

An evaluation of social work posts in young offender institutions

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Charlotte Fielder, Di Hart, Catherine Shaw and Jennifer Gibb, NCB

Introduction

In April 2006, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) commissioned the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to conduct an independent evaluation of social work posts in young offender institutions (YOIs). This report presents the findings from that process and implementation evaluation.

National Children's Bureau

The evaluation was undertaken by the Research and Evaluation department in partnership with the Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) within NCB.

NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. As an umbrella body for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, it provides essential information on policy, research and best practice for their members and other partners. NCB aims to:

- challenge disadvantage in childhood
- work with children and young people to ensure they are involved in all matters that affect their lives
- promote multi-disciplinary cross-agency partnerships and good practice
- influence Government policy through policy development and advocacy
- undertake high quality research and work from an evidence-based perspective
- disseminate information to all those working with children and young people, and to children and young people themselves.

NCB has adopted and works within the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child. NCB (England and Northern Ireland) works in partnership with Children in Scotland and Children in Wales.

Note

For clarity and to help protect interviewees' anonymity, the generic title of 'social worker' is used to represent those employed in the social work posts in YOIs. This encompasses workers with a range of job titles, including:

- social worker
- senior social worker
- senior practitioner
- principal social worker
- children and young people's support worker.

Context: social workers in YOIs

Background

The YJB is an executive non-departmental public body which oversees the youth justice system. It works to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people under the age of 18, and to ensure that custody for them is safe and secure. It also addresses the causes of their offending behaviour. It is responsible for placing young people aged under 18 years who have been sentenced or remanded to custody. There are three types of secure custodial accommodation:

- secure training centres (STCs), run by private operators, are purpose-built centres for young offenders up to the age of 17
- secure children's homes, run by local authorities, are generally used to accommodate young offenders aged 12 to 14, girls up to the age of 16, and 15 to 16-year-old boys who are assessed as vulnerable
- young offender institutions (YOIs).

YOIs are facilities run by the Prison Service and accommodate 15 to 21-year-olds, although under-18s are held in discrete establishments or young people's wings. YOIs have lower ratios of staff to young people than STCs and secure children's homes and generally accommodate larger numbers of young people.

In 2002, Mr Justice Munby confirmed in his judgement, following an application by the Howard League for Penal Reform, that children in YOIs are entitled to services under the Children Act 1989. Subsequently, the Joint Child Protection and Children's Safeguards Review by the YJB and the Prison Service (2004), the Caerphilly Judgement (2002) and the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children (2002) all highlighted the particular needs of children in custody.

The specific responsibilities that local authorities have towards such children have been set out in a Department for Education and Skills circular (DfES, 2004). These are:

- services in relation to children in need
- action where there are concerns that a child is suffering or likely to suffer harm
- action when a child dies in a juvenile secure establishment
- services in relation to looked-after children.

In order to support the development of this work it was decided that social work posts should be established in YOIs specifically to undertake tasks relating to the duties listed above. It was felt that, in addition to fulfilling the specific requirements of the DfES circular, such posts would make progress towards addressing some of the broader underlying issues, which were identified by a range of national stakeholders. These issues include:

- recognition that many young people in custody have a high level of need, and that a significant number of young people in custody are looked-after children

- concern that previously young people in custody had been ‘neglected’, ‘forgotten’ or ‘sidelined’ by local authorities, even when statutory obligations existed; this meant that young people’s needs were being met neither in custody nor on release
- concern that prisons were not sufficiently child-centred – for example, prison staff were thought to be unlikely to understand issues relating to looked-after children, or to be equipped with the skills or time to deal with welfare issues.

Funding the posts

The YJB considered childcare social work to be the ultimate responsibility of the DfES, but it was decided that the YJB would provide initial funding for a two-year period from March 2005 to allow time for a longer-term solution to be found. A budget allocation was provided to each YOI based on the number of young people within each establishment (one worker per 100 under-18s, with a higher ratio in the female estate). The local authority in which the YOI was situated was invited to access the funds specifically for the purpose of employing social workers to be based within the YOI. The expectation was that the local authorities would directly employ and manage a total of 25 social workers, enabling the social workers to be independent of the YOIs, and supported in fulfilling local authority responsibilities. The YJB anticipated that once the social worker project concluded in March 2007, long-term funding would have been secured with the help of the DfES. This turned out not to be the case and following a period of negotiation between the YJB, Home Office, Prison Service and the DfES, in late 2006 it was agreed that a further year’s funding would be provided jointly by the YJB and the DfES, during which time the YJB would continue to provide central co-ordination. The future of the funding for the posts beyond June 2008 is uncertain at the time of publication.

This ongoing uncertainty over future funding led to a climate of pressure to evaluate the posts, and to the commissioning of this independent evaluation. Nevertheless, given the short time that many of the social workers have been in post, and the lack of baseline information about practice before their appointment, it would be unrealistic to expect that the value – or otherwise – of the posts could be conclusively demonstrated.

Filling the posts

At the beginning of the evaluation period there were 17 YOIs in the juvenile estate (another unit has opened more recently and was not included in the data collection). At the time of reporting there were 15 social workers in post in 13 YOIs¹. Four YOIs did not have a social worker and a number of YOIs who had funding allocated for two workers had only one in post; post holders had either recently left or posts had never been filled. The first social workers were recruited in autumn 2005, the majority were in post by early 2006 and a small number came into post more recently as replacements for leavers. Considerable recruitment and retention issues were reported by interviewees due to the funding uncertainty during 2006/07.

Table 1 below shows the capacity of each YOI, and the number of social workers in post during the evaluation period. Local decisions were taken about the level of seniority

¹ This information is related to the social workers appointed through this initiative: some YOIs have seconded youth offending team workers or other staff who are described as social workers but they do not fulfil the same statutory role.

required to fulfil the role. Some social workers were recruited at basic grade; others at a senior grade.

Table 1: Social workers in post during evaluation period (April 2006 to March 2007)

Juvenile YOI	No. of young people	No. of social workers	Key changes during evaluation period
Ashfield	360	1	One social worker left
Brinsford	224	1	
Castington	168	1	
Feltham	296	1	Brief period with two in post – a second worker was appointed, then original worker left
Hindley	192	2	
Huntercombe	360	1	
Lancaster Farms	250	2	One social worker left, but has been replaced
Parc	64	1	Recruited April 2007
Stoke Heath	202	1	
Thorncross	60	1	Initial social worker left, recently replaced
Warren Hill	216	1	
Werrington	132	1	Social worker left, then interim named worker carried out the role; new social worker recently in post
Wetherby	360	1	
Establishments with no social workers in post during evaluation period			
Cookham Wood	17	0	No change, not recruited
Downview	16	0	No change, not recruited
Eastwood Park	10	0	Social worker left
New Hall	48	0	Social worker left

Supporting the posts

National co-ordination of the posts was carried out by the YJB and Prison Service. One element of this support was the establishment of occasional meetings in Burton-on-Trent for all YOI social workers and their managers as a forum for discussion. This is referred to as the networking forum in this report.

Evaluation approach and methodology

Aim of evaluation and specific evaluation questions

The overall aim of the evaluation was to explore the process and perceived impact of creating children's social work posts within young people's YOIs, with a view to informing the future planning and development of the role.

More specifically the evaluation addressed the following questions:

- What activities have been undertaken by the YOI social workers and how is this monitored?
- How does this relate to their remit as planned?
- What barriers or challenges were encountered and how (if applicable) were these overcome?
- What different 'models' of implementation are in evidence, and which have been most successful?
- How do young people who have had contact with a YOI social worker perceive the role?
- How do other professionals/practitioners (both internal and external to the YOI) perceive the YOI social worker's role?
- What perceived impact, if any, has the presence of the posts had on inter-agency working within youth justice and children's services?
- What impact, if any, has the role perceived to have had on the safety and welfare of young people?

These questions are considered directly in the conclusions and recommendations section.

Data collection: overview

Data gathering was undertaken in three phases:

- familiarisation, exploration of expectations and setting up of data collection systems
- monitoring of work in progress
- reflective interviews.

Social work posts were created in all juvenile YOIs, and these were therefore all within the scope of the evaluation. In practice we were only able to gather data from YOIs where a social worker was actually in post at the relevant time.

Phase one: familiarisation (April–June 2006)

Background research

Preliminary research involved collecting and analysing background documentation relating to the posts themselves, including service level agreements (SLAs) between

local authorities and YOIs and social workers' job descriptions, plus any available work plans.

Six unstructured interviews were undertaken with key national stakeholders, including staff from the YJB, the Prison Service, Prison Inspectorate, the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) and the DfES about the history and rationale for the posts.

Members of the evaluation team also attended the networking forum for social workers in YOIs to provide information about the evaluation and to introduce themselves.

Monitoring

A monitoring system was developed to gather information about every referral to the social workers, including demographic details, care status immediately prior to entering custody, details of the referrer, the reason for referral and action proposed by the social worker. Those social workers who had already established recording systems had the option to continue with these, but were asked to forward their data about referrals to NCB for analysis. Monitoring of social workers' referrals commenced in June 2006 and continued until the end of March 2007

Initial interviews with social workers

In the first couple of months of the evaluation, semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with 17 of the 18 YOI social workers in post at that time in order to discuss early progress and barriers encountered. These interviews covered the following areas:

- the social worker's role and remit within the establishment
- the position of the social worker's role within YOI structures
- their expectations and early experiences in the role
- their relationship with the employing local authority
- their views on how the social work post would 'add value' to the YOI and improve outcomes for young people.

Phase two: the work in progress (July 2006–February 2007)

Monitoring

Monitoring of referrals continued throughout phase two.

Snapshot surveys

Two snapshot surveys of social workers' time were conducted in August 2006 and January 2007. These surveys aimed to provide an overview of how the social work posts were operating in practice and to see whether the profile of work changed over time. The survey took the form of a timesheet, in which social workers summarised their activities for five consecutive working days during a specified period. The data gathered from the surveys were predominantly quantitative.

Case studies

A more detailed exploration of the issues was undertaken in three case study YOIs. Based on emergent findings from initial interviews, analysis of monitoring data and the first snapshot survey, three YOIs were selected to represent as many as possible of the

key factors which appeared to be influencing the way in which the role was developing². These included:

- the size of the YOI
- whether the YOI was a split site establishment (i.e. with young adults on the same site, but in different wings)
- the balance of strategic and face-to-face work undertaken by the social worker.

Members of the evaluation team visited each setting in order to collect data.

Each case study explored in depth a sample of the social worker's activities in the YOI in question. In each of the three YOIs, four pieces of work were selected in consultation with the social worker. These included examples of case work with individual young people, as well as instances of policy or practice development. For each piece of work a number of key informants (including, for example, YOT workers, social workers in local authorities, relevant YOI staff and the young person in question) were interviewed. Relevant documentation was also examined. Each of the 12 pieces of work were written up as 'illustrative examples' and these are referenced at various points in this report.

Phase three – reflection (February 2007–March 2007)

Reflective interviews

Detailed follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with all social workers in YOIs³, their managers in local authorities and other key personnel within YOIs, such as the safeguards manager – a total of 44 interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to allow key informants to reflect upon how well the posts were working, and what their future should be. Topics covered in these interviews included:

- how the role had changed and developed over time
- management, supervision and co-ordination of the posts
- barriers and enablers to fulfilling the role
- specific achievements
- perceived impact of the role on YOIs, local authorities and young people.

Data analysis

All semi-structured qualitative interviews were recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) and transcribed verbatim. Transcribed data were then analysed thematically using Nvivo software.

The monitoring data and the snapshot survey were analysed using MS Excel.

² A fourth case study in a girls' YOI had been planned, but the social worker left before the field work was set up.

³ Including one social worker who had recently left their post, and excluding one who had recently come into post.

About this report

This report is informed by data collected during the entire evaluation period, incorporating and building on findings reported in the interim evaluation report to the YJB (September 2006).

It should be remembered that this independent evaluation took place during a period in which there was uncertainty about whether funding would continue to be available for the social work posts. Indeed, an explicit aim of the evaluation was to inform future planning around the posts. However, while there was no expectation or understanding that a positive evaluation would guarantee a secure future for the posts, certain stakeholders – in particular the social workers themselves – had an undeniable ‘interest’ in the outcome of the evaluation. We recognise that these circumstances present a potential threat to the validity of the findings reported here. However, we also believe that by employing a number of different methods, outlined above, including gathering the views of a range of stakeholders, we have gone some way towards mitigating this risk.

The nature and range of work undertaken by social workers

The way in which the role was implemented varied quite widely from establishment to establishment. This section presents findings from interviews (with social workers, their local authority managers and YOI personnel), two surveys of activities undertaken by social workers during five-day ‘snapshot’ periods, and analysis of referral monitoring forms. Taken together, this provides a comprehensive account of the social workers’ activities, how this has changed over time, and some of the reasons why the role has developed in the way that it has. Data from all three phases of the evaluation have been included in the analysis.

Scope of the role

This section draws upon the views of social workers, their managers and YOI personnel. It provides a broad overview of how the role has been implemented generally and in relation to the four specific areas of responsibility set out in the DfES circular (child protection, children in need, looked-after children and serious case reviews). The social workers were interviewed near the beginning of the evaluation and again towards the end of the year. Reflective interviews were also conducted with a wider range of local stakeholders towards the end of the evaluation period.

Role definition

Many interviewees felt that the social work role was clear, and fitted in well with existing roles in the YOI. In many cases where it was felt to be working well, the social worker was part of a YOI staff team, usually safeguarding.

Where there was a very limited social work resource in the YOI (due to vacancies and/or high ratios of young people to social workers) it was sometimes seen as beneficial for other staff to undertake some of the social worker’s key responsibilities. In these YOIs, the social worker tended to focus on looked-after children, widely acknowledged as being a major priority. This has taken place in some of the YOIs where there was an existing strong child protection system, implemented by safeguarding or YOT workers, and where prison staff case workers or YOT workers had social work qualifications. For example, in one YOI, prison service-employed caseworkers with a social work background were undertaking children in need work because the social worker did not have sufficient time. Similarly, in another YOI the social work-qualified YOT workers were responsible for child protection work. The social work responsibility for children in need was identified as a key area for potential duplication or overlap, as some felt there were already various agencies within the YOI, such as mental health nurses, counsellors and substance misuse services carrying out work in this area. However, many interviewees acknowledged a gap in provision for children in need, and that the social work post could do more for this group of young people if they had more time.

It was noted that the social work role could potentially overlap with the remit of YOT workers in some YOIs. However, those social workers and local authority managers who identified this issue did not regard it as problematic; in some cases clarification had already taken place, and in other instances it was assumed that it could be resolved

through discussion. In one YOI it was suggested there was an overlap with the advocacy service, which had been dealing with child protection work to 'fill a void'; following discussion this work has now been passed to the social worker. Elsewhere, it was reported that the social workers and substance misuse team were duplicating some work. In some YOIs case workers expressed concerns that the social work post may replicate their work and that they could 'lose out' on some of their role. However, these anxieties seem to have been assuaged over time as the workers in question observed the added value of the social workers' knowledge and experience.

