

Integration in youth justice services in England and Wales

Approaches to integrating with Children's Social Care, Early Help, and other services for children.

July 2024

Jordan Rehill (Senior Research Officer) and **Dr Leia Miller** (Research Officer) at the YJB.



Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	9
Approach	15
Findings: Structure and integration	20
Operational and strategic integration	26
Findings: Integration with wider services	31
Children's Social Care	31
Early Help	37
Integration with other agencies or services	41
Findings: Benefits of integrated structures	44
Findings: Challenges when integrating	51
Findings: Facilitators and best practice	57
Conclusions	62
References	64

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in supporting the analysis and providing valuable feedback throughout the research process. Additionally, we would like to thank the individual service and case managers for making time to participate in this work despite the time and capacity pressures they continue to face. Their time and willingness to share their experiences were essential in completing the research.



Executive summary

Youth justice services (YJSs) in England and Wales vary in their organisational structure. Some remain structurally separate from other teams in the local authority or council, while others have become more integrated (Hopkins et al. 2010; Byrne & Brooks 2015; YJB 2015; Case & Haines 2019). This research focused on this concept of integration; exploring how YJSs are currently structured, what 'integration' means for practitioners, and the advantages and challenges of different approaches. Specifically, it aimed to answer four main questions:

1. Are there different models of integrated delivery in operation in England and Wales?
2. What are the perceived risks and challenges of integrated models of delivery?
3. Why are YJSs moving towards integrated models (i.e., what are the key motivations and perceived benefits)?
4. What are the key facilitators and best practice when it comes to integrating across service (and/or local) boundaries?

Methods

The research was completed in two stages:

1. **Youth Justice Plan analysis:** Analysis of 142 youth justice plans submitted to the YJB for the year 2023/24.¹
2. **Semi-structured interviews with practitioners:** Interviews with 12 youth justice practitioners (seven service managers and five case managers) across seven YJSs in England and Wales. Services represented a range of council types and had a range of HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection ratings.

Findings

What does integration mean in a youth justice context?

Analysis of youth justice plans suggests a shift away from detached or standalone YJSs – less than 1% of services stated they were operating in a standalone structure in 2023/24 reporting, down from 15% in 2015 (Deloitte 2015). The majority of YJSs were integrated in some way with other services in the local authority, with several overtly describing themselves as being an “integrated service.” However, there was inconsistency in how this term was applied in different contexts.

Our analysis suggests that YJSs are integrating at different levels in local authority structures. Services have been included in one category only below based on the highest

¹ 13 Youth justice plans were excluded from the analysis as they did not contain sections with available relevant information for analysis of the organisational structure.

level of integration into which they fit. For example, if a service is integrated in an umbrella service and is also integrated at delivery level, it has been designated as being integrated at delivery level. **13 services (9%)** did not provide a clear indication of their service structure in their plan and were therefore unable to be assigned a typology in this report.

Integrated at directorate level (29% of services): The YJS sits within the same directorate as other services designed to support children (this is often the Children's Services directorate of the local authority or within a Children's Trust). In most cases, the service sits in the same strategic area or division as Early Help and/or Children's Social Care teams. The service manager holds responsibility for the YJS only, and the service is not structurally integrated with other teams within the local authority at service manager portfolio or service delivery level.

Integrated as part of a management portfolio (26% of services): The service manager or head of service holds responsibility for a portfolio of other services within the local authority. However, the YJS continues to maintain its own identity within this portfolio, managing and delivering targeted prevention, diversion, and statutory youth justice work.

Integrated in an umbrella service (19% of services): The YJS sits within a wider integrated umbrella service which brings together 'adolescent' or 'young adult' services such as leaving care, youth work, or other targeted youth support under a single integrated service structure. In contrast to an integrated portfolio, an umbrella service is public facing and often there is often a single referral pathway. However, the YJS continues to maintain its own identity within the wider umbrella service structure with the YJS team managing and delivering targeted prevention, diversion, and statutory youth justice work.

Integrated at delivery level (17% of services): Part of the YJS remit or casework is being delivered either solely or jointly with another service in the local authority. In a small number of cases, integrated services including the YJS remit are delivered by adolescent or targeted youth workers which work across multiple services in the local authority but have been appropriately trained to manage youth justice cases.

We did not find evidence of a shift to the 'post YOT' model – described by Byrne & Brooks as a service model where children “receive essentially the same services and opportunities from the same people regardless of their entry point” (Byrne & Brooks 2015; p11). Though in 17% of services, targeted prevention and diversion activity was being delivered by a structurally separate Early Help or prevention team, or by adolescent

workers which worked across adolescent social care, Early Help, and universal youth outreach services. Specialism, however, remains paramount and all services operating in a service integrated at delivery level still had either specially trained workers or distinct youth justice teams delivering pre- and post-court statutory work.

We also found plenty of evidence of operational integration through case allocation and management processes (lead worker models, multi-agency working protocols) and multi-agency safeguarding processes (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs, Integrated Front Door, Multi Agency Child Exploitation panels). As well as strategic integrated working (Youth Justice Management Boards, Safeguarding Children Partnerships, Integrated Care Boards, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, Joint Exploitation Groups) across the full spectrum of structural models.

Why are services moving towards integrated models?

- The driving forces behind integration appear to be multi-faceted - from national policy directives emphasising joined-up working, greater understanding, and implementation of Child First, to local priorities around contextual safeguarding and child exploitation.
- In some areas, service managers specifically highlighted funding and resource pressures in their local area and the wider sector which forced them to take on wider portfolios of work and broader line management responsibilities.

