of managing a multi-agency team to design a child sexual exploitation team on that model. The team sat within the services she managed and the team's manager is a seconded senior practitioner from the YOT.

Commissioning services

4.23 To varying extents most of the YOTs we visited commissioned some services, successfully delivering a mixed economy of provision. This ranged from generic services (such as appropriate adults) to discrete interventions. Notable examples included Milton Keynes, where reparation services are delivered by G4S, and Kent, where remand services are delivered by Catch 22.

Case study: Harrow

Harrow YOT commissioned a range of interventions from voluntary sector organisations, from a motivational education intervention to a parenting course for the parents of a group of Somali-origin young people. The YOT commissioned the services for a year and then evaluated the interventions based on their impact on reoffending and educational achievement before deciding whether to re-commission.

4.24 Barnet was unique among the areas we visited in its approach to commissioning.

Case study: Barnet

The chief executive of the London Borough of Barnet explained that the local authority is set up on a commissioning model. The commissioning approach underpins all that Barnet does and the YOT has developed to operate as part of the wider commissioning model. The Chief Executive saw the YOT as a micro-commissioning service itself, commissioning services from within the integrated model.

Cost analysis

4.25 There was limited cost analysis of youth justice activity in the areas we visited. There was, however, a recognition that, while a difficult exercise, cost analysis was an area YOTs needed to improve in. A number of YOTs made reference to the Troubled Families cost calculator as a possible

model for YOTs to use to analyse their activity. A number of local areas reported that YOTs could do better at demonstrating the worth of their work to local partners, politicians and the public. We agree this is an area for improvement.

- 4.26 Where YOTs had carried out some cost analysis this was usually based on the YJB's cost analysis tool¹³. In Essex the YOT had built upon this to develop more detailed analysis of their work which was very positive.

Case study: Redbridge

In Redbridge the YOT resourced a quarterly audit of its work by external consultants. This independent scrutiny demonstrated a strong commitment to and investment in improving practice. As a relatively high-performing YOT, Redbridge would not normally receive such a level of scrutiny from the YJB.

Conclusion

- 4.27 We feel strongly that YOTs have an important role to play in prevention and diversion, but the location of prevention and diversion services within local authority teams should be determined locally. It is, however, crucial that YOTs are functionally integrated with prevention and diversion services so they can contribute their considerable expertise.

¹³ Available at: <https://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice/toolkits>

5. Central government funding for youth justice services

“Our current gold service of delivering core statutory and prevention activity would be reduced to a bronze level of service, delivering statutory activity only”

Dr Helen Paterson, Chief Executive, Wrexham County Borough Council

- 5.1 YOTs are funded by their statutory partners and receive an annual grant from central government for the purposes of the operation of the youth justice system and the provision of youth justice services. The YOT grant is administered, and compliance with its conditions overseen, by the YJB.
- 5.2 Since 2009/10 the YOT grant has fallen 36.5%. We were keen to explore with those we interviewed the value and importance of the YOT grant for their service, and what the impact of further reductions might be.

Impact of further reductions to the YOT grant

- 5.3 All the areas we visited noted the extremely challenging financial situation for local authorities and other youth justice partners. They highlighted the reductions to funding, both in terms of cash and other contributions such as staffing, that YOTs have already absorbed. The YOT grant was considered by all those interviewed to be core funding crucial to the delivery of local youth justice services.
- 5.4 Those we interviewed felt strongly that further reductions to the YOT grant would have a serious effect on the ability of the local authority and its partners to deliver youth justice services. They reported that further reductions in funding from central government could result in YOTs focusing solely on statutory work at the expense of prevention and diversion work, and at the expense of the more innovative work that they undertake. A number cautioned that the loss of this work could ultimately result in an increase in first time entrants to the youth justice system as young people’s needs and behaviour were not dealt with at an early stage.
- 5.5 Many of those we interviewed felt strongly that the YOT grant, like the statutory requirements that underpin youth justice services, gave YOTs influence and status locally. If the grant was reduced, or no longer provided on a ring-fenced basis from central government, this influence with partners would be diminished.
- 5.6 Many were seriously concerned that a reduction in central government funding for youth justice services would be seen by partners as reason to review and to reduce their contributions in line with the central government reduction. It was widely felt that such a reduction would signal a loss of focus on youth justice. A number of YOTs reported that they were already experiencing pressure from partners about their contributions, but were able to use the YOT grant to demonstrate and justify the importance of funding from other areas.