In some YOIs, which lacked staff resources for safeguarding, it was reported that the social workers were being given additional child protection and safeguarding duties which were not in their job descriptions; this included work that the social workers perceived to fall within the remit of the child protection co-ordinator/deputy co-ordinator.

Some interviewees, including social workers and their local authority managers, also felt that social workers were being given work that fell outside their responsibilities due to a lack of understanding about the social work post. For example, it was suggested in one YOI that staff from various departments 'dress up a lot of the issues as safeguarding' and pass it to the social worker, when it should be within their own team's remit:

...being part of the safeguarding team, [the social worker] was all things to all people. So there was a lot of work that needed to be done to educate the other workers within those areas as to what was really a safeguarding issue and what could be managed by their own departments.

(Local authority manager)

In another YOI it was suggested that the safeguarding manager's initial expectations of the post were too demanding:

I think it's inevitable because I don't think they know what social workers do. And as I say, I think it's because we've not been really clear about what she will and will not be doing as well. She's probably being pulled into a lot of stuff.

(Local authority manager)

Areas of responsibility in practice

The range of tasks undertaken by the social workers was partly determined by the resources available; when there was only one social worker in a large establishment, they had to prioritise within the range of responsibilities in their job description. It also depended on the roles of other staff in the YOI, and whether any tasks in the social worker job description were being undertaken by others. In all YOIs, child protection and looked-after children were given priority over children in need. Some social workers balanced looked-after children work and child protection work more or less equally while others focussed more on one aspect than on the other.

Child protection (general)

The extent to which social workers undertook child protection work appeared to be predominantly determined by the existing systems and posts in place in the YOI. Some social workers found that child protection took priority in their workload: some became directly involved in the process, for example undertaking child protection interviews, supporting investigations and liaising with the police in others, safeguarding teams and child protection co-ordinators were responsible for the majority of this work with the social workers taking on specific aspects, such as liaison with local authorities. There

were issues in some YOIs where social workers had been given child protection work which they felt should be the responsibility of child protection co-ordinators. Other social workers had minimal involvement in child protection work as this was the remit of other professionals within the establishment; for example in two YOIs there were YOT workers in post who undertook all the child protection work. This was not necessarily perceived as a bad thing; within a large YOI, such an additional resource could free the social worker up to support looked-after children.

One social worker raised a concern that although they received a lot of referrals, some incidents with potential child protection implications, for example when a young person sustained 'significant injuries', had not been discussed with them. There appeared to be no consensus as to the definition of 'child protection', or its place within the broader concept of 'safeguarding', particularly in respect of violence between young people.

Role in relation to child protection allegations against staff

Social workers had varying roles in relation to child protection allegations against members of staff in the YOI, although they did not usually undertake direct investigations.

In many YOIs, the social worker had no involvement at all in such allegations. In some establishments the social worker had a role in supporting the young person or ascertaining whether the young person wanted to make a complaint. Some social workers undertook the initial assessments and gathered information but their involvement ended at the strategy meeting. However, in two YOIs the social worker had undertaken investigations into allegations against staff, either as part of an internal prison process or s 47⁴ enquiries on behalf of the local authority. In a third YOI the social worker undertook the investigation jointly with external agencies. The threshold between an assessment and an investigation is not always clear; for example, some social workers were asked to view CCTV footage as part of the process of deciding whether a strategy meeting was needed, while other local authorities would regard this as being part of the formal investigation.

One reason for deciding to limit the social worker's role in investigations was the perception that such involvement could damage their relationship with prison colleagues. Other limitations to this aspect of the role were dictated by workload priorities or an explicit local decision that the social worker should not have any role in child protection.

Looked-after children

Working to support looked-after children was the core task of some social workers, particularly those who undertook minimal child protection work. These cases involved considerable liaison with home local authorities to ensure that they fulfilled their statutory requirements, as well as advising other professionals in the YOI. As their role developed, social workers set up screening and referral systems for looked-after children. In one female YOI, the social work role was originally intended to focus specifically on this group, but as there were such small numbers of looked-after girls the role broadened to include other work.

⁴ Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 gives local authorities a duty to investigate if a child within their area is thought to be at risk of significant harm.

Children in need

It is generally agreed that most social workers in YOIs lacked the resources to fulfil their responsibilities to children in need. Work on child protection and looked-after children took priority, leaving most social workers with the capacity to take only a limited and reactive approach to children in need. Given the commonly expressed view that most children in custody are children in need, this is an area where social workers would like to be able to do more.

Serious case reviews

There is no evidence of social workers spending any time undertaking activities in relation to a serious case review during the period of the evaluation.

Specific activities undertaken

The amount of social work capacity available in the YOI, the roles undertaken by other staff in the YOI and the main area of responsibility being fulfilled by the post holder determined the type of activities undertaken by social workers. For example, social workers in smaller YOIs could undertake more in-depth work and a wider range of activities than those based in larger YOIs. The work undertaken by the remaining social worker in YOIs where a second post holder had left was typically revised to reflect the lower capacity. Many stakeholders remarked on the variety of ways in which the posts had been interpreted and implemented across the juvenile secure estate.

In some respects, the social workers' activities changed over time. For example, in the early stages of implementation more time was spent on setting up systems and process development (e.g. referral and screening systems). A lot of time in the early stages of the post was also spent on raising awareness about the social work role within the YOI. Furthermore, some stakeholders reported that the social workers became busier as awareness of their post increased and systems bedded in, resulting in an increased rate of referrals. Social workers based in teams became integrated into systems and processes, entailing attendance at more meetings.

Most social workers reported that the majority of their time was spent on liaison work with other agencies, including local authorities, and other professionals (e.g. case workers or YOT workers) to ensure young people's needs were being met. This element of their work also involved participation in formal meetings about individual children (e.g. looked-after children reviews and sentence planning meetings) and operational meetings about specific groups of young people in the YOI, such as those at risk of self-harm.

Social workers have also been involved in developing policy and procedures (e.g. safeguarding policies), either being directly involved in drafting documents or advising other YOI professionals. Some social workers also attended strategic meetings about specific issues or processes; examples include child protection or safeguarding committees, with at least one social worker being invited to attend the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Training sessions for staff have also been arranged by social workers in some establishments; for example, about child protection or the looked-after children system. At both interview points, social workers identified training as an area that they would like to develop further. Early on in the posts' implementation awareness-raising activities were a priority for most social workers.

In addition, some face-to-face work with young people was carried out, but for most social workers this was not a core element of their role. Such work included general

tasks such as meeting new arrivals during their induction as well as targeted work with individual young people, such as interventions relating to past abuse, looked-after children's entitlements, and accommodation. Some social workers carried out initial assessments and child protection interviews. Some stated that they did very little direct work with young people, either because this was not the focus of their role, or because they did not have the time. In the open establishment, the social worker undertook risk assessments of young people to determine whether they posed a risk to the public or to children if they went out into the community.

Differences between the male and female estate

There were significant differences in the way in which the social work role was implemented in male and female establishments. In the male YOIs, where numbers of young people were higher and resources more stretched, there was pressure for social workers to be drawn into work over and above their responsibilities (as described earlier). By contrast, social workers in the two female YOIs had some problems carving out their designated role. There were smaller numbers of young people and a relatively high ratio of professionals in the female estate, and in both female YOIs stakeholders described the YOT being protective of their responsibilities. For example, YOT workers were already undertaking child protection work and liaising with local authorities. In one of the YOIs, the social worker had no role in this area at all. One interviewee described a 'constant wrestling match' between a small team of workers with regard to roles.

Day to day use of time (from snapshot surveys)

Two snapshot surveys were conducted to capture information about how social workers spent their time on a day-to-day basis to provide a more detailed understanding of how the roles were implemented in practice. This data complements the broader overview provided above. The surveys were carried out at two points in time, the first at an early stage in the posts' implementation, and the second when the posts had had more time to be embedded.

All social workers from the 17 YOIs who were in post at the relevant time were asked to participate in the snapshot survey. Twelve social workers from nine YOIs returned the first questionnaire in August 2006⁵; a response rate of 71%. Eight social workers from eight YOIs returned the second survey in January 2007⁶; a response rate of 57%. Five social workers completed both of the questionnaires.

For each survey, social workers completed a detailed diary of how they spent their time over a five-day period. This snapshot illustrates their use of time at two points, and is therefore not necessarily representative of how they spent their time overall in the post, nor of the activities of all social workers in YOIs. A short set of questions asked social workers how typical their activities had been in the five-day period and what had not been captured in the diary that week. In many cases, routine meetings such as supervision or team meetings had not fallen during the five-day period; other deviations from their 'typical' week included training days, conferences, getting more referrals and trying out a new process.

⁵ The dates of the five-day period varied between workers but all fell within one month of each other.

⁶ Please see footnote above.

Data presented below in Chart 1 (following) is from the more recent snapshot survey. Table 2 compares this to the findings from 2006. Please note that respondents to the two surveys differed on each occasion; therefore, conclusions about change in the social workers' role over time should not be drawn. In fact, the findings reveal little variation.

Chart 1 provides an overview of how social workers used their time in a five-day period in January 2007. Overall, liaison work with other professionals in local authorities and with YOI-based staff about specific young people referred for a social work service constituted the largest proportion of social workers' time. This included communication with local authorities (via email, letter, telephone), and meetings, including sentence planning meetings and looked-after children reviews.

Chart 1: Breakdown of social workers' time in a five day snapshot period⁷ (January 2007)

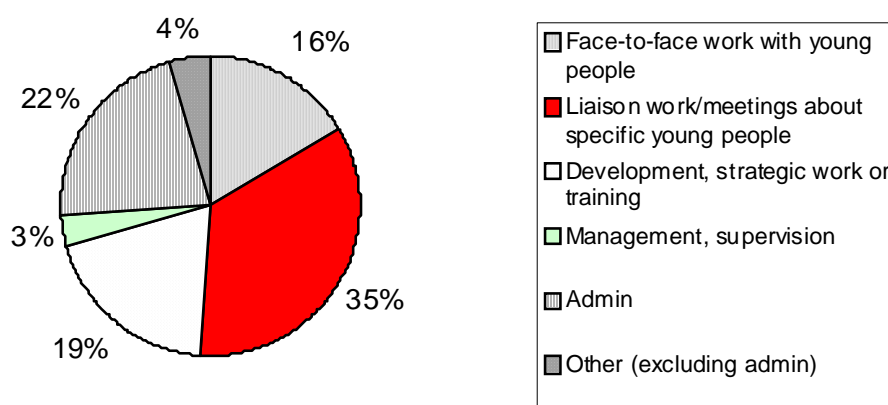


Table 2 compares the findings from 2006 and 2007, and illustrates variations in time use between social workers. It suggests that time spent on different types of activities remained relatively unchanged over the six-month period. In the 2006 and 2007 snapshots, liaison work and meetings about specific young people were the most common use of social workers time (37 and 35% respectively). At both points in time administrative tasks used up the second largest proportion of their time. The maximum proportion of time spent on administration was lower in the second snapshot at 36%, compared to 44% in the first snapshot.

Table 2: Time spent by social workers on key activities (comparison of the 2006 and 2007 snapshots)

Activity	Overall (%)		Median (%)		Min (%)		Max (%)	
	Aug-06	Jan-07	Aug-06	Jan-07	Aug-06	Jan-07	Aug-06	Jan-07
Face-to-face work with young people	14	16	14	15	1	2	35	30
Liaison work/meetings about specific young people	37	35	32	36	22	3	60	49
Development, strategic work or training	12	19	8	15	0	0	41	67

⁷ Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

Management, supervision	3	3	2	3	0	0	14	7
Administrative tasks	26	22	24	24	5	7	44	36
Other	7	4	4	3	0	0	40	14

The proportion of time spent in management and supervision did not change, and remained minimal. Direct work with young people comprised an average of 16% of social workers time, although it varied considerably from individual to individual.

The overall proportion of time spent on strategic and service development activities, including training and setting up safeguarding systems, appears to have increased, although much of this change can be attributed to one social worker spending 67% of their time on such tasks in the 2007 snapshot. This was an unusual week as the worker spent a lot of time on training. This activity presents the widest variation in social workers' use of time, with one worker in 2006 and two workers in 2007 reporting no activity in this category.

Young people referred to social workers (monitoring data)

Early in the evaluation period, the evaluation team provided social workers with monitoring forms to record all referrals made. Monitoring was carried out from June 2006 until March 2007. The data received by the evaluators represents a partial picture of the work undertaken, as not all social workers submitted complete records for the duration of the evaluation period. However, the data does provide a broad overview of the young people referred to YOI social workers, the sources and reasons for such referrals, and the kinds of action taken by social workers as a result.

Age

The social workers were funded to provide a service to young people within the young people's YOIs (although one social worker in a female establishment was also separately funded part-time to work with the mother and baby unit). Table 3 shows that over 90% of referrals related to young people under the age of 18. At times, young people on a Detention and Training Order (DTO) would remain in the establishment beyond the age of 18 to complete their sentence. Other social workers worked in split site establishments also catering for young adults aged 18–21 and some referrals were made in respect of them.

Table 3: Age of young people referred to social workers

Age	Number	%
15	151	15.0
16	301	30.0
17	476	47.4
18	63	6.3
19	4	0.4
20	8	0.8
21	1	0.1
Total	1004	100.0

Gender

Table 4 shows that the overwhelming bulk of referrals were in relation to young men. This reflects the respective size of the population and the fact that only two of the young women's units appointed social workers.

Table 4: Gender of young people referred to social workers

Gender	Number	%
Male	1014	98.4
Female	16	1.6
Total	1030	100.0

Care status

Table 5 indicates that over half the young people referred were known to have been looked-after immediately prior to entering custody. Additional information about their care leaving status indicated that 443 of these young people (78.3%) would also have been entitled to leaving care services.

Table 5: Care status of young people referred to social workers

Care status	Number	%
Care Order	263	25.5
Accommodated s 20 ⁸	263	25.5
Remanded under Children and Young Persons Act 1969	40	3.9
None of the above	393	38.2
Missing data	71	6.9
Total	1030	100.0

⁸ Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 gives local authorities responsibility for providing accommodation for children in need in their area who require it.

Accommodation prior to custody

Table 6 reflects the unsettled nature of the young people referred, with only a quarter living with their parents prior to custody.