Integration with wider agencies

Children's Social Care

- Integration with Children's Social Care varied from being in the same directorate, to being part of an umbrella service, to YJS managers overseeing parts of Children's Social Care operations (most commonly Leaving Care or Residential Children's Homes).
- We found several examples of YJSs operating within the same umbrella service or management portfolio as specialist 'adolescent' social care teams.
- Motivation: Services often integrated with Children's Social Care due to the significant overlap in their caseloads, while integration at umbrella service or portfolio level allowed them to deliver family-focused interventions and more effective responses to local needs like rising exploitation cases.

Early help

- Several YJSs integrated with Early Help at the delivery level, with targeted Early Help services often delivering out-of-court disposals and other prevention activities.
- Motivation: This integration, frequently supported by Turnaround² funding, aimed to reduce the criminogenic impact of involvement with the youth justice team, provide access to longer-term interventions, and improve exit planning.

² Turnaround is a youth justice early intervention programme led by the Ministry of Justice – Youth justice services have been allocated time limited funding until March 2025 [Turnaround Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/turnaround-programme)

- However, there were challenges: some practitioners worried that Early Help staff may lack specialist skills in supporting children who have committed an offence, while others cited Early Help's capacity limits and longer waiting times as barriers. Additionally, while many practitioners see a need for them, clear thresholds, and protocols for handover between Early Help and YJSs, especially around the boundaries of Turnaround work, are not always well-defined. This may create further challenges when Turnaround funding is scheduled to end on 31 March 2025.

Other agencies and services

- Many areas incorporated universal youth services as a key element of their wider umbrella service or service portfolio. Integrating with universal services allowed the wider service to provide a continuum of support with flexible exit planning, often utilising their offices to offer non-stigmatising physical spaces for engagement with children.
- Several YJSs integrated with schools' teams to manage attendance and contextual issues for children. One service that was integrated with a schools' team as part of their umbrella service suggested that this integration meant the schools' team could be used as an alternative intervention.

What are the benefits of integrated structures?

- **Reduced duplication:** Sharing information, adopting joint case auditing processes, and providing interventions collaboratively minimised the number of professionals and handovers for an individual child.
- **Improved communication:** Rapid informal communication across teams, allowing proactive problem-solving and efficient resource allocation.
- **Shared funding:** Structural integration was often perceived as presenting an opportunity to pursue funding sources creatively and across service boundaries.
- **Inter-agency collaboration:** The process of moving towards an integrated structure encouraged services to articulate their own organisational identity and clarify their own purpose. This not only empowered youth justice practitioners, but also fostered understanding of the specialism and unique value of other services within the integrated structure.
- **Shared training:** Integrated services promote knowledge-sharing and joint training, ensuring staff are equipped to support the diverse needs of children on their caseloads.
- **Stronger community links:** Drawing on existing community ties established by other services, supporting the holistic approach vital for contextual safeguarding.
- **Embedding Child First:** Practitioners felt they could influence broader local authority culture to be more Child First in nature, shifting language and approaches away from risk management towards a strengths-based approach.

What are the challenges?

- **Maintaining specialism:** Services highlighted the importance of maintaining their specialist youth justice identity, specialism, and statutory responsibilities – to

safeguard children, provide public protection, and to adhere to current inspection frameworks. There were concerns that full convergence with other services could dilute this expertise.

- **Defining service scope:** Defining appropriate boundaries for the service's scope and remit while still addressing wider needs was cited as a common inherent tension for service managers.
- **Operational and strategic remit:** Concerns were raised about the size and scope of the operational and strategic remit of a sole service manager or head service. In some areas, service managers had their portfolio limited to ensure they could adequately focus on the unique strategic partnerships vital for youth justice delivery.
- **Contextual factors:** Large geographical boundaries and multiple sites, funding constraints and short-term funding, and high staff turnover in partner agencies also hampered integrated working in some areas.

Next steps

This research set out to describe and analyse different integrated models, but in a similar vein to Fielder et al (2008) it did not attempt to make any value judgements about what has 'worked'. Ultimately, YJSs across England and Wales must thoughtfully assess the complex web of local circumstances, service needs and resources to determine their ideal structural model. Integration is not an end in itself, but a means of delivering comprehensive, efficient support which aligns with Child First tenets.

YJSs looking to structurally integrate with other services locally may wish to:

- Maintain the specialist youth justice identity and training for staff within integrated structures to ensure the unique needs and strengths of children who come into contact with the criminal justice system are supported through specialised assessment and interventions.
- Establish clear protocols, including clear outlining of roles and responsibilities, joint auditing processes to improve case management, delegated responsibilities, and handover between YJSs and other agencies.
- Involve staff throughout the integration process through consultation and clear communication to improve buy in and successful implementation.
- Actively seek feedback from children, respecting their knowledge to assess the effectiveness of integrated approaches to ensure that services are meeting their needs and promoting their strengths in a responsive way, aligning with the tenets of Child First.
- Prioritise co-location and ensure shared access to IT systems.
- Document and share successful case studies and best practice of integrated working.

Future analysis and research

- Future research may usefully analyse of the effectiveness of services, using the updated youth justice key performance indicator (KPI) measures³ and/or HM Inspectorate of Probation ratings, comparing services within each of the different integrated typologies to support service improvement.

³ [Key performance indicators for youth justice services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-performance-indicators-for-youth-justice-services)



Integration in youth justice services: child-friendly summary

What is this research about?

- Think of the teams who help support children – like youth justice workers, social workers, youth workers and others. This research asks how these teams work together. Do they each work separately, or do they all work as one big team?