Conclusion

- 5.7 In our view there is a strong case for continuing investment by central government in local youth justice services. While we recognise there needs to be a better understanding of the relationship between funding and outcomes, we are concerned that reducing central government funding without understanding the potential impact risks undermining the successes achieved by the youth justice system in recent years.
- 5.8 We believe that central government funding gives central government and the YJB local influence. It demonstrates central government's commitment to and oversight of local youth justice services and its ring-fenced nature sends a clear message to local partners that the government takes youth crime seriously.

6. Leadership, strategy and governance

- 6.1 All of the YOTs we visited contributed to and influenced the strategic direction of the local authority and other local partners. How effective YOTs were in this differed from area to area and was dependent on a number of factors, but strong leadership of the YOT and of its management board were key.

YOT management board

- 6.2 All the areas we visited identified a strong YOT management board as critical to good governance and to raising the profile of, as well as responsibility for, youth justice among local partners. Effective boards were able to scrutinise and challenge the work of the YOT. They were also able to champion the YOT and influence local partners.
- 6.3 The seniority of the chair and of other members was an important aspect of a strong board. The boards that we felt were strong tended to be chaired by senior individuals. In the areas where a police officer was Chair those interviewed felt this brought the additional benefit of independence from the local authority as well as credibility with a key partner.

Case study: Kirklees

In Kirklees the chair of the YOT management board was always the local district commander, bringing stability and continuity. The incumbent felt that his position as a police officer also gave him the independence to ask challenging questions of the YOT. The chair reported a very good relationship with the assistant director with responsibility for the YOT. The chair had regular meetings with the local authority's chief executive where he was able to discuss youth justice.

Case study: Stockton

In Stockton the local authority's chief executive was poised to take over chair of the YOT management board from a retiring senior police officer to show his support for the YOT and to raise its profile with local partners. The chief executive spent a year preparing for the role by attending meetings to learn about the YOT and to provide continuity. He had also been proactive in meeting partners at a senior level when attendance at board meetings had slipped.

Case study: Torbay

In Torbay the management board provided detailed scrutiny and challenge by auditing cases. The board usually compares two similar cases with different outcomes to see where improvements could be made. The director of children's services and chair of the management board felt that this was particularly helpful to better understand the data as well as the standard of practice. It also gave other members of the management board influence and enabled partners to identify their contributions to individual cases.

- 6.4 In Cwm Taf the Chief Executive of Merthyr Tydfil chaired the management board. A Merthyr Tydfil Councillor and a Rhondda Cynon Taf Councillor were members of the board. The local PCC was also represented. The director of children's services in Harrow had recently become chair of the management board with the specific aim of increasing attendance among partners. In Warwickshire the PCC chaired the chief officers' board which oversaw the YOT. In Liverpool a senior police officer chaired the management board and reported strong relationships with elected members and the local PCC.
- 6.5 But such examples contrasted with what we heard in Gateshead, where a restructure saw the role of chair delegated by the director of children's services to a less senior local government official. The YOT manager explained that partners had responded by sending less senior staff to represent them on the board. The YOT manager had, however, raised this with both the strategic and service directors to suggest a review of the chair and membership.

YOT manager

- 6.6 We met many passionate and inspiring YOT managers doing fantastic work in challenging circumstances. The YOT manager's role was of particular importance to the YOT's ability to influence and contribute to local strategic aims. Strong and stable leadership from YOT managers experienced in youth justice practice gave YOTs a stronger and more credible voice.
- 6.7 It was evident from the areas we visited that the role of YOT manager is changing. With closer integration and the need to save money, YOT managers are now more likely to manage other services as well as the YOT, such as Troubled Families and other family or youth services. A number of YOT managers felt that this had given them a stronger voice within the local authority and more influence when it came to commissioning. There was a recognition that youth justice experience was useful and particularly important where more senior managers did not have a youth offending background.