Table 6: Young people referred to social workers: accommodation immediately prior to custody

Accommodation prior to custody	Number	%
With parent/s	257	25.0
Family/friends	137	13.3
Own accommodation	1	0.1
Looked-after children placement with family/friends	5	0.5
Looked-after children placement	256	24.9
Bed and breakfast/unsupported hostel	64	6.2
Other supported accommodation	65	6.3
No fixed abode	54	5.2
Missing data	191	18.5
Total	1030	100.0

Source of referral

Table 7 indicates the wide range of people who made referrals to the social workers, the majority of whom were employed within the YOI. Many of the referrers were people who had a direct role in assessing aspects of the young person's needs, such as caseworkers or specialist safeguarding staff. Other referrals came from those with a less specialist role but who were in a position to identify the fact that the young person may be in need of additional support, including first night and wing staff.

Table 7: Source of referrals to social workers

Source of referral		Number	% ⁹
Self-referral		40	3.9
Identified through screening by social worker in YOI		58	5.6
Child's home local authority		58	5.6
Family or friend		2	0.2
YOT worker		46	4.5
YOI staff member	Case worker	287	27.9
	Safeguarding/child protection	75	7.3
	Governor	4	0.4
	Probation	33	3.2
	Prison officer/wing staff	47	4.6
	Bail and remand worker	17	1.7

⁹ Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

	Custody, reception and first night	34	3.3
	Resettlement	7	0.7
	Other	132	12.8
Other agency in YOI	Substance misuse service	36	3.5
	Healthcare (including mental health, psychology)	19	1.8
	Connexions	2	0.2
	Education	10	1.0
	Advocacy	6	0.6
	Chaplaincy	5	0.5
Other agency outside YOI	Police	2	0.2
	Social worker in another YOI	12	1.2
	Other	13	1.3
Other		25	2.4
Missing data		60	5.8
Total		1030	

Reasons for referral to social worker

For all ages, around half of referrals were for looked-after children or those entitled to care leaving services (see Tables 8 and 9 below).

Table 8: Reason young person was referred to social workers

Reason for referral (all referrals)	Number	%
Child in need	135	13.1
Child suffering harm	175	17.0
Looked-after child or care leaver	511	49.6
Other	130	12.6
Missing data	79	7.7
Total	1030	100.0

Some referrals were of people over the age of 18. This could relate to a young person who had remained on an under 18s wing pending release or transfer, a young adult in the 18–21 part of a split site YOI or an adult in a female prison. The referral could relate to their own needs, for example as care leavers, or those of a related child.

Table 9: Reason young person aged 18 years and over referred to social workers

Reason for referral of 18 & over	Number	%
Child in need	8	10.5
Child suffering harm	10	13.2

Looked-after child or care leaver	39	51.3
Other	15	19.7
Missing data	4	5.3
Total	76	100.0

Action taken by social worker in response to referral

In the original planning for the role, it was envisaged that the posts would be primarily 'strategic' rather than involving direct casework with the young people. This is reflected in the responses made by social workers to the referrals received. Table 10 shows that much of the social workers' activity was designed to ensure that young people received the services they needed from other agencies, particularly their home local authority.

Table 10: Action taken by social worker in response to referral

Action taken	Number	% of referrals (n=926)¹⁰
Liaison service between local authority and YOI	475	51.3
Information and/or advice	382	41.3
Initial assessment	128	13.8
No further action	122	13.2
Referral to home local authority	121	13.1
Referral to another agency or service in YOI	87	9.4
Undertake safeguarding – s 47 investigation	49	5.3
Referral to local authority	35	3.8
Core assessment	9	1.0
Serious Case Review	0	0.0

¹⁰ This analysis is based on the 926 cases in which complete data was provided (NB: percentages do not add up to 100 as multiple actions could arise from each referral).

Reflections on the role

Having described in the last section both the broad scope and the detail of the work undertaken by social workers, this section presents more general reflections on the role and some of the specific challenges and opportunities encountered by post holders. It draws on interviews conducted during phases one and three of the study.

Skills and experience required

Stakeholders were asked what skills and experience they felt were required to fulfil the role. Social workers were asked this in both the initial and later interviews to see if their experiences in post had altered their opinion.

Experience and knowledge

Social workers felt that the most crucial areas of knowledge and experience required to undertake the post were of the looked-after children and child protection systems. A social work qualification was felt to be essential and some understanding of the youth justice system was seen as desirable.

Some felt that the worker needed to be a senior practitioner, on the grounds that a YOI was not an appropriate environment for a newly qualified social worker because of the level of knowledge and skill required and the lack of team support at hand. It was also felt that senior staff were required to undertake strategic development work and, if necessary, have the credibility and authority to challenge senior level personnel, such as governors. Some national stakeholders also agreed, on reflection, that the posts should have been funded at a senior level and one interviewee pointed out that some of the salaries offered were unlikely to attract sufficiently experienced staff.

Personal skills

Social workers suggested a number of skills and qualities that they felt were important in undertaking this post. These included:

- general social work skills
- networking, negotiation, tact and diplomacy
- good interpersonal and communication skills, including communicating with young people
- independence, initiative and being a 'self-starter'
- determination, perseverance and patience
- open-mindedness
- empathy, listening and advisory skills, and an ability to switch off from the crime committed by the young person
- adaptability and flexibility
- confidence, ability to challenge, outgoing personality and thick-skinned.

[The social workers need to be] assertive, bossy, thick skinned...to be able to speak your mind, to be able to not to take things personally, to be able to cope with lots of officers and other people staring at you blankly.

(Social worker)

Working in a prison environment is very, very different and it's a very different culture, and I think you've got to essentially be someone quite outgoing really, and able to work on your own initiative...Because you're very much on your own, you've got to be able to be a person that's willing to draw on support and take that, and that's not just from your manager on the outside or your colleagues on the outside. But you've got to get it from in here and so you've got to be a person that's got to be willing to find it really.

(Social worker)

Both managers and social workers considered that the personality of the social worker was a key factor in successfully implementing the role.

Support and management

Various arrangements were in place that could potentially provide support to the social workers. National co-ordination of the posts was carried out by the YJB and prison service. Line management of the posts was located within the local authority in which the YOI is based and day-to-day support could come from colleagues within the YOI itself. In this section, both post holders and other local stakeholders reflect on these various sources of support and how effective they have been.

National co-ordination

Support and communication for social workers and managers

Many interviewees reported a lack of visible national co-ordination since a conference organised by the Prison Service in Birmingham in September 2006 to which safeguards managers, social workers and their local authority managers were invited to hear the initial findings of the evaluation and share their own experiences. It was felt that although this national event was a helpful idea, it would have been more constructive had the continuing uncertainty about funding for the posts not overshadowed other issues.

Views on the availability of support from the YJB and Prison Service at a national level were mixed. Whilst some reported having no contact, others felt the people involved nationally had been very supportive. A number of interviewees described contacting the Prison Service when they had queries and issues to resolve, but some felt they had not had much contact with the YJB during the later stages of the posts' implementation.

Social workers valued opportunities to meet up to discuss and share practice issues, good practice and experiences, as they often felt isolated and did not have a clear sense of how others were developing the posts. Both managers and social workers felt it would have been helpful for the networking forum, initially held in Burton-on-Trent, to have been continued after the first few months of implementation. Safeguarding managers valued their own regular meetings and felt that the social workers would have benefited from a similar arrangement of periodic meetings to discuss issues.

Local authority line managers would also have welcomed opportunities to meet their peers and discuss implementation issues. It was also suggested that local authority and

safeguarding managers would have benefited from initial training or briefing about the posts, including an introduction to the legislation and terminology involved.

Managers and workers alike felt they would have liked to have been kept better informed by those in the YJB and Prison Service who were co-ordinating the posts, particularly regarding the funding issue.

Strategic direction and vision

Some interviewees perceived a lack of strategic direction from the YJB. Interviewees reflected that the posts had been implemented differently across the YOIs and felt that the national co-ordinators should have ensured greater consistency in the role and a longer-term vision, extending beyond the short-term funding cycle. However, the need for a certain amount of flexibility in relation to specific needs of YOIs was also acknowledged by a small number of interviewees.

Interviewees suggested a need for greater monitoring of the posts, incorporating systems for monitoring outcomes, and also some national scrutiny of practice.

Promoting and publicising the post

With hindsight, interviewees would have liked the Government to have publicised and promoted the post more widely to local authorities, YOIs and YOTs. Even at the end of the evaluation period interviewees identified a need for national players to publicise the posts to local authorities, reminding them again of their duties to children in custody; it was suggested that this could be done through another looked-after children circular or by issuing guidance about the secure estate. It was suggested that such strategic input from central Government was needed to improve the engagement of those local authorities that were not fulfilling their statutory duties to young people in YOIs. It was felt that engagement could be improved by introducing targets or including this aspect of their work in local inspections.

In addition, it was suggested that central government could also communicate clear messages to YOIs, for example through guidance, about what the social work role should entail, the distinction between this role and the role of the YOT worker, and the rationale and need for the posts.

Local management and support for social workers

Support from YOI staff

Social workers and local authority managers cited the support of members of YOI staff as a key factor that had facilitated the implementation of the post. Social workers generally appeared to have been accepted and supported in the YOIs, although the nature of their relationships and the location of their post in the YOI team structures varied.

The social work posts were based in different teams across the YOIs, predominantly safeguarding, but also casework – through care and resettlement teams. Some workers were to a large extent integrated into teams, attending team meetings and working closely with the safeguarding managers. In a small number of YOIs the social worker did not appear to be linked into any particular team.

The nature of the relationships with managers in YOIs varied, although social workers were never line-managed within the YOI. Many reported good working relationships with YOI managers who provided informal supervision or day-to-day support and advice on practice issues. Such good relationships were also felt to facilitate the

integration of the social worker into the establishment's systems and processes, including relevant meetings. Some social workers, however, reported that the manager they were linked to in the YOI was only able to help them with logistical issues, such as security and accommodation, rather than professional issues, and some described having little or no support from a manager within the YOI.

Turnover in YOI managers had at times hindered the on-site support arrangements for social workers.

Aside from the manager they were formally linked to, some social workers found other working relationships helpful, such as those with probation officers, YOT workers and child protection co-ordinators. However, such relationships were not always without difficulty, for example where demarcation between roles was not clear, as discussed earlier.

The support of the governor is seen as critical. This was highly valued when the governor was supportive of the post and took an interest in the social workers. Conversely, when the governor was perceived to have had little involvement or interest in the post, this was felt to have been a barrier to its successful implementation in the YOI. For example, one social worker felt the governor neither understood nor trusted the post. Generally, however, interviewees reported high levels of support from senior prison personnel.

Local authority management and support

Social workers were managed by people in a range of different positions within the local authority, including social work team managers (e.g. for safeguarding or child care teams) and those with more strategic roles, such as area-wide safeguarding. In one YOI where a strategic manager managed the social worker, it was suggested that linking the social worker to a local team would have provided additional support. It was noted that in some authorities, restructuring of children's services could affect future management arrangements for the YOI social work posts.

Generally, safeguarding managers, social workers and local authority managers felt local authority management arrangements for the post worked well. However, this was not a universally held view. Not all social workers felt well supported due to capacity issues, difficult relationships and a perceived lack of understanding by the local authority about the post in particular, and prison systems more generally.

Across the country, local authority managers were perceived by themselves, and by social workers and YOI personnel as being under immense pressures (in terms of time, and in some cases, immediate priorities for child protection). These pressures were felt to limit the time available for managers to support the social workers in YOIs, impinging in particular on the frequency of supervision meetings. However, the commitment of managers was often noted. It was also reported that managers were able to offer ad hoc support by telephone and email in addition to meetings.

The extent to which social workers had links with their employing local authorities varied from those who had little contact beyond supervision to those who spent allocated days in the community office. Perceptions of the levels of awareness about the post in the local authority varied. A number of suggestions were made for improving awareness, including providing updates to the local safeguarding children board, holding open days in the YOI and giving presentations to local professionals. One social worker described developing policy guidelines for their employing local authority

regarding the minimum standards of social work service that should be provided to young people in custody (such as a fixed financial allowance).

YOI and local authority co-ordination of support

It was generally felt that interaction and understanding between the managing local authority and the YOI was satisfactory. Overall, social workers, local authority managers and YOI personnel were clear that the ultimate responsibility for the posts lay with the local authority rather than the YOI. While in some cases, managers within the YOI had day-to-day responsibility for overseeing the work and workload priorities of the social worker, interviewees generally did not perceive there to be conflicting lines of accountability.

In some areas, the YOI and local authority had periodic joint meetings to discuss the post; however this approach did not appear to have been adopted everywhere. Interviewees felt these meetings ironed out any problems arising from the role. Good links between the YOI and the local safeguarding children board were felt to improve awareness and understanding of the social worker's role and foster stronger relationships.

The expectation that there would be local monitoring of the role agreed between the local authority and YOI does not seem to have been consistently fulfilled.

Social work in the YOI environment

Initially, working in a YOI had been a new experience for most of the social workers and while experiences varied across establishments, by the time of the initial interviews in spring 2006, early apprehensions had generally been overcome. After a year to 18 months in post social workers, who remained in post, seem to have adjusted well to working in the YOI environment. Nevertheless, social workers and their managers identified some specific issues arising from being a social worker in a YOI environment. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Isolation

Social workers and their managers emphasised that being a lone social work professional within the very different culture and environment of a YOI could be isolating. Maintaining contact with the local authority team through management, team meetings, training, and peer support was felt to alleviate the problem. Those who had minimal contact with their local authority described feeling very isolated. It was felt that more regular opportunities for peer support would be helpful, for example a YOI social worker network, which could be facilitated by a national co-ordinator.

Receptiveness to the post

Acceptance of the social work post by YOI personnel at all levels, and a willingness to co-operate, were seen as key facilitating factors in its successful implementation. The introduction of various other disciplines into the prison system over recent years was felt to have eased the way for the introduction and acceptance of social workers into YOIs. Some also felt that acceptance had been helped by a generally increased awareness of safeguarding issues and a gradual move towards a more child-centred culture. Furthermore, recognition of the value and need for the social work post by most senior YOI personnel was also felt to have facilitated the integration of the post into the establishment. However, a degree of resistance from both senior and ground level workers continued to be reported in some establishments.

Initial, and in some cases, ongoing resistance to the post by prison service staff was attributed by social workers to a generalised apprehension and suspicion of the profession, particularly around the issue of child protection allegations. This highlights the continuing need to build awareness and understanding of the post and the full range of its responsibilities. Although some interviewees reported that this issue had improved over time, building understanding across the YOI workforce remained an ongoing challenge.

Interviewees suggest that understanding and acceptance of social workers could be facilitated by:

- proactively publicising the post to personnel through meetings, training, induction, posters and interacting with personnel on the wings
- integrating the social worker into a specific team
- a senior person in the YOI communicating messages about the post
- the personality and approachable nature of individual social workers.

One YOI representative felt that it was important that prison representatives were on interview panels for social worker posts in order to assess whether the applicant's personality would be compatible with the YOI culture.