How do youth justice services work?

- The way a youth justice service is designed is different depending on where you live.
- Sometimes it's a separate team, sometimes they're in the same team (such as Children's Social Care and Early Help). **This is called "integration".**

Why do they work together?

- It can be stressful for children to talk to lots of different people. Having teams work together makes it easier.
- Teams can talk to each other easily, so they can solve problems together faster.
- Sharing good ideas; working together lets everyone learn the best ways to help.

What can be difficult?

- Those helping children who have committed an offence need special training, and sometimes working across big teams can make it hard to keep being experts.
- Too much to do! Sometimes the people in charge get busy because they have to think about lots of different teams, not just the youth justice team.



Introduction

Organisational structures are far from set and static, they are constantly shifting and actively shaped by financial pressures, national guidance, and local innovation. These structures often shape the working culture of the organisation and potentially affect the underpinning philosophies guiding practice (Unwin 2013).

Evidence suggests there is diversity in the structure and organisation of youth justice services (YJSs); some remain structurally separate from other teams which support children, while others continue to move towards integrated models of service delivery (Byrne & Brooks, 2015; Hopkins 2010; YJB 2015). For the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to best support services, it is important to have a greater understanding of how they are currently structured, what is meant by 'integration,' as well as the benefits and barriers to different ways of working.

This is not the first time an attempt has been made to understand the developing relationship between YJSs and wider services that support children.

- **In 2008**, Fielder et al sought to understand the nature of integration between Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)⁴ and Children's Trusts in the years after the implementation of *Every Child Matters* in 2003.
- **In 2010**, the YJB commissioned work to explore the relationship between 'YOTs' and children's services, focussing on the strategic and operational links between these two agencies (Hopkins et al 2010).
- **In 2014**, the YJB also undertook a stocktake of 20 YJSs to better understand of how local services were being delivered and funded (YJB 2015).

All found some evidence of services becoming more 'integrated' – a term which has different definitions across those studies but most commonly refers to increased co-location as well as service managers also managing other services within the local authority. There were further concerns raised by practitioners in each of the studies that integration could lead to the specialist 'risk-based services' delivered by YJSs to a complex and 'high-risk' group of children becoming diluted. There were also concerns that integration with Children's Social Care could lead to less focus on youth justice in departments more concerned more with safeguarding, or where the 'YOT' sat in Community Safety, less focus on the needs of children in a department concerned more with public protection (YJB 2015).

Now, some 10 years after that final study was commissioned, this work attempts to provide another temperature check of the sector. In a similar vein to Smith & Gray (2019) and

⁴ The YJB now refer to youth justice services rather than the statutory definition of youth offending team. This is to acknowledge the evolution of services in all their guises and to move away from the stigmatising language of 'offending' the terms Youth Offending Team and 'YOT' have been included here and throughout if they are the terms used in the original research cited.

Case & Haines (2019), this work is interested in how youth justice is organised currently by those directly concerned with its delivery.

Research questions

1. Are there different models of integrated delivery in operation in England and Wales?
2. What are the perceived risks and challenges of integrated models of delivery?
3. Why are YJSs moving towards integrated models (i.e., what are the key motivations and perceived benefits)?
4. What are the key facilitators and best practice when it comes to integrating across service (and/or local) boundaries?



Recent trends

Since the introduction of YOTs in 1998 (now referred to by the YJB as YJSs), the UK and devolved Welsh governments have continued to legislate and provide guidance to improve and refine criminal justice policy relating to children, with many of these changes having implications for service integration. For example, there has been an extension of prevention and diversion activities in YJSs, necessitating a closer relationship with Early Help, Children's Social Care, and other universal services for children. Since December 2022, YJSs have been able to use Turnaround⁵ funding from the Ministry of Justice to offer children and their families an Early Help style assessment to address needs and to build on individual strengths, with the aim of preventing them going on to offend or reoffend.

At the same time, the numbers of children being remanded or sentenced to custody have significantly dropped (YJB 2024). However, there have been new challenges in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, 'county lines' activity, concerns about various forms of child exploitation and serious violence, and a greater understanding of trauma and its impact on

⁵ Turnaround is a youth justice early intervention programme led by the Ministry of Justice – Youth justice services have been allocated time limited funding until March 2025 [Turnaround Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/turnaround-programme-extended)

children.⁶ These trends, combined with an overall reduction in funding for services since 2012 (YJB 2024), may have prompted leaders and directors to reflect on the integrated nature of their services. This may have led some services to become more closely integrated with wider services rather than operating as stand-alone partnerships, leading in some areas to what has been called ‘post-YOT youth justice.’ In this model, children “receive essentially the same services and opportunities from the same people regardless of their entry point” (Byrne & Brooks 2015).

The adoption of ‘Child First’ as the guiding principle for policy, strategy, and practice across the youth justice system in 2021 has also brought with it a greater emphasis on professional partnerships and inter-agency working.⁷ As well as child-centrism and a knowledge and understanding of the tenets of Child First, stakeholder evidence has consistently identified components and practices of inter-and multi-agency working relationships, particularly philosophical and cultural differences as central to the effective implementation of Child First in practice context (Case and Browning 2021; Case and Hazel 2023).

Recent developments in Children's Social Care practice, such as the increasing awareness and implementation of contextual safeguarding, also present new opportunities for enhanced interagency collaboration (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2023a). This collaboration could involve YJSs, social care, and other relevant agencies working together to share knowledge and expertise, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for children (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2023a). However, challenges persist in communication and collaboration between YJSs and Children's Social Care teams. HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections (2023b) consistently identified youth justice staff reporting difficulties in reaching Children's Social Care, experiencing issues with unanswered calls and high staff turnover, which hindered the development of effective working relationships. These reports also acknowledged the significant pressure faced by Children's Social Care teams (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2023b).