YOTs' contributions to local strategic aims

- 6.8 In all the areas we visited YOTs were well-embedded across local strategic boards and in local strategic plans. A number of YOT managers stressed the importance of YOT representation across both the

safeguarding/children's services boards and the criminal justice/Community Safety boards. A number of senior managers also recognised the benefits of using YOT managers' skills and experience to support other high-priority work. The strategic boards and operational groups on which YOTs were represented spanned public protection, safeguarding, CSE, extremism, courts and out of court disposals. YOT managers were also making significant contributions to national government priorities.

- 6.9 In Kent the YOT Manager was chair of the local criminal justice board (LCJB) and was able to keep youth offending high on the local agenda. He led on a protocol developed by the Board to ensure a child first approach to youth offending. In Warwickshire criminal justice agencies were co-located in a justice centre, and the YOT manager was chair of the justice strategic board bringing together Warwickshire's criminal justice agencies.
- 6.10 A number of YOT managers reported that having a profile with elected members was important to the YOT's ability to influence and contribute to local strategic aims. In Newham the YOT manager met monthly with elected members to discuss the YOT's work. Similarly Coventry reported positive relationships with elected members, fostered through regular performance reports to the relevant lead member.

Case study: Essex

In Essex we met the cabinet member for children and adults who had youth justice in his portfolio. He prioritised local youth justice services and the chair of the YOT management board felt that this had raised the profile of the YOT among its partners. The councillor also met regularly with frontline YOT practitioners, using the interactions to inform his strategic discussions with partners.

- 6.11 A number of YOT Managers we spoke to felt that the statutory duties placed on local authorities and other partners, as well as the YJB's oversight and HMI Probation inspections, raised the profile of youth justice services and helped to make youth justice a local priority.

The future of youth justice services

- 6.12 Across all the areas we visited those interviewed felt that the future of youth justice services would see: closer integration with other services delivered by the local authority; more working across local government boundaries; and a continued focus on early intervention, prevention and family-based services.
- 6.13 Cross-boundary working was a particularly strong theme in the more metropolitan areas. In London and the West Midlands local authorities were actively exploring options for cross-boundary working, and it was also on the local agenda in West Yorkshire and on Teesside.

Conclusion

- 6.14 It is our view that to be effective YOTs need strong leadership. This means a strong management board, a strong manager and commitment from senior leaders at the local authority and among other local partners. Strong leadership is particularly important for a multi-agency partnership.
- 6.15 A strong board requires local partners to commit senior staff who can make decisions. In areas where senior figures chaired the board, we felt YOTs were stronger and had more influence. This was also the case where YOTs had profile with elected members and Police and Crime Commissioners.

7. Partnership working

“Our partnership working has matured to become a collaboration of all the partners”

Superintendent Paul Betts, West Midlands Police and Chair of Sandwell YOT Management Board

- 7.1 All those we interviewed identified strong local relationships between statutory and non-statutory partners as critical to the effective delivery of local youth justice services. The strength of relationships varied from area to area, but on the whole we were impressed by the commitment from local partners to work together under challenging circumstances.

Police services

- 7.2 It was evident from our visits that police services were strong and committed youth justice partners, and that a good relationship between the police and the local authority was critical to an effective YOT. Almost all areas reported positive relationships with the police, and this was particularly the case in areas where the YOT management board was chaired by a senior police officer.

Case study: Sandwell

In Sandwell the chair of the YOT management board was a senior police officer and had been so for a number of years. He reported that youth justice was a high priority for West Midlands Police and that the police in Sandwell had a considerable commitment to the YOT. He was soon to return to West Midlands Police to develop force-wide work on youth justice, building on his work at Sandwell YOT. Another senior police officer was due to become chair. The YOT had five police constables made available to it as well as a police sergeant.