Social workers found the culture of the YOI very different to that encountered in children's social services, particularly in relation to ways of working, security issues and the varying perceptions and understanding of prison officers regarding the young people.

Information systems

Prison information systems were described as less well developed than local authority systems by social workers and their line managers. Some reported that it had not been possible to access local authority databases from the YOI. It was suggested that if the social worker had been linked into the local authority system, records about young people could be kept fully up to date.

Some social workers reported difficulties getting caseworkers or relevant YOI staff to operate screening processes to identify looked-after children as this was seen as extra work, which they were reportedly reluctant to carry out.

Working with home local authorities

Most young people are placed in a YOI outside their home local authority but that authority continues to retain some responsibility for providing services, particularly if they are a looked-after child or care-leaver. Overall, social workers reported that the levels of engagement of home local authorities both with young people in YOIs and the social workers themselves had improved over time, as the posts became embedded. Nevertheless, social workers reported very mixed experiences of working with the home local authorities of young people in custody. Some authorities were described as being very co-operative and in many cases appreciative of a link with a YOI-based social worker. Other authorities did not respond at all, or refused to provide a service, which was a source of enormous frustration.

It was reported that levels of awareness of the social work posts varied widely; unsurprisingly perhaps, staff in authorities containing a YOI appeared to be more aware

of the posts, while many other social workers were reported to be still unaware of its existence until directly contacted. Interviewees described some efforts to raise awareness amongst home local authorities, but many had not yet had time to do this. Suggestions made by interviewees for improving this issue included better publicity about the posts and reminders to local authorities of their statutory responsibilities coming from the Government, and, on a local level, stakeholders sending out information and holding meetings with the main local authorities that feed into the YOI.

It was felt that since the social workers came into post there had been an overall increase in the number of looked-after young people whose entitlements were being met through looked-after children reviews, pathway plans, social work visits and financial allowances. Children in need were highlighted as being the most difficult group to access support for from local authorities, for example accommodation on release and welfare visits.

While the social workers aimed to be diplomatic and helpful when dealing with local authorities, ways of approaching those authorities that refused to provide young people with their entitlements varied. Some advocated a non-confrontational approach, with at least one social worker stating that they would not challenge an authority that did not agree to meet their responsibilities, but would instead use the advocacy service within the YOI to put forward the young person's perspective. However, most social workers felt a duty to hold the local authority to account by challenging them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. This had been done in a variety of ways, for example by writing letters clearly specifying the legislation, by copying in other key agencies to correspondence with the local authority and, where needed, discussing individual cases with social work team managers or heads of services. Social workers' managers also became involved in communication with the authority when required. In some instances, issues were referred to the Howard League.

Contextual factors

It is important to bear in mind various contextual factors when considering these identified shortcomings on the part of local authorities. Firstly, local authorities were working under resource constraints, with resultant workload pressures on their own social workers. This was given as a reason in some cases for the limited support being offered to young people in YOIs. Secondly, there were only a small number of young people's YOIs and, at the time of the evaluation, a large secure estate population and high population movement. Therefore YOIs contained young people from different authorities, many of whom were a long distance from home. In such circumstances it could be more difficult for local authorities to release resources for workers to travel long distances to visit young people. It was also difficult for the YOI social worker to build strong relationships with so many different authorities.

Resources

Funding for the posts

Interviewees felt that the implementation of the posts had been adversely affected by the months of uncertainty about whether the posts would continue to be funded by Government beyond March 2007. This is widely believed to have had negative effects on both staff retention and morale. Of the social workers who had left, one confirmed this was the main reason they had sought alternative employment and others cited it as a

contributing factor. Interviewees reported that the necessary focus on the posts' survival distracted attention and energy away from embedding the posts within YOIs.

At the time of the reflective interviews, funding had been confirmed for a further 12 months up to April 2008. Interviewees across the YOIs raised concerns that this short-term funding presented immediate problems, particularly for YOIs with social worker vacancies, because of the difficulty of recruiting to such time-restricted posts. Furthermore, it was feared that if the uncertainty continued, social workers would leave in pursuit of more secure employment. Finally, interviewees in some establishments suggested that until it became clear that the posts would become permanent, they would not be fully accepted and integrated into the working life of the YOI.

Social work capacity

As we have already seen, the ratio of young people to social workers varied across the estate, particularly between the male and female YOIs. This presented differing challenges for the social workers in fulfilling their roles.

In the YOIs with the most limited social work capacity, the social workers had to prioritise those aspects of the role that could realistically be undertaken, at the expense of other activities. This lack of capacity has also resulted in heavy workloads for social workers, long hours for some, and a lack of cover when they are absent. Some report that they are merely 'scratching the surface' in terms of meeting the needs of young people in the YOI.

Capacity was particularly stretched in the large YOIs that only filled one of the two funded posts. Even when there were no vacancies, interviewees considered that staffing levels were insufficient to fulfil all the responsibilities in the job description and that there was possibly sufficient work to occupy an entire team of social workers.

In the two female YOIs where social workers were appointed, the capacity issues experienced in the male estate were not replicated. The reasons for this were two-fold; firstly the number of young people in the female YOIs was far smaller, and secondly there were reported to be various other relevant professionals in the establishments undertaking similar roles. This situation was felt to present its own difficulties (as reported earlier) in terms of delineating a social work role without duplicating work or coming into conflict with other staff.

Administrative support

In most cases, the lack of administrative support for social workers in YOIs, flagged up in the interim evaluation report, had not been alleviated (see Tables 1 and 2 for amount of time spent on administration). Several social workers and their managers felt that too much time was still being spent on tasks such as logging referrals and data entry. Where administrative support had been provided, either by the local authority or the YOI, it was highly valued. Managers and social workers alike saw this as a key area to be addressed, and one that required specific funding. Not only would this release more time for social work tasks, it could also strengthen recording and monitoring systems.

Equipment and accommodation

Very early on in the posts' implementation, many social workers faced practical difficulties, such as not having accommodation or access to their own computer, telephone, filing cabinet and desk. This was described as contributing to a sense of isolation and not being valued. These issues appear to have largely been resolved, although finding suitable accommodation for the workers was difficult in some YOIs.

Some social workers were still also sharing telephone lines with other staff. The main physical barrier remaining for some social workers and their local authority managers was a lack of access to email systems and local authority databases. There are difficulties inherent in the fact that the social workers were effectively working across two systems, and they had to develop local solutions in terms of the records they kept and the way their work was logged and monitored within both local authority and YOI processes.

Achieving outcomes

Measurement of outcomes did not fall within the remit of this evaluation, as the posts were so newly established. However, the final interviews with social workers and other YOI staff explored their perceptions of progress towards achieving outcomes. In addition, the illustrative examples of practice also include reference to perceived outcomes.

Intended outcomes

Early on in the posts' implementation, social workers and national stakeholders were asked how they felt the posts could add value to what was being done already within YOIs, and which outcomes they thought would be improved for young people in custody by the introduction of these posts.

Five intended outcomes were identified through this process. Table 11 presents these five outcomes, together with associated indicators. If fulfilled, these intended outcomes could be expected to have a beneficial effect on the following problems:

- children and young people in custody having high levels of need
- local authorities failing to meet their obligations to children in custody
- YOI culture and practices being inappropriate for children.

However, while there was a widespread sense among interviewees that the posts could potentially contribute to improved outcomes, there was some suggestion that it would be difficult to demonstrate exactly how the posts had made a difference. This was felt to be particularly the case where there were overlapping responsibilities among professionals in a YOI.

Table 11: Intended outcomes of social work posts in YOIs

Early expectations for service delivery
Intended outcome 1: Local authorities accept, understand and meet their obligations to children in custody
Local authorities are aware of their statutory obligations to specific young people in custody
Local authorities maintain links with looked-after young person throughout time in custody, ensure pathway plans are completed, and visit young people in the YOI. Looked-after children reviews take place while the young person is inside YOI and social workers attend remand or sentence planning meetings. Other agencies also come to assess young people for services, such as housing associations.
Local authorities are more consistent in the level of services provided to young people in custody.
Care and Pathway Plans are more effective than if done on release, the young person is involved in the process and the plan is better thought out.
Financial support is provided to looked-after young people.
Social workers in home authorities have a point of contact in the YOI for support about how the YOI operates, and organising access to the young person.
Young people receive continuity of care throughout their time in custody and on release.
Child protection system and procedures are improved to provide a better service for young people. More young people at risk of harm are identified and their cases handled effectively.
Intended outcome 2: YOIs become more child-centred
Social work perspective has changed prison staff's thinking and ways of working with young people.
Historic abuse is identified and action taken.
There is better support for young people in custody as prison processes, such as resettlement, recognise and refer welfare needs to others.
Prison staff are aware of concepts around looked-after children, from governors to prison officers.
Awareness levels amongst prison staff about children in need are raised.
Prison staff check for a young person's looked-after status and act on this where appropriate.
Prison staff are more aware of child protection and make referrals to social workers for child protection concerns.
Prison staff are more aware of children in custody being vulnerable and make referrals to social workers about children in need.
YOI culture becomes more child-centred, recognising that children need to be treated differently from adults. Working practices become more appropriate for children in custody.

YOIs are safer for children and young people than previously.
There is a better understanding of the needs of young people in each individual YOI.
The welfare capacity of YOIs is improved.
Intended outcome 3: Joint-working between YOI and local authorities improves
A system is set up for identifying looked-after children and young people in the YOI.
There is more joined-up working between agencies to improve outcomes for young people in custody.
Communication between agencies within and outside the YOI and young people in custody improves.

Early expectations for impact on children and young people
Intended outcome 4: Outcomes and experiences for children and young people in custody improve
Young people do not feel abandoned or forgotten about by social services when in custody, and can maintain their relationship with their social worker.
Young people are safe from harm while in custody.
Children and young people feel safer in custody.
Young people with traumatic lives have support throughout their time in the YOI.
Young people in custody receive the services to which they are entitled in the same way as young people in the community.
Young people have a sense of purpose and direction in custody, including a clearer sense of agencies that are willing to support them and a plan with aims and objectives for their future.
Young people have their medical needs met.
Looked-after young people have the same access to financial support as other young people in custody which can be used in ways that are valued by the young person, such as for telephone calls to their family or clothing.
Children and young people in custody are less anxious about issues on the outside when they are released, such as their living arrangements, family circumstances, historic or familial abuse.
Intended outcome 5: Outcomes and experiences for children and young people on release improve
Young people have more effective relationships with their home social worker on release.
Young people have somewhere suitable and stable to live when they leave the YOI – for example, supported accommodation or another stable environment, which reduces the risk of young people going into bed and breakfast accommodation, or becoming homeless.

Young people have a sense of purpose and direction on release.
Young people have someone to support them when they leave the YOI.
Young people have their holistic needs met, such as employment needs, when they leave the YOI.
Young people are given opportunities not to re-offend on release, through support in prison and aftercare, provision of accommodation and services such as education.
Children and young people are at less risk of harm on release.

Progress towards achieving outcomes

In the spring of 2007, reflective interviews were conducted with all social workers currently in post, their local authority managers and key personnel from each YOI, such as safeguard managers. Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of progress against the five key outcome areas represented in the previous table. Additional views were gathered during the three site visits. This section of the report summarises perceived progress identified by these various local stakeholders in the first 12–18 months of the posts' existence, and signposts readers to illustrative examples of practice, which can be found in Appendix A.

It is important to bear in mind the general agreement that social workers had not been in post long enough to demonstrate substantial progress against all the outcomes they had the potential to achieve. Many of the implementation issues discussed in this report, such as the perceived lack of social work capacity in many establishments, could also be expected to have a bearing on the achievement of outcomes.

Intended outcome 1: Local authorities accept, understand and meet their obligations to children in custody

Views varied about progress towards this outcome. Most stakeholders perceived some progress, albeit from a fairly low baseline. It was felt that there was still a long way to go. Some of the difficulties stemmed from within the YOIs themselves, and the lack of understanding about the looked-after children system.

See also illustrative example of practice 1: Setting up a referral system for looked-after children (Appendix A)

Examples of change cited included more looked-after children reviews taking place, more pathway plans being written, community social workers being more aware of young people in custody and more likely to visit them, and financial allowances being provided.

See also illustrative example of practice 2: Accessing leaving care services for young person (Appendix A)

One YOI representative summarised his perceptions of change in the support from local authorities:

Well there's lots and lots of boys that we've done LAC [looked-after children] reviews [for], we'd never done a LAC review here before, ever, until [the social worker] came. We'd never had a child protection police interview until [the social worker] came because there was no substance to it. Nobody really cared. Kids were just, until they were released they were forgotten, whereas now, their Looked After Reviews [are] done... The duties that are supposed to be dispelled by their local authorities are being done.

(YOI representative)

However, as already described in the section about issues in working with home authorities, it was felt that the changes were not being achieved consistently, and the response of local authorities to looked-after young people in custody was 'hit and miss'. Many interviewees felt that there would not be an adequate response from all local authorities until there was more drive from the Government to raise awareness of the

posts and compel local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities. Furthermore, it was suggested that accommodated young people were less likely to receive an improved service than those on care orders, and that the practice of local authorities closing cases of section 20 (s 20) children or discharging care orders when young people enter custody persisted.

Stakeholders suggested that this was an area upon which the posts had the potential to make an identifiable impact, and one that could perhaps be more easily attributable to the social workers. This is because it is a clearly defined responsibility within the social worker's role that was not being addressed in any targeted or consistent way prior to the posts' inception.

See also illustrative example of practice 3: Accessing care leaving services for young person (Appendix A)

Intended outcome 2: YOIs become more child-centred

Interviewees felt that YOIs were already, or were becoming, more child-centred. YOIs becoming more child-centred was described by interviewees as a development that has taken place, or is taking place, due to the introduction of the safeguarding agenda more broadly, including the establishment of safeguarding teams, alongside a gradually changing ethos of prison management. The social worker was generally seen as one element of this wider agenda rather than necessarily being the driving force; therefore any perceived changes should not necessarily be attributed to the social work post alone.

Internally, people ask questions about who's got parental responsibility for that boy, and I hear officers saying that, and they wouldn't have been saying that a few years ago.

(YOI representative)

However, various specific pieces of work undertaken by social workers appear to be making an important contribution towards making YOIs more child-centred.

See also illustrative example of practice 4: Involvement in child protection investigations and illustrative example of practice 5: Child protection investigation (Appendix A)

There was also a widespread recognition that looked-after children were being identified within the YOI and referred to the social workers through new systems set up by the post holders.

YOI personnel and social workers alike perceived social workers to be influencing and improving policies, procedures and practice in relation to child protection and safeguarding by playing important roles as 'critical friend' or expert advisor at meetings, contributing to policy development, general awareness-raising work and, in some YOIs, through training.