Current policy and guidance

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the co-operation of the named statutory partners to form a YJS. These statutory partners are:

- the local authority (this should include Children's Social Care and education)
- the police
- the probation service
- health.

The YJS includes staff seconded from or employed by these agencies. To support the YJS, additional partners may also be recruited to provide specific services and support to

⁶ This guidance was updated by Sustaining the Success and [Modern youth offending partnerships: guidance on effective youth offending team governance in England](#), [YOT management board guidance: guidance on effective youth offending team governance in Wales](#).

⁷ [Putting Child First into practice](#) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

children. There may be one or more YJSs in each local authority area, or a YJS covering a number of local authorities (commonly two or three), for example, where a combination of local authorities is agreed in respect of the operating boundaries of health, police or probation, or smaller authorities combine to provide a jointly constituted team.

The YJS has a statutory duty to co-operate with other local agencies and bodies, and whilst not detailed in statute, the YJS also has a role in developing partnership working with other agencies to support children in the youth justice system.

- Under Section 325 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, YJSs are one of the named 'duty to co-operate' bodies within Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Under Section 10 (4) of the Children Act 2004, YJSs have a duty to cooperate with children's services in making arrangements to improve the well-being of children in the local authority's area. This duty is set out in the Local Safeguarding Children Boards Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/90) (England) and in part 7 (Safeguarding) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in the establishment and operation of Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (England) and Safeguarding Children's Boards (Wales).

National Standards, which are set by the Secretary of State, outline the minimum expectations of YJSs.⁸ These Standards are outcome focused and enable services to flexibly determine structure, strategy, and delivery, supported by YJB Case Management Guidance. The current YJS model allows for significant autonomy for local authorities and their partners to plan and deliver services that meet local needs.

Defining integration

"[There is] a definitional problem, with terms such as integration, partnership, joint working, and multi-agency working being used interchangeably. They suggest a continuum with full integration at one end of the spectrum and agencies working autonomously at the other, and separate but co-ordinated services in the middle."

Fielder et al. (2008); 32.

There has been much academic work to understand the nature of multi-agency working – defined in the youth justice context as the ways in which partners required to form part of the service by statute (police, health, education, probation, social services) operate – see HM Inspectorate of Probation (2021) as a recent example.⁹ This project, in contrast, explored how YJSs are integrated with other agencies and wider services within the local

⁸ [Standards for children in the youth justice system](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-children-in-the-youth-justice-system) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁹ [Multi-agency work in youth offending services](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmip/) ([justiceinspectorates.gov.uk](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmip/))

authority outside of the multi-agency youth justice team or service. The focus was on mapping the YJS's location within the local authority structure, at both strategic and operational levels. This included identifying potential areas of integration with other local authority teams/agencies at different levels. It is important to note that integration with voluntary and community services (VCS) was not included in the scope of this project.

Approach

Document analysis

Youth justice plans

Building upon the methodology used by Smith and Gray (2018), this project employed qualitative content analysis to explore and categorise the information contained within Youth Justice Plans. All 155 Youth Justice Plans¹⁰ submitted to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) for the year 2023/24 were included for analysis (138 from England and 17 from Wales), though 13 were excluded from the analysis as they did not contain sections with available relevant information for analysis of the organisational structure (see Table 2).

There are two main reasons why youth justice plans were chosen. Firstly, from a practical standpoint, they are readily available documents. Secondly, following the introduction of clear guidelines, they tend to follow a consistent format.¹¹ Each service is required to submit a plan to the YJB, guaranteeing full coverage of England and Wales. Specifically, the following sections in each plan (where available) were analysed:

- An annex or dedicated section containing a current organisational chart and individual partner services and seconded or permanent staff members.
- A section on 'Governance and partnerships' which often contained a current overview of their partnership working with Children's Social Care, Early Help, and other universal services or 'adolescent support' teams. Occasionally this also contained a short history of integration and merging services.

Where possible, the analysis separated services operating in England and those operating in Wales. This is largely due to the unique oversight function of the devolved Welsh Government and the Welsh Blueprint¹², which were likely have implications for the approach to integration, partnerships, and the structure of the service.

¹⁰ Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services. Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.

¹¹ [Youth justice plans: guidance for youth justice services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/68444/youth-justice-plans-guidance-for-youth-justice-services.pdf)

¹² [youth-justice-blueprint_0.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://www.gov.wales/youth-justice-blueprint-0.pdf)

Table 1: Information extracted from youth justice plans.

Service design		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wider services and teams that make up the umbrella service or portfolio. • Information on whether the service is co-located. • Description of the service including the name of the umbrella service (i.e., “adolescents’ team”) • Description of key challenges for the service. • Description of the key benefits of the service structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line management arrangements. • Responsibility for initial assessment and triage. • The presence of shared information platforms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authority finances. • Children’s Social Care performance. • The local environment: size, location, and boundaries.

HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports

This project also analysed recent HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports to provide additional context and a critical view of the integrated nature of youth justice practice. As this project sought to assess “current” practice as much as possible, a decision was taken only to assess inspection reports from 2022 onwards. While the structure of HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports have changed in recent years, there is often comment or appraisal of the relationship between the youth justice service (YJS) and other agencies within the local authority, as well as some information on the structural location of the service. Analysts from HM Inspectorate of Probation also reviewed the coding structure and provided quality assurance of coding for a sample of services. The table below provides an overview of the coverage provided by youth justice plans and recent HM Inspectorate of Probation reports.