- 7.3 In the areas we visited it was clear that the relationship between the local authority and the police was crucial to the fall in first time entrants to the youth justice system over the recent years. We saw police forces and YOTs working together successfully to deliver robust and effective triage schemes and innovative non-statutory out of court disposals alongside statutory youth cautions and youth conditional cautions.
- 7.4 It was notable that in Stockton the fall in first time entrants lagged behind other areas we visited. The YOT manager felt the reason for the lag had been previous approaches to policing. A change in leadership at Cleveland Police had seen a change in focus. The YOT was now operating an enhanced community resolution in partnership with the police, as well as a triage scheme funded by Cleveland PCC. First time entrants were now falling in line with the trend across England and Wales.

Police and Crime Commissioners

- 7.5 The election of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 2012 was a significant development for YOTs. While not a statutory youth justice partner, the relationship between YOTs and their local PCC is extremely important. We were pleased to see many examples of PCCs who were committed to youth justice services and working closely with YOTs.
- 7.6 YOTs often worked together to approach PCCs on a regional basis. We felt this tended to be more effective than YOTs who received funding from the PCC through the local authority's Community Safety Partnership.
- 7.7 Many YOTs received PCC funding for discrete pieces of work, particularly for out of court disposals, enhanced community resolutions and triage schemes. These interventions diverted young people from the formal youth justice system while dealing effectively with their behaviour and commanding the confidence of the police and other partners. There was, however, a significant degree of concern among YOTs at the sometimes short term nature of the grants they received from PCCs for this work.
- 7.8 In London local relationships with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime were managed through local authorities' Community Safety Partnerships. YOTs did not have a direct relationship, but there was a willingness from YOTs to engage more directly.

Health services

- 7.9 A number of areas reported difficulties in their relationships with local health services. This was due in the most part to the restructure of health services over the last few years. Attendance at the YOT management board was a particular problem, as was access to local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- 7.10 There were, however, notable exceptions. Barnet, Newham, Wrexham and Coventry all reported good access to CAMHS services, with Coventry having a seconded CAMHS nurse. Nottingham City had a sexual health nurse as well as two school nurses embedded within the YOT. Liverpool had two seconded general health nurses and good links into CAMHS.
- 7.11 In Milton Keynes access to health services had been historically strong. The YOT had built on this strength by refreshing its approach and negotiating with health services along the lines of a service level agreement rather than focussing on secondments of individual staff. The YOT manager reported an increase in the range of input from health services at no extra cost.

Probation services

- 7.12 A number of areas also reported difficulties in their relationships with probation services, but not to the same extent as with health services. Again this was due to the recent restructure of probation services. The difficulties tended to be at a management and strategic level rather than at an operational level, although in Kent and Wrexham probation's contribution to the YOT in terms of operational resource had decreased. In

Milton Keynes the YOT had not had a seconded probation officer for many years, instead receiving funding from Probation to enable the YOT to recruit a worker of their choosing.

- 7.13 At a strategic level YOTs now need to build and maintain relationships with the National Probation Service (NPS) and their local Community Rehabilitation Company. A few areas reported confusion and duplication between the two bodies. There was a recognition that a NPS representative was most important given that youth offending referrals were directed through them.

Education services

- 7.14 Most areas reported good engagement with education services at a strategic level with the local authority's education department, and at an operational level with institutions offering alternative provision. Direct relationships with schools were often more difficult. The YOT managers that we spoke to recognised that they needed to work at building relationships directly with head teachers.

Case study: Coventry

In Coventry YOT practitioners reported excellent relationships with institutions offering alternative provision, but also noted that they were working increasingly well with head teachers. The YOT manager had identified establishing relationships directly with head teachers as a priority and had attended meetings of the local head teachers group to raise the YOTs' profile and to identify common goals.

Conclusion

- 7.15 We feel that the statutory requirements for partners to cooperate at both a strategic and an operational level are important for the delivery of effective youth justice services. Youth justice partnerships have matured and adapted well to local needs over the past 15 years.

Annex A

Over February and March 2015 Board members visited the following youth offending teams:

- Barnet
- Coventry
- Cwm Taf
- Essex
- Gateshead
- Harrow
- Isle of Wight
- Kent
- Kingston and Richmond
- Kirklees
- Liverpool
- Milton Keynes
- Newham
- Nottingham
- Redbridge
- Sandwell
- Stockton-on-Tees
- Torbay
- Warwickshire
- Wrexham