See also illustrative example of practice 6: Providing training to YOI staff about looked-after children systems (Appendix A)

The external scrutiny provided by the social worker as an independent local authority-employed professional was seen as a key factor in ensuring child protection procedures were appropriate. Interviewees reported that YOI personnel were now more comfortable about the way in which child protection allegations against prison staff were handled,

and that more child protection referrals were being made. As one YOI representative described:

[The social worker] has become very much a critical friend of ours and will ask us very difficult, sometimes quite difficult questions, interrogate decisions that we make, interrogate investigation decisions that we make, but in a way that we have learnt to value because we value it as allowing us to appear more transparent, allowing us to demonstrate to other agencies that we are an organisation willing to be held to account and...I think our processes are capable of being held to account.

(YOI representative)

The very presence of a social worker within the establishment was felt by some interviewees to have had a subtle impact on the culture. It was reported in some YOIs that increased awareness and understanding of the welfare needs of young people in the YOI had improved through the day-to-day interaction of the social worker with prison staff and by being able to observe social worker interactions with young people.

[Staff] see how [the social worker] reacts to the young people and how she treats them, and you see that people who are really interested in working that way will pick it up, and that's the bit about changing the culture...it's learn and develop and just watch and listen.

(YOI representative)

And [the social worker] puts that into context, and says, 'You're dealing with some very emotionally damaged and disturbed young people because of this, this and this'. And when [staff] see that...once the penny drops and they see these are the trigger points for why [young] people behave like they do in certain circumstances, then the staff feel they can deal appropriately and refer them on appropriately. That has helped tremendously.

(YOI representative)

However, there were also suggestions that more work would be needed to change the attitudes of some prison staff towards young people.

Intended outcome 3: Joint-working between YOI and local authorities improves

Views about the effectiveness of joint working between YOIs and the local authorities that employ the social worker appeared to vary. Most local authority managers felt that there had been some or good progress in joint working due to the introduction of the posts. It was acknowledged by some local authority managers that previously relationships had been in need of improvement and one manager reported that the relationship with the YOI remained poor. On the other hand, a number of YOI personnel felt that joint working relationships between the YOI and local authority were strong anyway, or were improving independently of the social worker.

From the local authorities' perspective, the posts had enhanced relationships by creating a visible presence and point of contact in the YOI. Holding periodic meetings to discuss the social work post was identified as a means of enabling joint working between the organisations. YOI personnel now had specific named people in the local authorities to contact. Child protection was felt to be a key area where, in some YOIs, joint working had improved due to having a social worker in post.

I think [the social worker] has just improved my whole relationship with the prison services. It helps me focus on it... I have a better understanding of individual prison officers' duties, the safeguarding role of [the safeguarding manager]... The area officers and the local authority are much closer connected with the needs of the prison service.

(Local authority manager)

In terms of improving relationships between the YOI, local authorities and other external agencies more generally, the social workers have clearly had a role to play, particularly in relation to liaising with home authorities and accessing services for looked-after children and care leavers.

I think it's probably strengthened the links with outside, with social services outside...I can think of some cases where we've had lads to discharge and it's almost been a case of there's nowhere for them to go, there's no-one out there to look after them, those sort of things. And that's much improved now...[the social worker] knows who to talk to...I can remember a number of cases before [the social worker] was here when we literally had a young man sitting in our reception and I had nowhere to send him. That doesn't happen any more.

(YOI representative)

See also illustrative example of practice 7: Identifying looked-after children and ensuring a service is provided (Appendix A)

Intended outcomes 4 and 5: Outcomes and experiences for young people in custody and on release improve

Progress towards improving outcomes for young people was felt to be underway to some extent, but it was recognised that this was partly dependent on whether the changes to YOI and local authority practice discussed above had occurred. As one YOI representative described, the fact that local authorities were now fulfilling their responsibilities has meant that:

...we're getting rid of the stress, the concerns, so the kids don't self-harm, don't get angry and frustrated and cause us trouble.

(YOI representative)

I think if [the social worker] hadn't been involved we'd have had a lad down there segregated for longer. We would have had a lot more staff time probably down there, it might not have had the same outcome, because I think once [the social worker] went in with him and could speak to him about all his looked after issues etc...he was a changed lad.

(YOI representative)

See also illustrative example of practice 8: Setting up systems in relation to looked-after children status (Appendix A)

For some young people the support provided by a social worker in the YOI conferred a direct benefit, contributing to their perception of safety, for example in relation to child protection issues.

See also illustrative example of practice 9: Supporting a young person through child protection investigation (Appendix A)

Other vulnerable young people have ongoing needs for support, which prison staff lack either the skills or time to provide. Some social workers have been able to provide targeted support to specific young people.

The kids like it, the young people feel very well supported...they know what social workers do, and what their responsibility is to them, and they see [the social worker] very clearly in that role. 'Do you know', they say, 'I've got a social worker in here, she's called [name]'. And just that little bit of attachment is probably worth an immense amount for that child.

(YOI representative)

See also illustrative example of practice 10: Providing support for individual looked-after child (Appendix A)

See also illustrative example of practice 11: Making contact with looked-after child's home social worker (Appendix A)

Divergent views were expressed on where the greatest improvements in outcomes for young people had been observed; in some YOIs it was felt that more progress was being made for young people in custody than those on release, while elsewhere the reverse was reported. As evidenced above, the evaluation was able to find examples in which positive outcomes were being reported for young people while they were in YOIs. However, it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to gather follow-up data regarding young people who had been released.

Views on the overall value of posts, and implications if they are removed

Consistently strong views were expressed by local authority managers, social workers and YOI personnel that the social work post has been a very beneficial addition to the services provided to young people in custody.

See also illustrative example of practice 12: Developing child protection systems and training (Appendix A)

Great concern was expressed about the possibility of these posts being removed. Interviewees variously described this as a retrograde or 'Luddite' step. For example, one YOI representative described the potential difficulty of dealing with such an eventuality, following a lengthy period of team-building and integration:

The biggest fear, more than anything else, is when you build up a team and someone takes a big chunk of that team away, how you then fill the gaps, the vacuums that that leaves, and [the social worker's] vacuum, with the way it's now built into the system, would be a big vacuum to fill, and we wouldn't have that knowledge.

(YOI representative)

Another interviewee reported similar concerns, alluding specifically to the specialist skills of the social worker:

Where would all that work go? And obviously either some of the work wouldn't get done or it would be tagged onto somebody else's role, and I'd have concerns about their ability and perhaps confidence and knowledge to deal with some of

the intricate and quite sensitive dealings that [the social worker] has with the young people and with external agencies.

(YOI representative)

Given the social workers' acknowledged ability to track down and forge links with young people's home authority, this was felt by a range of stakeholders to be an area of work which would rapidly deteriorate if the posts were discontinued, with potentially serious knock-on effects for looked-after young people and care leavers:

I don't think that many people would have the time to be digging. I know, because of the amount of time I spend doing it, finding out who somebody's social worker is, finding where I can contact them, actually takes quite a lot of time. And I just don't think that piece of work would be picked up.

(Social worker)

I think [looked-after children reviews] would just stop. I think, social workers wouldn't phone us, or if they did, they wouldn't know who to phone, who to get in touch with, and I think that's one of the things with [the social worker] here as well, she's helped people get through the various systems. And that's really important because you phone the switchboard and you don't know who you want to talk to. You might say, 'well I need to talk to them about a LAC', [switchboard staff] wouldn't know what a LAC review was.

(YOI representative)

I'd hate to think we'd lose that contact between us, [the local authority] or the social services that are out there. Because it's not just about whilst [young people] are in care, it's about releasing them after.

(YOI representative)

Underlying all these concerns was a sense that in many cases the social worker had, in a fairly short space of time, significantly contributed to introducing systems to promote the safety and welfare of young people in YOIs. It was feared that in their absence, and without their oversight, YOIs were at risk of reverting to a more haphazard, 'hit and miss' approach.

I would have no system to guarantee that the interests and safety of my young people were correctly looked after whilst in custody.

(YOI representative)

It would be very much hit and miss, there wouldn't be a consistency and I think that's what these [social work] posts achieve is that level of consistency for all the young people here.

(Social worker)

The current model and future developments

This section presents the views of social workers, local authority managers and YOI personnel as to the appropriateness of the current model for social work posts in YOIs, i.e. social workers employed and managed by local authorities but physically based within a specific YOI. These views were gathered during phase three of the evaluation.

Social workers employed by local authorities

The fact that the social work posts in YOIs were line-managed by local authority managers was felt to be crucial, bringing independence and transparency to the role. Independence was seen as highly important in terms of the social worker's role in quality assuring policies and procedures and being able to advise on prison practice from an open, objective and external perspective. It was also felt to set social workers apart from prison staff in the eyes of young people, once they were made aware that the local authority employs them.

Management and regular contact with the local authority was felt to be important for the post holder, in that it could help alleviate the sense of isolation, maintain professionalism, keep knowledge and skills up-to-date and enable career development after leaving the YOI position.

A couple of interviewees could see advantages to alternative models. One interviewee felt if the post were employed by the prison, YOI personnel would be more likely to take the post seriously as the social worker would be an employee rather than perceived as an 'add on'; it was felt that this would confer status within the establishment. Another felt that being managed by the YOI would not be problematic because social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council.

If teams of social workers were to be introduced in the future, one suggestion was that the most senior social worker should manage the other social workers within the YOI, with only the senior social worker being managed by the local authority. This would ease the burden for local authorities and provide closer, on-hand supervision for social workers.

Designated social workers based within YOIs

Interviewees suggested that having a social worker based in the YOI ensured that a social work service was provided to looked-after young people inside, whereas if the post was part of the community team, YOI referrals would possibly be low priority given the multiple pressures faced in such teams. In addition, it was felt that their presence in the establishment facilitated positive relationships between the social work profession and YOI personnel, building trust and raising awareness of the social worker's role.

Practical benefits were also cited for basing the post within the establishment, for example the social worker and YOI staff being in close proximity for advice and in order to respond to issues, and ready access to information files. Being in the YOI familiarised the social worker with the prison systems and regime and also any specific

relevant issues within the establishment. It could also help to foster an integrated approach when the social worker was based within a team, enabling the social worker to attend regular meetings and build rapport with young people. Furthermore, it was suggested that being on site could ensure the social worker was immediately responsive to urgent issues such as child protection.

The main challenge posed by this model was the sense of isolation already referred to for social workers cut off from a social services community team. Some stakeholders expressed an anxiety about social workers 'going native', becoming so integrated into their host establishment that their perceived independent identity was under threat.

A different model had been set up for an interim worker following the departure of a social worker in one YOI. This post holder was a designated worker for the YOI, but based in the community team. Local personnel reflected that this model ensured the worker did not feel isolated and was able to maintain their area-based skills and experience. It was suggested that their independence was protected, yet they were also able to be present and attend key meetings at the YOI when needed. However, it was admitted that the YOI might have preferred someone fully on site to be part of the day-to-day functioning of systems and services.

As already alluded to in this report, the female estate presents a range of quite distinct issues and challenges for social workers. Interviewees from one YOI in the female secure estate suggested it would be better to have an allocated social worker who was not based on site, but who would make visits when required, due to the low volume of work in this establishment. An alternative suggestion from another female YOI was that the post holder's remit be expanded to include other groups of people, such as older women.

Possible future developments

Reviewing resource allocation and ratios

As we have already seen, the time pressures on social workers were identified as a key constraint that limited the extent to which the model could be further developed within current resources. Social workers, YOI personnel and local authority managers identified the resource allocation of social work capacity per establishment as a key issue to be addressed.

In the male estate, increased funding was felt to be essential if more social workers and more senior-level workers were to be recruited in order to provide a fuller social work service. Work with children in need was seen as a key area that social workers would like to be able to develop further, but currently were unable to due to lack of resources. Many stakeholders stated that a social work team would be preferable in larger YOIs.

I think that we need, we actually need, looking at the establishments there are teams of psychologists, there's a team for the youth offending team, there's the team of through-care, there's lots of different teams and I actually think we need a team of safeguarding social workers, more social workers to do the role properly.

(Local authority manager)

It was also suggested that the posts needed to be allocated according to a more sophisticated funding formula, led by the needs of YOIs and including funding for

administrative support. It was also suggested that local authority management costs should be paid for out of central funds.

Related to this issue, some stakeholders expressed bewilderment at an apparently large disparity between the high levels of funding allocated to substance misuse workers and advocacy services and the limited and uncertain funding allocated to social workers, which they saw as an essential service.

In the female estate, it was also felt that the resource allocation formula should be revisited, for contrasting reasons; interviewees felt that social workers in girls' YOIs did not have sufficient work to fill their time if they were to strictly follow their job description.

Representatives of national agencies involved in setting up the posts acknowledged that the funding formula to allocate the number of social workers to establishments was arbitrary¹¹. The formula allocated one worker to every 100 young people, to a minimum of £20,000, and with additional funding for young women's establishments, in recognition of girls' higher level of need.

More direct work

Across various YOIs, both social workers and local authority managers felt that it would be beneficial for the role to be developed to encompass direct work with young people. It was suggested that the social work perspective would significantly enhance much existing work, that the post holder could set up therapeutic work on a one-to-one and group basis and could also potentially assist with a range of issues for young people in the YOI, including:

- bullying
- behavioural issues, such as behaviour management programmes, preventative work relating to offending behaviour and restorative justice
- abuse
- personal issues, including attachment disorder
- bereavement
- sexually inappropriate behaviour
- domestic violence
- suicide prevention.

Extended scope and remit

According to interviewees there are a number ways in which the groups of people eligible for social work support within the secure estate could be expanded. In light of time pressures in the male estate, further expansion of duties would be likely to require more resources. However, in the female estate, social work roles have already been extended to make fuller use of their time.

¹¹ One stakeholder explained that the formula was based on an establishment in Wales with 20 young people, which had a social worker for one day a week.

Care leavers aged 18 years and over

The main area for expansion of the social work role was seen to be with care leavers aged 18 years and over. It was recognised that care leavers still had needs to be met once they were 18, but that this group were currently left without a service in the way that under-18s were before the social work post was introduced. At the time of the evaluation, the extent to which the social workers based on split sites worked with over-18s varied from little or no involvement to proactively helping care leavers of that age. The monitoring data indicates some work is being undertaken with this age group, with 7.6% of referrals recorded being with young offenders aged 18 years and over, the majority of whom were referred because they were care leavers. However, it is worth noting that this includes very little data from those YOIs where interviewees described higher levels of work with the older age group.

Parents in secure estate with children in the community

Social workers in male split site establishments and the female estate highlighted that one area where their help could be required was around supporting young people whose own children were in the looked-after children system or were going through adoption processes. For example, one social worker described the value of being able to provide advice and information about the adoption process to other YOI professionals working with a young man whose child was going to be adopted and who was identified as being at risk of self-harming.