Table 2: Information sources

England	138	127 (92% of English services)	45 (33% of English services)

	Youth justice service plans	Useable information in youth justice plan	Recent HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection (2022 onwards)
Wales	17	15 (88% of Welsh services)	8 (47% of Welsh services)

Analysis and creation of a typology

We aimed to create a typology of different services using data extracted from the plans. Services were organised and grouped based on the structure of the service, management responsibilities, and the nature of the integration (Stapley et al., 2022). Not all services within each group will have had the exact same experience nor will share the exact same perspectives, however there must be something fundamentally similar about the services within each group that links them together and apart from the other groups of services.

In this project, each ideal type was given a name and a detailed description (see Findings section below). The description closely represented the optimal case and, in this way, illustrates the group of similar cases to which it belongs. Using the type descriptions, independent researchers from the YJB and HM Inspectorate of Probation who had not been involved in the analysis then attempted to regroup a sub sample of the cases into the ideal types. The purpose of this was not to check inter-rater reliability, but to ensure that the descriptions of the ideal types were appropriately grounded in the data, and that the descriptions are clear and differentiated enough to allow someone else to use them to be able to group the existing cases into the proposed ideal types.

We have also completed analysis of operational and strategic integration, as we know from previous research (Fielder et al. 2008; Hopkins et al. 2010) that there is often substantial joint working between agencies outside of the formal line management and organisational structures.

Stakeholder interviews

This project employed a purposive theoretical sampling strategy (Charmaz 2006) – this involved selecting participants based on their potential to contribute to the evolving typology and were therefore not randomly chosen. This involved engaging with representative services within each of the four distinct structural types identified through the analysis of planning documents (seven services in total – one in Wales and six in England). In each service, semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

- One service manager
- One case manager

Table 3 summarises the distinctive features of each of the selected YJSs – further detail on the nature of the typology can be found in the main findings chapter below.

Table 3: Case study sites selected for interview.

Typology			
Integrated at directorate	Service B	Children's Trust	Requires Improvement
Integrated at management portfolio	Service C	Unitary Authority	Requires Improvement
	Service D	Unitary Authority	N/A (over 5 years ago)
Integrated in an umbrella service	Service E	Metropolitan Borough	Requires Improvement
	Service F	Unitary Authority	Good
Integrated at delivery	Service G	County Council	Outstanding
	Service H	Metropolitan Borough	Good

The interviews were organised around a series of key prompts, which were designed to generate responses indicative of interviewees' aspirations and orientation to integration. These prompts included:

- What was distinctive about their organisational structure in relation to other YJSs.
- How they engaged with wider services.
- How they managed individual cases, including any information on oversight and escalation processes.
- What they perceive to be the main benefits or risks of integration and the main motivations for doing their current model of delivery.
- [if applicable] What they perceive to be the main facilitators to integrated delivery.

Direct quotes referenced within this report will be from one of the 3 following sources:

- youth justice plans
- HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports
- stakeholder interviews.

Limitations

While the approach has been designed to offer both breadth (via analysis of youth justice plans) and depth (via semi-structured interviews) there are limitations to this methodology. The youth justice plans follow a structured template, and in most cases have not been written to provide details on their history of integration or approach to integration. Therefore, in some cases it has been impossible to accurately place a service within one of the typologies. This has meant 13 services were excluded from the analysis.

Moreover, as YJSs continue to integrate, models and practices are likely to change. This analysis provides a snapshot of a particular moment in time and may not capture future shifts or challenges. Finally, the use of purposive sampling in interviews limits the generalisability of the qualitative insights to the broader population of YJSs.

Findings: Structure and integration

Location of the youth justice service

Service directorate

The project first attempted to locate services within their directorate and then the strategic division within the local authority. It appears there has been significant movement of youth justice services (YJSs) since the last assessment of service integration. Hopkins et al. (2010) noted, in their assessment of service integration, that around 50% of YJSs were operating as part of Children's Services departments.¹³ This analysis, however, finds a significant shift, with the majority of services now residing within Children's Services (or equivalent) departments. A small number of areas had commissioned a not-for-profit social enterprise or Children's Trust to deliver their Children's Services activity, including YJSs.

"In April 2023, the YJS transitioned from the Communities Department into Children's Services. This transition is welcomed and has impacted on the team positively. We are now located in a new office within a main council building alongside Children Social Care Teams and Education."

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated at directorate level | Metropolitan Borough Council

Strategic focus area

To understand the organisational context of YJS delivery, information from youth justice plans was used to identify the strategic focus area within which each service operated. The following categories were developed drawing inspiration from the typology presented by Smith and Gray (2018) but with slight modifications to reflect the scope of this analysis. In contrast to Smith and Gray (2018), which analysed the entirety of the youth justice plan to categorise services, we instead focused solely on the organogram and sections related to YJS structure. This limitation means the categorisation presented here should be considered indicative of the YJS's strategic focus area or division, and not an attempt to map the broader typology of practice. It is also important to note that most services may fall into multiple categories.

Table 4: Strategic focus area descriptions

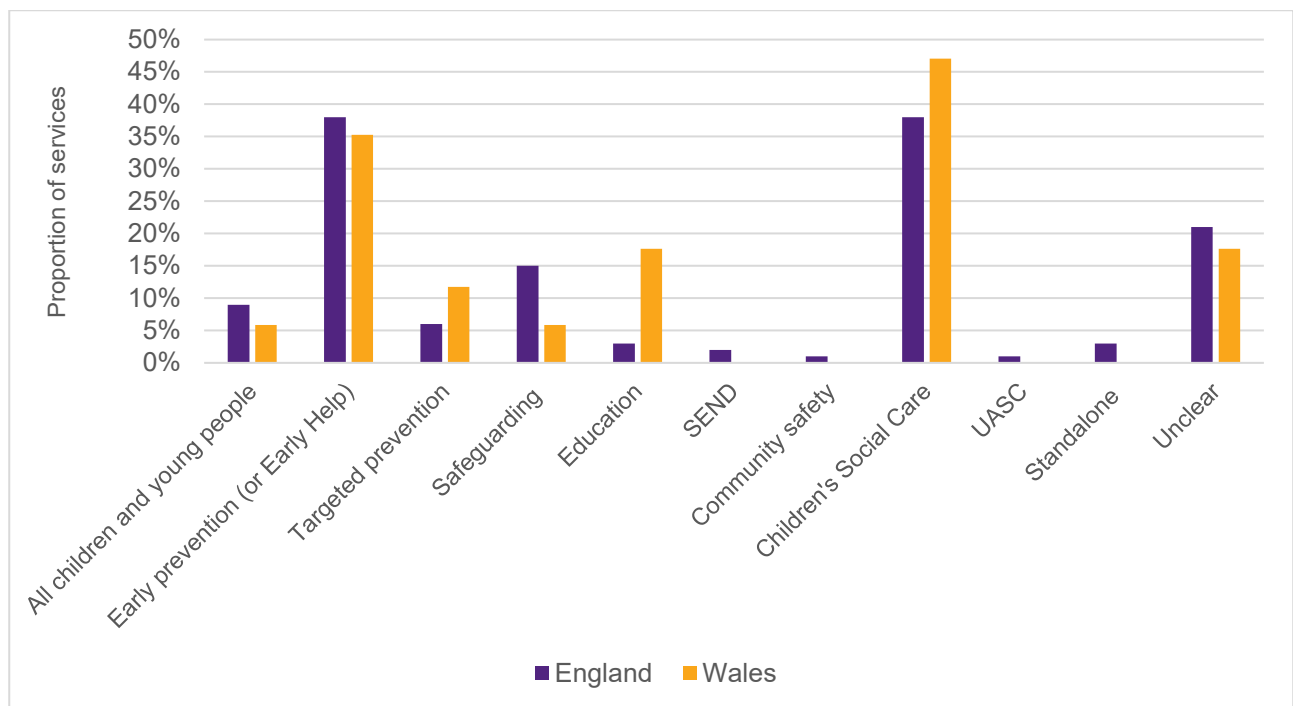
¹³ Children's services are responsible for supporting and protecting vulnerable children. This includes providing children and their families with extra help. This is a broad catch-all term used interchangeably in HM Inspectorate of Probation and YJB documents - used in this exercise at a directorate level.

Division	
All children and young people	The YJS is not described as being in a division or strategic area with a particular focus, instead it is embedded as part of the Children's Services (or Children's Trust) directorate alongside services which support all children (including those without welfare or justice concerns).
Early prevention (or "Early Help")	The YJS sits in a designated early prevention or 'Early Help' division or strategic area. In this exercise "Early Help" is described as support for all children (with no linked offence) to address unmet needs and/or welfare concerns. This may include support for substance use, employment, and/or education needs.
Targeted prevention	The YJS sits within a division or strategic area which is dedicated to specialist support for children who have had some contact with criminal justice services but are not currently being supported through diversion, an out-of-court disposal or statutory order (this could include children who have had previous YJS intervention). This is to address unmet needs and/or welfare concerns.
Safeguarding	The YJS sits within a division or strategic area dedicated to addressing safeguarding or exploitation concerns, specifically to reduce the risks around criminal or sexual exploitation and harm to children outside of the family home.
Education	The YJS sits within a division or strategic focus area dedicated to supporting children in education. This may include additional support for children to ensure their engagement in education or managing attendance issues.
Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	The YJS sits within a division or strategic area dedicated to supporting children with SEND.
Community safety	The YJS sits within a division or strategic area dedicated to addressing community safety.
Children's social care and family support	The YJS sits within the Children's Social Care division or strategic area in the local authority. In this exercise this has been used to define statutory social work, child protection activity and intensive parenting support – from Child in Need interventions to supporting Looked-after children.
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	The YJS sits within a division or strategic area which has been overtly described as being dedicated to supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Division	
Standalone	The service does not sit in a division or strategic area with any other services. In some cases, this describes when the service is directly overseen by the local authority Chief Executive (or equivalent).

In England, just over a third of YJSs (38%) operated within the Children’s Social Care and family support division of their local authority. A similar proportion were in the “Early Help” (or early prevention), division or strategic focus area (38%). Smaller proportions were within safeguarding (15%), targeted prevention (6%), and all children and young people (9%) divisions. In Wales, nearly half of services were based within the Children’s Social Care and family support division or strategic area (47%) of their local authority. Early prevention also features prominently (35%). Education (18%) and targeted prevention (12%) represent larger proportions compared to England (though in Wales the overall counts are much smaller so these proportions should be treated with caution).

Figure 1: Service division and/or strategic focus area within which the youth justice service is situated



Note: Services may fall into multiple categories.

A typology of structural integration

Analysis of youth justice plans suggest a shift away from detached or standalone youth justice services (YJSs) – less than 1% of services stated they were operating in a standalone structure in 2023/24 reporting, down from 15% in 2015 (Deloitte 2015). The majority of YJSs were integrated in some way with other services in the local authority, with several overtly describing themselves as being an “integrated service.” However, there was inconsistency in how this term was applied in different contexts.