In the female estate, interviewees identified that many young women and women in the adult wings had children in the community, and that there was therefore a role for the social worker in helping to support mothers, for example if they had concerns that their child was being abused.

Adopted children

One social worker felt that there was a small but significant number of young people in the YOI who were from adopted families and had experienced an adoption breakdown. It was suggested that there was a role for the social worker to provide support around the issues resulting from this, for example around attachment disorder or early abuse and neglect.

Foreign nationals and asylum seekers

In a small number of YOIs, the issue of asylum-seeking minors was raised. One social worker described their role in accessing legal advice to deal with issues relating to legal status and deportation, and also to help plan services for their release. In another YOI an interviewee noted that it would be helpful for the social worker to be able to provide this type of support, as they felt that the needs of asylum-seeking children on release were not adequately planned for.

It was also suggested that the social worker could be in a good position to help address the specific needs of under-18s who were foreign nationals. This group was felt to face specific difficulties, such as language barriers and issues of legal status.

Continued embedding of the role

The posts have only been in place for a short period, and have often not been functioning at full capacity. Therefore, stakeholders felt that as the implementation continues into the future, the following activities should be developed further:

- awareness-raising activities in YOIs, such as training and developing further links with relevant personnel
- awareness-raising in home authorities, such as sending information, visiting and giving presentations to local authorities
- children in need responsibilities specified within job description and service level agreement
- training staff on issues such as child protection.

Conclusions and recommendations

Revisiting the evaluation questions

In considering the conclusions to be drawn from these evaluation findings, we return to our original evaluation questions.

What activities have been undertaken by the YOI social workers and how are these monitored?

The nature of the work being undertaken is determined and limited by capacity, but indicates a mix of ‘true’ strategic activity (training, safeguarding procedures, setting up systems); young people focused activity (meeting young people at induction, screening processes, liaison); casework with specific young people (attending looked-after children reviews, undertaking assessments, supporting young people through child protection processes) and administrative tasks.

The role has developed a different emphasis in different YOIs, with some workers focusing on looked-after children, some on child protection and some on both. While such an emphasis may be entirely appropriate, it has often been the case that factors such as history, existing roles within the YOI or individual staff preferences, rather than an analysis of the young people’s needs, have influenced the focus of the social work role. Child protection work seems to be particularly contentious in this respect.

Evidence of the work undertaken indicates a high volume of appropriate referrals, referred by a wide range of stakeholders. This confirms the views of interviewees, that there was a gap in the service provided previously. The majority of referrals related to looked-after children and care leavers. Data on previous circumstances indicated that young people being referred for a service were living in unstable circumstances before referral, and arranging accommodation on release was a priority issue in many cases.

How does this relate to their remit as planned?

The posts were established in order to support the duties that local authorities have towards children in custody, that is to provide services to children in need, to take action where child protection concerns are raised, to provide services to looked-after children and to participate in serious case reviews, should a child die while in custody. It was expected that such services would be provided to children and young people below the age of 18.

The evaluation found a general acceptance that social workers had insufficient capacity to adequately address the ‘children in need’ aspect of their role. The social work role in serious case reviews was not tested during the evaluation period.

Although not part of the original remit, work with a small number of young people aged 18 and over has taken place in some establishments, often relating to accessing leaving care services.

The differences between the male and female estates have been marked, with social workers in the male YOIs sometimes being drawn into filling gaps that were the responsibility of the prison service and, conversely, there being few perceived gaps in the female YOIs that would allow the social worker to carve out a meaningful role due to higher staffing ratios.

In most instances, the only monitoring that had taken place was instigated by the evaluators, despite an expectation that local monitoring of the role should occur.

What barriers or challenges were encountered and how (if applicable) were these overcome?

A number of inter-related barriers to the effective implementation of the role have been identified, including uncertain funding, lack of a cohesive and co-ordinated approach at central government level, insufficient capacity, low morale and high staff turnover.

Many social workers were initially hindered by practical difficulties such as a lack of access to private office space, telephone lines, computers and administrative support. Many of these issues were resolved during the evaluation period, although several social workers still lacked sufficient administrative assistance and experienced ongoing problems relating to incompatible IT systems between the prison service and local authorities.

Ongoing uncertainty about funding the posts had a major effect on how effectively they were implemented. Issues of job insecurity led to low morale, distraction from core tasks and, in several cases, resulted in resignations. The subsequent vacancies proved difficult to fill, as guarantees could not be provided about the future security of the posts.

The acknowledged arbitrary nature of the ratio of young people to social workers used in funding the posts, compounded by difficulties with recruitment and retention, have led to some social workers having limited capacity to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. This meant that certain areas of work had to be prioritised while others were neglected.

The isolation experienced by many social workers, often as sole practitioners in a new post, was to a certain extent alleviated by attending the networking forum meetings. This was felt to be a helpful source of support, and several interviewees regretted that meetings were no longer being held regularly. Safeguarding and local authority managers were also in new territory and similarly valued the occasional opportunities provided to meet and discuss common issues with their peers. Many felt that they could perhaps have benefited from more initial training or briefing about the posts, as well as more regular updating about funding issues.

The 'culture clash' between the child-centred approach of social workers and the more disciplinary ethos of the prison service was an initial hurdle to be overcome in many establishments. This was compounded by a lack of awareness and understanding of the social worker's role, and of relevant legislation and procedures with respect to looked-after children. Many social workers and YOI staff have reported progress in this area, often simply attributed to ongoing opportunities for interaction between social workers and staff, but also due, in some cases, to training provided by the social workers.

What different 'models' of implementation are in evidence, and which have been most successful?

Social workers were located within, or attached to, various different teams within YOIs, and had negotiated somewhat different roles, according to local needs and circumstances. However, in practice it did not prove possible to identify or extrapolate distinct 'models'. Nor was it possible, given the short time in which the social workers had been in post and the variety of contexts in which they were working, to make comparative judgements about their success in different settings. What does require

emphasis, however, is the importance of social workers having a distinct and clearly understood role that does not duplicate the roles and responsibilities of existing staff. In many YOIs such duplication of roles was avoided although the situation within the girls' estate appears to be more problematic.

The overall 'model' of implementation, by which the social workers were based within the YOI but managed by the local authority, was felt to be crucial by almost every interviewee, in that it conferred independence on the post holder, giving them credibility in the eyes of young people and enabled them to challenge practices within the YOI.

How do young people who have had contact with a YOI social worker perceive the role?

All of the young people interviewed during the evaluation valued the work of the social worker. Generally social workers were perceived as being on the side of the young person, easy to talk to, good listeners and reliable. The fact that they were based on site was appreciated, as young people were able to get a rapid response if required. The young people were aware of, and appreciated, the independent role played by the social worker.

How do other professionals/practitioners (both internal to the YOI and external) perceive the YOI social worker's role?

Overall, perceptions of the post have been positive and stakeholders have identified ways in which the posts have made the YOIs more able to support young people. Social workers themselves valued the positive welcome they received from key senior personnel within YOIs. Although some individuals experienced difficulties, including a lack of support from senior YOI colleagues; these were in a minority.

The considerable cultural differences between the prison service and children's social services cannot be overlooked. The shift towards a more child-centred ethos appears to be progressing slowly. Some initial hostility encountered from prison service was attributed to social workers' roles in child protection investigations, although such suspicion was reported to be gradually reducing over time. Nevertheless, acceptance and understanding of the social work role varied from establishment to establishment.

What perceived impact, if any, has the presence of the posts had on inter-agency working within youth justice and children's services?

The posts were perceived as crucial in 'bridging the gap' between YOIs and local authorities in terms of ensuring services were provided to looked-after children in custody. Social workers within YOIs were able to talk to their peers within local authorities in an informed and authoritative manner, often reminding external social workers of their legal obligations to young people in custody. They also had more time and understanding of local authority structures, enabling them to track down relevant information and individuals more rapidly. Equally, social workers trying to contact the YOI now had a specific named contact to ask for. All of these things eased communications and promoted mutual understanding.

Generally, it was reported that more looked-after young people were having their needs met and receiving more of what they were legally entitled to, thanks to the intervention of the social workers. However, the picture reported across the country appeared mixed, with some authorities continuing to be apparently reluctant to engage with YOIs or to meet their legal obligations. The fact that most YOIs took young people from a large number of authorities did not help, as social workers did not have time to develop strong relationships with all these authorities.

Local authority managers had not, in many cases, been able to provide an optimum amount of support or supervision, largely due to other pressures, including local reorganisation of children's services. However, they were largely reported to be committed in principle to the posts.

What impact, if any, is the role perceived to have had on the safety and welfare of young people?

In spite of the small numbers of social workers and short time scale, the illustrative examples of practice provide qualitative evidence which suggests that specific actions or interventions provided by the social worker have had a positive impact on way on individual children; for example, instances where leaving care services were accessed or where children felt able to raise an allegation against a member of staff safely.

In addition, social workers were acknowledged to have contributed to a greater or lesser extent to the development, implementation or improvement of a range of policies, procedures and systems which could be expected to improve the safety and well-being of children within YOIs and, on their release, in the community. These pieces of work include:

- systems for identifying looked-after children and ensuring that their home local authorities meet their legal responsibilities
- contributing to the development of a range of safeguarding policies
- providing training and other awareness-raising activities for prison staff to ensure that young people are perceived and treated as children rather than simply as offenders.

The social worker's introduction of a debriefing session following the use of force, accompanied by a monitoring system, was said to have reduced incidents in one establishment.

Conclusions in summary

The evaluation was undertaken during the early stages of the establishment of these short-term posts. As expected a number of teething problems were encountered, largely relating to practical matters such as office accommodation and facilities; these difficulties had generally been resolved by the end of the evaluation period. Cultural differences between prison service staff and social workers have proved less easy to overcome, although progress was clearly being made in many establishments as a result of training and awareness-raising work carried out by the social workers. It seems likely that the longer the posts are in place, the more accepted they will become.

In many establishments there was only one social work post, and this inevitably left post holders feeling somewhat isolated. Nevertheless, independence is key to the success of the role, and it was therefore vital for social workers to be managed by local authorities, rather than being absorbed into YOI structures.

The evaluation found that social workers were carrying out activities related to three of the four duties required of them, the exception being involvement in serious case reviews (no child death having occurred during the evaluation period). One of the most important aspects of the role has been around setting up systems to identify looked-after children and accessing services for them. This has involved liaison with home local

authorities to ensure that they discharge their legal obligations to looked-after children and care leavers. YOI staff were ill-placed to carry out these functions themselves, being generally unaware of the details of looked-after children system. While specific roles varied from establishment to establishment, social workers were often also involved in child protection issues and direct case-work with specific vulnerable young people. All social workers reported high levels of need for their services among young people within YOIs, not all of which could be met given the social work resources available, this being particularly true in the case of 'children in need'. It was suggested by many that *all* young people in YOIs fell into this category; however, a single social worker could not be expected to provide services to them all.

Some social workers were carrying out work which was technically beyond their remit, for example with older care leavers or young people with children in the looked-after children system, and a case could be made for expanding the role to meet the needs of other groups of vulnerable young people in YOIs.

Young people valued the support provided by social workers, either directly, or by accessing services from the home local authority and other interviewees perceived ways in which social workers had contributed to improving outcomes for young people.

The evaluation has thus demonstrated a clear need for social work posts in YOIs. Indeed it could be argued that more such posts are required, if the full range of duties required of social workers are to be discharged, including providing services to all children in need.

Recommendations for future development of the posts

- If the posts are to develop, arrangements for long-term funding need to be agreed as a matter of urgency in order to ensure retention (or replacement) of existing social workers.
- Government departments should agree an approach towards the posts, supported by publicity and guidance about the purpose of their role. This should include clear responsibility for how the posts will be co-ordinated and monitored nationally. It is important that local authorities that do not contain a YOI are also engaged in this process.
- The formula for deciding how many posts are needed within each YOI and their level of seniority needs to be reviewed, with consideration given to teams of social workers being based in the larger YOIs. A realistic allocation of funding for administrative support should be provided.
- The model for local authority management, but geographical location within YOIs should be maintained, although consideration needs to be given to a more flexible approach within the girls' estate.
- Social workers in YOIs would benefit from coherent support at a national level, including regular joint meetings and targeted development or training opportunities; ideally they should be linked into local team structures that can offer local support.
- The job description needs to be reviewed to reflect resource levels. It should be considered whether other relevant groups such as care leavers aged 18 or over, young parents with children in the community, babies within mother and baby

units, asylum seekers, foreign nationals and public protection issues should come within the social workers' remit. Expectations regarding children in need should also be clarified.

- It had originally been the intention that the social workers would become involved in serious case reviews. There were no incidents that warranted such a review during the study but this responsibility is clearly one that rests with the local safeguarding children board (LSCB) and Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. Although the social worker could be called upon to assist any review, as could any other professional, it would not be appropriate for them to take a lead role. It is therefore recommended that this be removed from their job description.
- There is an urgent need to consider respective roles and responsibilities in child protection work, including a clearer definition of the distinction between assessment and investigation. The role of the social workers in wider safeguarding concerns, such as bullying and self-harm, also needs to be clarified.
- Consideration needs to be given to the processes that social workers should use to link local authority and YOI processes, e.g. databases and referral systems, in order to avoid duplication, support accountability and allow meaningful monitoring.

Appendix A: illustrative examples of practice

The following examples of practice were gathered from three YOIs to provide examples of the range of work carried out by social workers.

Illustrative example of practice 1: Setting up a referral system for looked-after children

<p>Relevant contextual/background information</p> <p>Two social workers were based in this large YOI which had dealings with a large number of home local authorities. One of the social workers focused on looked-after children.</p>
<p>Description of work carried out by social worker</p> <p>The social worker had set up a number of systems in relation to looked-after children. A referral form regarding the young person's looked-after child status had been devised which offender managers completed during a young person's first five days in custody. Following this, an information form was sent to the home local authority requesting information on looked-after children status, care planning and behaviour management issues. The social worker conducted this initial liaison with the home authority, checking the looked-after children status of the child and gathering other relevant information to feed back to the offender manager. The social worker made sure YOI staff knew who had parental authority.</p> <p>The social worker only worked directly with looked-after children if an ongoing concern was identified (e.g. self-harm) or there were behavioural problems. The numbers of looked-after children were too high for the social worker to support them all. The social worker was responsible for keeping the home authority social worker informed about specific developments, e.g. if an Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) document was opened.</p>
<p>Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously</p> <p>An offender manager admitted that they sometimes only found out that a young person was looked-after when a home authority social worker phoned to arrange a review meeting. Other establishment staff recognise that previously there was a general lack of knowledge about looked-after children:</p> <p><i>To be perfectly honest, up until [social worker] arriving, I think my knowledge and the knowledge generally in the prison about looked-after children was nil to be fair. I don't think we recognised that these children had particular needs that we were obligated to provide.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Safeguarding manager)</p> <p>The social worker echoed this view and pointed out the importance of their role in liaising between local authorities and the YOI:</p> <p><i>I think [previously] it would have been left up to the offender supervisors. However, I don't think it would have been done efficiently... They don't fully understand statutory requirements for local authorities, and the local authority doesn't understand how things work in here.</i></p>
<p>Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work</p> <p>Both social workers and other staff expressed some frustrations about implementing the new systems. The offender managers complained about bureaucracy and form-filling, while the social worker reported that some offender managers had been less than co-operative:</p> <p><i>Sometimes forms are coming to me without information. I'm spending hours trying to track down what local authority? Who's the worker? What team are</i></p>

they on?