1. Integrated at division/directorate level.

The YJS sits within the same directorate as other services designed to support children, (this is often the Children’s Services directorate of the local authority or within a Children’s Trust). In most cases, the service sits in the same division as safeguarding, Early Help, and/or Children’s Social Care teams. The service manager holds responsibility for the YJS only, and the service is not structurally integrated with other teams within the local authority at service manager portfolio or service delivery level.

2. Integrated at management portfolio level.

The service manager or head of service holds responsibility for a portfolio of other services within the local authority, ensuring oversight and closer working relationships. However, the YJS continues to maintain its own identity within this portfolio, managing and delivering targeted prevention, diversion, and statutory youth justice work. This structure bears resemblance to the ‘merged management’ structure identified by Case & Haines (2019).

Case study: Integrated at management portfolio level.

“The Head of Service has additional responsibility for youth homelessness and youth substance misuse work within the Local authority, in addition to managing the Supporting Families programme. Statutory, out-of-court and prevention work is managed within the youth justice service.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Unitary authority

3. Integrated in an umbrella service.

The YJS sits within a wider integrated umbrella service which brings together ‘adolescent’ or ‘young adult’ services such as leaving care, youth work, or other targeted youth support under a single integrated service structure. In contrast to an integrated portfolio, an umbrella service is public facing and often there is often a single referral pathway. However, the YJS continues to maintain its own identity within the wider umbrella service structure with an operational YJS team managing and delivering targeted prevention, diversion, and statutory youth justice work.

Case study: Integrated in an umbrella service.

“[Youth justice service] sits within the wider umbrella service ‘Targeted Early Help & Integrated Support Service’ (TEHISS) in [local authority] Children’s Services. TEHISS also hosts the residential children’s homes team and therapeutic support. [Youth justice service] was part of the Early Help & Integrated Youth Justice Service (EHYJS) throughout 22/23, however a decision was made in to split EHYJS into two separate services to allow for two Service Managers to be appointed who could focus on the different emerging priorities.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Metropolitan borough council

4. Integrated at delivery level.

Part of the YJS remit or casework is being delivered by either solely or jointly with another team in the local authority. Most commonly, this takes the form of the YJS targeted prevention and/or diversion activity being delivered by another service in the local authority.

Case study: Integrated at delivery level

“Youth justice workers have a specialist and dedicated function in [local authority] and only work with children in the youth justice system pre and post court. However, the youth justice service continues to have access to the full range of services throughout the Early Help and Children’s Social Care division. The youth justice service is part of the Integrated Adolescent Service – case managers within the Early Help part of the service manage Turnaround and other Targeted Prevention activity.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Unitary authority

In a small number of cases, integrated services are delivered by adolescent or targeted youth workers which work across multiple services in the local authority but have been appropriately trained to manage youth justice cases. The case worker will both coordinate the package of support and deliver many of its components, pulling in co-workers where required but not routinely referring out to others to do the bulk of the direct work. In all cases the service was also operating as an umbrella service or was integrated at portfolio level.

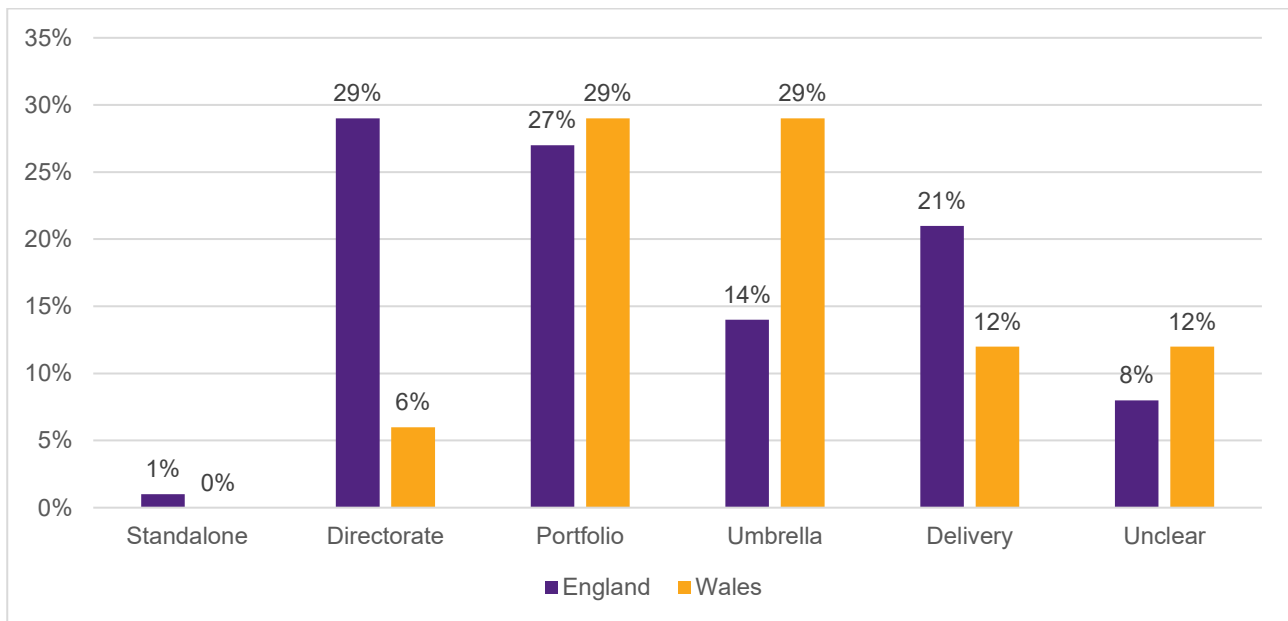
Case study: Integrated at delivery level