However, others recognised the value of the role, reporting that social workers could get a response from social services more readily than other staff, as they were more confident of their ground and therefore had more clout:

The social worker knows where to go to get what's needed, and my officers won't necessarily know that and tend to end up going round in circles trying to find information that [social worker] can do quite quickly. And I think she's dealing with her own professionals who're happy to deal with her. A prison officer rings up social services and immediately it's difficult.

(Safeguarding manager)

Perceptions of impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

The social worker reported that the accurate identification of looked-after children within the YOI had been enhanced by her knowledge and understanding of the looked-after system. Previously, staff did not know what information was necessary to establish a young person's legal status.

I think having a social worker background training you know what questions to ask and how to ask them...The offender supervisors were just simply asking, 'Do you have a social worker?' And then they were taking whatever the answer was...and it's trying to get [prison staff] to see, we have to first have a conversation with [young person], and from that conversation you get those bits and pieces of information. Like, 'Where did you live before you came here?'

Illustrative example of practice 2: Accessing leaving care services for young person

Relevant contextual/background information

This 18-year-old young person had been in custody before. Previously he had been released into the community with no support, despite being on a full care order. Accommodation set up by his drugs worker in the YOI had fallen through almost immediately. The young person re-offended and was returned to custody. Both the social worker and the young person consider that this lack of support and accommodation to have been factors in the young person's reoffending:

Released out with no support, no accommodation, no plan, and that's why he got himself re-offending.

(Social worker)

So I was out on the streets and that, so I had to do crime to get back to jail so I had somewhere to live, basically.

(Young person)

The young person continued to be aggrieved about the lack of service provided to him while in custody:

My aftercare workers ain't doing nothing for me...I ain't got no money or nowt to live on in here.

(Description of work carried out by social worker

Now aged 18, the young person was seeing a drugs worker in the young offender side of the establishment. The drugs worker referred the young person to the social worker, who contacted the young person's home local authority to find out why no support had been provided, and discovered that the aftercare worker had been off sick. The young person received a written apology from the aftercare worker's manager. The aftercare worker

subsequently returned to work and was planning to bring the young person's sister on a visit. The young person was shortly due to transfer to another YOI, but the social worker was confident that contact with the home local authority would continue.

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

The drugs worker had tried to set up accommodation when the young person was released on a previous occasion, but this had fallen through. She had made contact with the aftercare worker, but felt that she lacked sufficient clout to ensure a service was provided.

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

The drugs worker feels that the role and status of the social worker were crucial in ensuring that the home local authority fulfilled their responsibilities:

I honestly wonder, if [the social worker] hadn't got involved, whether the [visit from the home social worker] would have taken place quite as quickly as it did ...and I just think because it was social worker to social worker, 'Come on, this lad's entitled to the same level of service whether he's in custody or not.' ...I think that's why the visit happened.

(Drugs worker)

The young person was very pleased with both the speed of events and the flow of information once the referral had been made to the social worker:

I think it was on a Friday [that the drugs worker] got in touch with [the social worker] then on the Monday morning she come and see me, so she come straightaway to see me.

She is good. She gets on with things. You tell her something and she'll sort it out and come back to you straightaway on it.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

All of those directly involved with this case felt that the intervention of the social worker had made a major contribution to improving both the young person's access to his entitlements, and his general well-being:

At least [the home local authority] established contact, they were proactive, they were going to get the sister to visit, 'cos he hadn't seen her or any of his family for ages, so that was a positive result, so I'm happy.

(Social worker)

[The young person] was very, very satisfied with the service that [the social worker] gave him, and all of a sudden a lot of his anxieties did seem to disappear.

(Drugs worker)

I've had a letter off [the] social services manager now saying that they're going to get in touch with me and stuff. So [the social worker] has done her work well.

(Young person)

Illustrative example of practice 3: Accessing care leaving services for young person

Relevant contextual/background information

This 17-year-old had previously been accommodated under s 20. He was serving a three-year sentence and was due to be released in mid-2007. He was already in the establishment by the time the social worker came into post and therefore was not picked up using the recently established referral procedures for new admissions. Instead, his caseworker referred him to the social worker, as he had had no contact with the leaving care team from his home social services since being in the YOI. He had just had a birthday and received neither a card

nor a visit.
<p>Description of work carried out by social worker</p> <p>The social worker made contact with the home local authority and arranged for the social worker to visit. All developments were reported back to the young person. A looked-after children review was planned. In addition, the young person requested that the social worker check what accommodation arrangements were being made for him on release (he wanted supported lodgings). The social worker liaised with the authority and, at the time of writing, the YOI was completing a risk assessment form in relation to accommodation.</p>
<p>Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?</p> <p>It was acknowledged within the YOI that these developments may or may not have happened in the absence of a social worker, depending on the knowledge, motivation and time of individual prison staff.</p>
<p>Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work</p> <p>The young person clearly perceived the social worker as someone who could help him access what he needed, including specific entitlements, as well as providing general support in a respectful manner.</p> <p><i>I told her that I have no clothes, I don't get no visits and stuff like that...I've had these clothes and these trainers for a long time now, but [the social worker] said that social services should be helping me with money and stuff like that and hopefully clothes...</i></p> <p><i>It's like I need a lot of help and if the social worker's just on the outside, that is good, obviously, but I believe being in jail, we need help as well...be there to help us, and that is another thing that's going to help us not come back [inside].</i></p> <p><i>She don't treat me like a child either, she treat me like a young adult...we'll have mature conversations, which is nice.</i></p>
<p>Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)</p> <p>The social worker felt that the local authority was now aware and willing to meet its obligations regarding this young person, thanks to her intervention and persistence:</p> <p><i>[The new home social worker] has been very good and obviously is really aware that we're quite on the ball here and that [he's] not going to slip through the net. And she does regularly email me now and she sends me stuff, she sent me his housing forms a little while ago...so she does communicate quite well now, but he was without a social worker for months.</i></p>

Illustrative example of practice 4: Involvement in child protection investigations

<p>Relevant contextual/background information</p> <p>During the first few months in post, the social worker carried out whole child protection investigations, following initial interviews conducted by a probation officer. The social worker's local authority manager did not feel there was any risk of a conflict of interest, because of the particular personality of the individual concerned.</p>
<p>Description of work carried out by social worker</p> <p>More recently, however, it had been agreed that the social worker would carry out the initial interview with the young person when an allegation (against staff) was made. The social worker then continued to act as an independent supporter for the young person and their guardians (parent/social worker/foster carer, as appropriate) during subsequent investigations. This involved providing ongoing support to the young person and explaining procedures and developments to families and YOT workers.</p>

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

Since coming into post the social worker took on some of the child protection co-ordination roles, which used to be held by the safeguarding manager.

Previously, the safeguarding manager was acting as supporter to both staff and the young person during investigations, which was not regarded as satisfactory:

I would've been the one to support the staff, so I was trying to support the young person and the staff, and that really is a conflict of interest.

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

Because others, including the social worker, began providing support to young people and staff, the safeguarding manager appreciated being freed up to take a more strategic role.

I'm not down there in the nitty gritty any more. I can oversee actually what's happening and that has been a vast improvement. And I think staff will tell you that's been a vast improvement since [the social worker's] come on board.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

Establishment staff and guardians alike appreciated the support provided by the social worker:

[The social worker] has had thank you letters from staff and...at least one from a parent to say thank you for the input and the information, which is excellent.

(Safeguarding manager)

Illustrative example of practice 5: Child protection investigation**Relevant contextual/background information**

This 17-year-old had been in care and was entitled to leaving care services. Concerns had been noted about the young person's vulnerability in custody. A child protection investigation was initiated when the young person's wrist was broken while he was being restrained by three male members of staff who were trying to remove a ligature from his neck.

Description of work carried out by social worker

On first hearing of this incident, the social worker contacted the young person's parents, his YOT worker, the home social worker (personal advisor) and the police. The social worker viewed CCTV footage of the incident and use of force paperwork. He then requested an internal investigation. During the investigation, the social worker's role was to support the young person during the interview and to debrief him afterwards. He also checked that staff were not trying to make the young person change his story, and found that this was not happening. The result of this investigation was that no further action was taken.

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

The young person assumed that he would not have been kept informed about the progress and outcome of the investigation had the social worker not been available to do this:

Because otherwise I wouldn't have found out really. Because no-one else would have told me.

The young person lacked confidence in the reliability of the advocacy service:

I did ask for some help [about different issue] but they didn't really help me really...then when I broke my wrist...another [advocate] come...I didn't ask for her to come, she just come. And she tried to explain that she would get stuff done and that, and she never come back either.

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

The young person's personal advisor was very impressed with the social worker in this case, describing his interagency working skills as being "spot on", in that he passed on relevant information to key stakeholders and explained why decisions had been made, e.g. why no

further action had been taken. The decision to take no further action was described as being a coherent, evidence-based decision. The personal advisor reported that the young person valued having an appropriate adult available to talk to who was not a figure of authority.

The young person echoed this, and appreciated the fact that he was kept well-informed and up-to-date with developments:

[The Social worker would] explain things. And if anytime something new happened, he would come back and explain things. He wouldn't leave it like a couple of days afterwards. Like on that day he'd just come straight back to me and tell me.

While the young person was not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, and is intending to raise the issue with his solicitor, he did not blame the social worker:

[The social worker] has tried his best, but there's nothing he can really do...he can only do what he's done and just have a little investigation.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

For the young person, the social worker played a major supporting role, being one of the only adults in the establishment he could comfortably communicate with, and who had time to listen:

He's easy to talk to. Normally I can't really talk to...I can talk to people but I'm not comfortable around [YOI staff]. But I could talk to him, he was alright. [The prison officers are] always busy so they can't really listen, do you know what I mean? They're always running around.

The young person's personal advisor, who had worked with a number of YOIs over the last three or four years, recognised the 'fantastic' difference a social worker made. It was reported that communication between the local authority and YOIs was much improved, making it easier to access the young people, and removing the necessity to repeat information to numerous individuals. Information was received more rapidly than from prison staff.

Illustrative example of practice 6: Providing training to YOI staff about looked-after children systems

Relevant contextual/background information

The establishment held a training day for staff once a month.

Description of work carried out by social worker

The social worker contributed to the YOI training days, providing information about looked-after children procedures and reviews. She also wrote papers explaining the legal status of looked-after children:

She goes through the looked-after procedures, the importance of LAC reviews, who carries out LAC reviews and why they're carried out...and it's all stuff we didn't know, and it gives a constant update, because the law and things change all the time.

(Casework manager)

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously

Before the social worker came into post, no-one was in a position to provide such an overview. The social worker was aware of an inconsistency in understanding across the staff team, and that this would get in the way of establishing effective systems:

It's crucial to set [systems] up, but as part of that it's also crucial to have other people on board with me to do it, because I need other people's input and referrals...I put the training together because there was a general lack of

understanding of looked-after status...people had different levels of understanding, there was obviously a lot of confusion.

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

The new systems were deemed to be working well and running smoothly. A range of respondents reported that staff had an enhanced understanding of key issues. For example, the administrator who provided support to the social worker described how attending the training helped her to understand some of the terminology, why calls needed to be made, and enabled her to provide more effective support to the social worker.

A case worker was grateful for the handouts provided, and referred to them regularly:

[The training] helped, but I'm glad I kept the paperwork, 'cos I have to keep going back to sections 20, 31...I can't remember it all.

Perceptions of impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

Both the social worker and other members of staff were aware of enhanced understanding of looked-after children status, and the effect that this was having on practice:

Certainly case workers and wing staff, they think a bit more now about those young people and their care status and their needs. And they understand who [the social worker] is and they understand what your role is...so I think it's raised awareness and I think practice has changed because of that.

(Social worker)

[Training helped with understanding] the difference between lads that are with social services and section 20. One's voluntary and that makes a bit of a difference when we're sat there interviewing trying to assess a lad for vulnerability and such like.

(Caseworker)

Illustrative example of practice 7: Identifying looked-after children and ensuring a service is provided

Relevant contextual information

Working with looked-after children was the agreed 'main piece of work' for the social worker in this establishment.

Description of work carried out by social worker

The social worker devised various systems and protocols, including initiating and implementing a system for identifying and accessing support for looked-after children. At induction, if a young person indicated that they were known to social services, they would be automatically referred to the social worker, who investigated their status. If they were looked-after, the social worker would contact their home area social worker and press for services to be provided (looked-after children reviews, financial support etc).

Additional systems were also devised, including a referral form and database, standard letters to be sent out and a consent form for release of information from health workers.

The social worker also created a form to gather information from YOI staff for consideration at looked-after children reviews, to ensure those attending the review have all the information they require.

By gathering all the information and taking it to the review then it means that you don't have to have half a dozen members of staff at the review, because you just couldn't do that [due to shift work etc].

(Manager)
<p>Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?</p> <p>Establishment staff acknowledge that previously very little follow-up of looked-after children occurred:</p> <p><i>We always asked the question [of whether the child was known to social services] but nine times out of ten we actually didn't have enough staff to do anything about it.</i></p> <p>(Safeguarding manager)</p> <p>It was reported that a probation officer would phone around for information on the rare occasions when a looked-after children review was initiated by home social services.</p>
<p>Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work</p> <p>The safeguarding manager recognised the key role played by the social worker in the identification of looked-after children – where other professionals have failed – and ensuring co-ordinated and joined-up support throughout custody and on release:</p> <p><i>So [social worker] has made a great deal of difference in the young people's lives in here, because she picks [if they are LAC] up very quickly and she'll get in touch with the [home authority] social worker, and builds up a rapport with the social worker and the YOT worker. Now nine times out of ten the YOT worker doesn't know that these people have a social worker, which to my mind is absolutely disgraceful, but that's how it goes.</i></p> <p><i>Plus the fact they've got a person that they know on the outside coming in regularly, somebody who knows them very well and can be looking at what's going to happen to them when they're released which is really important. It's not a scrambled thing at the last minute, it's an organised sentence plan and the YOT team's involved, the social worker's involved, we're involved and it can be a smooth transition hopefully to them going back out into the community.</i></p>
<p>Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)</p> <p>Staff in this establishment reported that far more looked-after children reviews were taking place than ever before. The role of the social worker was crucial in ensuring that more local authorities were aware of, and meeting, their obligations to looked-after children:</p> <p><i>I think that [the social worker] has definitely, because she's been able to speak the correct language, has definitely had an impact on all local social services or local authorities.</i></p> <p>(Safeguarding manager)</p>

Illustrative example of practice 8: Setting up systems in relation to looked-after children status

Relevant contextual/background information

In this YOI the social worker had a specific remit to work with looked-after children, as this was perceived to be a priority area for development.

Description of work carried out by social worker

The social worker devised a referral form with which the casework team can refer looked-after children to the social worker. The social worker also created and cross-referenced databases to ensure consistency of information and to pick up missing cases. Once a referral had been made, the social worker would liaise with the home local authority, YOT and any other relevant agencies. She also collated information for looked-after children reviews.

[The social worker] will then pick up that young person, she'll go and speak to them, she'll go and find out what the issues are, she'll contact the YOTs, see if there's any previous history...so it's very good.

(Manager)

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

Some aspects of this work were previously covered by the casework team, but staff admitted that this kind of liaison was time-consuming and therefore contact with local authorities tended to be ad hoc and reactive. Moreover, case workers did not know the legal entitlements of looked-after children, or who to contact (beyond the YOT). Cases were slipping through the net and needs were not being met:

The biggest thing she had to do when she first started was getting a database on who the looked-after children were in [the YOI]. It was that basic...I can only assume what happened before was that they probably got lost in the system...

(Local authority manager)

Well, we would have continued stumbling the way we've always been stumbling, and being bounced from one area to another area, to another area, because the prison officers aren't social workers...

(Casework manager)

It used to be a really big problem...[young people] achieved all the targets whilst they'd been here, they'd followed the carrot and the stick. When it came to that early release...they'd be told a week before they're not going anywhere because there's no accommodation...whereas [the social worker] now pre-empts all this and rings up the various areas and says, 'Look, you need to be aware of your responsibilities'.

(Safeguarding manager)

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

A case work manager recognised the importance of the social workers' role in exerting pressure on local authorities to meet their commitments to looked-after children:

Obviously [the social worker's got] a vast wealth [of knowledge] on what the law is and what they're entitled to...and it gives us that little bit of pressure on the outside communities that we wouldn't normally have, so it's quite invaluable really.

As well as ensuring looked-after children received the services to which they are entitled, the social worker has reduced the burden on various staff. Case workers no longer spent time trying to locate the right person within a local authority. An administrative worker who processes referral forms was at first wary about the amount of additional work the new system might entail. However, she reported that this system had actually reduced the number of queries and enquiries about looked-after children coming through the office.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

The new systems have contributed to an improved service to young people, including regular

and higher quality looked-after children reviews, more young people receiving support from their local authorities, and a sense that they were now actually more likely to be genuinely 'looked-after' while in custody.

We hardly had any [LAC reviews] and again it was done haphazardly... and we'd have caseworkers sat on the review that wouldn't have really understood what the whole process of a LAC was for, and why we were doing it, and that it was a legal requirement and so on.

(Casework manager)

It's things like the visits from the YOTs and the looked-after children people who bring in clothing, and all these different things that they've been getting that we wouldn't have been aware of. The fact they've got to supply clothing, we wouldn't have known that...It's that understanding of what the youngsters are entitled to that we didn't know.

(Casework manager)

The fact that [the social worker] is here now means that actually those boys are looked after ...

(Healthcare manager)

Illustrative example of practice 9: Supporting young person through child protection investigation

Relevant contextual/background information

This young person was serving a life sentence, and had been identified as having behavioural problems and self-harm issues. The social worker had already worked with the young person's home local authority as he had previously been in care. A child protection investigation was initiated when the young person made an allegation of assault against a member of staff.

Description of work carried out by social worker

From the start, the social worker acted on behalf of the young person, offering support and keeping him informed. The social worker described how she stood her ground and ensured the allegation was properly investigated and that the police were involved. The social worker explained to the young person what would happen during the investigation.

I accused one of the gym's staff of assault, and the outside police got brought in, so of course [the social worker] was with me all through that, and stood by me, helped me out.

(Young person)

Make sure he feels he can speak, have a voice, that whatever's being done is quite transparent, there's nothing hidden and everything was going to be done fairly.

(Social worker)

Charges were eventually dropped, and the young person accepted this outcome.

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

This type of investigation would have been carried out by the local area office, but the social worker felt that the young person would have been unlikely to receive support or information:

There might be no communication to acknowledge with [the young person]

what's going on.

The young person believed that without a social worker to push for an investigation, nothing would have happened:

I don't think anything would have happened really without [the social worker], 'cos it was really [the social worker] what started everything going for me...I suppose it would be one of those things the prison would just cover over, wouldn't it?

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

From the social worker's point of view, being based on site was important as it ensured that the young person could receive regular support and information:

I was able to see him on a day-to-day basis, saying this and this has happened...so I offer that support hands-on.

The young person appreciated the informed independence of the social worker role:

[The social worker's] from the outside of it, to do with the prison, but outside the prison, if you know what I mean.

For the young person's YOT worker, the social worker's liaison function was important:

[The social worker's] certainly been very helpful in providing that link between myself and the prison specifically relating to the child protection issues that have been identified.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

Although the allegation was not upheld, the young person nevertheless felt that the process was safe. He felt protected when reporting the allegation and had no worries about possible repercussions from staff:

'Cos you know someone's there to help you out and nothing's going to happen to you about it. It's like you ain't done nothing wrong.

Illustrative example of practice 10: Providing support for individual looked-after children

Relevant contextual/background information

This 15-year-old young person with special educational needs was serving a life sentence. He was previously on a full care order and, as he was expected to be over the age of 18 on release, would be entitled to leaving care services.

Description of work carried out by social worker

The social worker became involved in providing individual support to this young person because in addition to being a looked-after child, he was identified as being a 'hard lad to manage'. He wasn't joining in on the unit and had been refusing to leave his room. The social worker started regularly checking on him, talking to him and trying to encourage him to come out.

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

The young person would not have responded well to similar approaches from prison staff, and did not regard them as appropriate people to talk to:

We see the staff 24/7...and some people just do not get on with the staff...they are annoying, they want you to lose your mind, to make you out to look like a loose cannon.

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

From the social worker's point of view, the value of the role is that they are able to offer both time and be a neutral listener to troubled young people:

He feels he can talk to myself and one other person from [the advocacy service], because we actually give them the time when we come down and see them.

A lot of them, they just want someone to talk to, but not someone in authority.

This is very similar to the perception of the young person, who also appreciated the accessibility of the social worker, in comparison to advocates:

If [the social workers] think you're being intimidated by some of the bullies or something like that, they'll come to see you and like try to talk to you, try to find out what's happening and all that kind of stuff.

[The advocacy service] come to see you once every blue moon, where social workers you can call up and they'll come.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

This young person clearly felt that in the social worker he had found, and genuinely valued, a reliable person who was 'on his side' and prepared to listen:

I think that all [the prison] staff are reluctant to know the kids, and that's what young people need. They need someone who they can talk to and all that kind of stuff...if you've got [people like social workers], yeah, it's all right. It's all right.

[The social worker] came to see me yesterday, she came to see me today, she came to see me the other day, and I didn't have to ask, she just came. And then any time she comes I'm ready to speak.

There is also evidence that the social worker was beginning to influence this troubled young person's thinking and behaviour, although progress was slow:

There was a time like I wanted an envelope and [the social worker] said if I come out of my room she will get me a big size envelope, that's what I needed...I didn't come out of my room...but I was thinking about it. So it did make me think.

Illustrative example of practice 11: Making contact with looked-after child's home social worker

Relevant contextual/background information

This 17-year-old was on an 18-month DTO, and had been in custody on two previous occasions. He had been accommodated in supported lodgings prior to his most recent sentence, and was entitled to leaving care services.

Description of work carried out by social worker

The young person found out about the social worker through his case worker and asked to be referred. He asked the social worker to contact his home local authority to find out about what had happened to his belongings, to find out his entitlement to accommodation on release (he did not want to go into a hostel) and to chase up a cheque which needed paying to his father.

Basically I wanted to get through to my [home authority] social worker because...I heard something about they not housing me when I get out...so I wanted [the YOI social worker] to find out what was going on.

<p style="text-align: right;">(Young person)</p> <p><i>So the work there was about getting answers I suppose to those questions...to-ing and fro-ing really, to-ing and fro-ing...just putting his mind at rest...So it was normal issues, but issues that are key for young people when they come in here and things are just up in the air and they don't know and nobody's telling them.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">(Social worker)</p> <p>The social worker made contact with his home social worker and communicated the outcome to the young person. A visit was also arranged.</p> <p><i>It was about chasing her up to say, 'You need to come and visit him because he is in custody, you do need to carry on seeing him.' It's that role of saying, 'Come on, it is still your responsibility, you do still have a duty of care.'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Social worker)</p> <p>Health information was also collated and forwarded to the local authority.</p>
<p>Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?</p> <p>It was acknowledged within the YOI that this may or may not have happened in the absence of a social worker, depending on the knowledge, motivation and time of individual prison staff.</p>
<p>Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work</p> <p>The home authority social worker confirmed the account of the YOI social worker and reported that information had been passed on and/or confirmed in writing. She found the YOI social worker very helpful in terms of arranging a prison visit, as she did not know how to go about this herself; she had tried to visit on a previous occasion, but did not know about visiting hours and had been unable to access the young person. The young person was equally impressed with the service provided:</p> <p><i>Very understanding, very good. She understood what I meant and she done what I asked her to do.</i></p>
<p>Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)</p> <p>The home authority social worker reported that the young person was feeling very abandoned, alone and scared on his arrival at the YOI. In particular, he feared that his home social worker would not be there for him any more. These anxieties were much relieved by the contact facilitated by the YOI social worker, and the fact that his entitlement to accommodation had been properly explained:</p> <p><i>[The YOI social worker] got the information for me... [The home social worker] never said they not housing me, they're not housing through semi-independence 'cos I'm going to be 18. But when I get out they're going to get me a flat through the council...so everything's sorted really.</i></p> <p><i>I understand it all now and there wasn't any real need to speak to [the YOI social worker] again, but if I do need to find out anything I will contact her again.</i></p>

Illustrative example of practice 12: Developing child protection systems and training

<p>Relevant contextual/background information</p> <p>The establishment had been without a child protection co-ordinator until recently. Some of that role had been covered by the social worker.</p>
<p>Description of work carried out by social worker</p> <p>The social worker found that managers were not receiving training in child protection or other</p>

safeguarding issues, as they were not in the target group for Juvenile Awareness Staff Programme (JASP) training. They therefore lacked guidance for dealing with incidents occurring during evenings or at weekends. The social worker devised a training programme based on JASP, but also incorporating elements suggested by the LSCB that were specifically adapted to the YOI context. This training had been delivered twice, with a third session planned.

In addition to the training, the social worker introduced a debriefing session after every use of force, to check whether there were any child protection issues.

Child protection referrals were subsequently monitored to see if there were any observable changes that could be linked to the training, or following specific incidents, indicating a heightened awareness of issues among staff.

Who (if anyone) would have done this in their absence/previously?

The young persons' governor acknowledged the widespread ignorance of many child protection issues within the establishment, and that they would have found it difficult to devise and implement appropriate procedures:

We'd have struggled [without the social worker]...I come from an adult background...so this is completely new to me, and a lot of the people around me...Dealing with children, juveniles, young people, it's very specific and there are very different areas of care that we have to concern ourselves with.

Other staff highlighted the consistency brought by the social worker's approach to previous well-meaning but somewhat haphazard practices:

We would have been cooperative in giving information, but we probably would have done it in a piecemeal way, probably not as co-ordinated as we've got it now...I think our relationship with the police or specialist teams probably wouldn't be as positive as it is now.

(Deputy governor)

It was really hit and miss...it wasn't a particularly good system because lots of things got missed. There was no consistency.

(Safeguarding manager)

Views of key stakeholders about implementation of this work

The social worker's expertise in the area of child protection was clearly valued, and he was used as a source of advice and support by a range of establishment staff:

I know [the social worker] has done a lot of work regarding actioning the safeguarding procedures that we have in place, because they were a bit of a grey area when he first took over. We're getting a lot of clarity...

(Young person's governor)

It's nice to have [the social worker] here if we do get a problem...it's nice to be able to ring [the social worker] up and say 'what do you think about this?' or 'I've got to do this, what do you think?'

(Senior prison officer)

The training for managers was carefully presented and enthusiastically received:

We're coming from the 'this is how we can protect you and help you do your job'... the take-up has been phenomenal.

(Safeguarding manager)

Having a social worker on site, able to take an independent position in child protection investigations, was widely appreciated. A police officer described how the social worker was perceived by young people:

[The social worker's] not the friend, or the grass to the prison service. He's a neutral person, somebody [the young person] can trust and speak to or bring [their] problem to, and I think that's extremely important.

Similar views were also expressed by a governor and a prison officer:

The work that's gone on, I don't think we'd have accomplished if it had been a prison officer asking the questions and not a social worker. Because young men in custody see me as a prison governor first, not someone who's looking after their welfare.

I can't put a uniformed member of staff in there [following a fight] because a uniform will make it worse again and [the social worker] is calm, cool and he can drag information out sometimes that we can't get.

Perceptions of the impact on outcomes (how it has made a difference)

Staff in this establishment were able to use evidence from the monitoring systems initiated by the social worker to point to a reduction in both restraints and child protection referrals resulting from the use of force:

We found that we're not having many repeat offenders, so if a boy's restrained once, he's debriefed, we explain to him, he explains to us...it very rarely happens again that the same boy's restrained again. Well, that wouldn't have happened without [the social worker], because we wouldn't have learnt those issues without [the social worker's] assistance. So there's been a big benefit for us, my restraints figures have dropped 25 to 30 per cent since we started doing that.

(Senior prison officer)

We've noticed over the last six months...that we've had no child protection referrals as a result of the use of force...I wouldn't say [the social worker] has been the reason

for that, and I wouldn't say other things in isolation have been the reason for that, but...we've got five or six different strategies in place all pointing in the same direction, so I think it's a combination and culmination of all that. But [the social worker] is very much a part of that, the awareness about child protection is very much part of that, the need to de-escalate because it protects staff as well as prisoners. All of those, all of that debate [the social worker] has contributed to.

(Deputy governor)

According to the safeguarding manager, the presence of the social worker had made a significant contribution to making the establishment more child-centred:

I think it's about being more child-focused. Violence reduction and our whole safeguarding strategy is really designed around the child, and we wouldn't have done that before. Most of our policies and protocols are

written and designed for adults. One of the things we're doing is trawling back to make sure that they are fit for children.

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