“The integrated approach brings together youth justice, early help, and safeguarding adolescents. Trained and designated staff in our Targeted Youth Support (TYS) teams undertake youth justice case work. The four quadrant teams utilise an integrated service delivery model: designated staff in these quadrants are assigned youth justice work and have received appropriate training, but they may also case-manage children subject to other children’s services interventions.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Non-metropolitan county council

Figure 2 shows the distribution of services across the typology in both England and Wales. Services have been included in one category only in the figure below based on the highest level of integration into which they fit. For example, if a service is integrated in an umbrella service and is also integrated at delivery level, it has been designated as being integrated at delivery level. The analysis suggests that around one in five services in England (and around one in eight in Wales) were integrated at a delivery level – meaning youth justice casework (either statutory, out-of-court, or prevention) is being co-delivered with another service within the local authority. Moreover, in England 41% of services were integrated at either portfolio or umbrella level (in Wales this rises to 58%).

Figure 2: Service integrated structure, England and Wales



Note: Information derived from analysis of 2023/24 youth justice plans.

Several services noted they had recently transitioned towards a more integrated model in their youth justice plan. This typically involved moving under an umbrella service or moving towards an integrated delivery model and delivering casework jointly with other agencies. Other services also reported plans for further integration in the future.

“In 2021, the [local authority] established the Contextualised Safeguarding Team, encompassing Child Exploitation and Extra Familial Harm. Later in the year, it was agreed to reposition the [service] to align with the Contextualised Safeguarding Team, placing them within the Front Door, Assessment and Adolescent Services.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated as an umbrella service | Non-metropolitan county council

Motivation for integration

Services highlighted both push and pull factors behind their decision to move towards an integrated structure. And while there were some commonalities between areas, these reasons differed depending on the local context. In many areas, this was based on a desire to provide a more holistic and streamlined services, driven by a shared understanding of the overlapping welfare and justice concerns in many children's lives.

"There are additional plans over the next 12-months to potentially bring both services [contextual safeguarding] under an Adolescent Safeguarding Service structure that would enable increased alignment and pooling of resources and a more holistic approach to supporting some of our most vulnerable teenagers in line with the [Area] Adolescent Safeguarding Framework."

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at directorate level | Metropolitan borough council

In others, service managers specifically highlighted funding and resource pressures across the area and the wider sector. We heard that these pressures meant they had little choice but to take on a greater portfolio of work and more line management responsibility.

"Money wise you just can't have a service manager sitting there overseeing like 15 or 16 staff. You know now I've got like [...] 35 staff or something like that, but you can't, you know you can't you've got to you're going to have to have to merge things together."

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Further detail on the rationale for specific service structures and integration with Early Help and Children's Social Care can be found in the 'Findings: Integration with wider services' chapter below.

Operational and strategic integration

The location of the service within the local authority structure is an important indicator of integrated working, but it is only a partial indicator. There is often a range of formal and informal operational arrangements alongside the structural location and management structure of the service which may facilitate integrated working. This section covers the over-arching operational and strategic integration. Further detail on the integration with specific services can be found in the '**Findings: Integration with wider services**' section below.

Operational integration

Case allocation and management processes

Practitioners in all areas and structural models referenced participation and regular attendance at Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), the Integrated Front Door, or equivalent as an important way in which they conduct integrated working with other key agencies in the local authority. Several services cited the importance of space and time in those meetings to speak about and “fight the case” for additional support as an important ingredient of successful integrated case management. These fora not only allowed for more effective identification and allocation of children, but also allowed YJSs the platform to share their service offer to try and encourage referrals, especially for early and targeted prevention.

“I’d say our relationship with MASH so that is our front door service, because everyone calls it different things, don’t they? Our relationship with our MASH I would say is very good. If we put a referral through or and they want to talk it through, we’ve got that relationship that we can have those discussions with them. And I think at the moment we are trying to broaden out our Turnaround programme to share what we can offer and what the criteria is to encourage referrals, to try and do that early intervention.”

Case Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

This was also emphasised in several recent HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports which emphasised the value of multi-agency planning meetings to coordinate resources and ensure assessments are completed with the support of the wider professional network.

“Multi-Agency Planning Meetings coordinate resources and ensure all children entering the Youth Justice System are supported through a single Multi-Agency Plan. These meetings provide a forum for mental health, speech & language, education, and substance misuse specialists to meet with the wider professional network across YJS, Children’s Social Care and Early Help and make contributions to the development of AssetPlus assessments and desistance focused intervention plans, adopting Signs of Safety approaches to risk assessment and trauma-informed approaches to interventions.”

HM Inspectorate of Probation Inspection Report – 2022

Some service managers noted that attendance on specific risk assessment meetings run and organised by another separate service in the local authority was an important way of managing cases which straddled team remits and helped to ensure shared oversight of cases and joint working.

“There's a weekly risk assessment meeting that the child vulnerable to exploitation team, own and chair. But we sit on every week, so some will be our children. Some won't be.”

Service Manager, Service C | Integrated at portfolio level

Practitioners also cited attendance at regular combined leadership meetings as an important point of integrated working. These ensured there was no single point of contact between services and issues could be raised across different fora.

“Because she [the Head of the Umbrella service] is the head of MASH, I'm well integrated with them. I am in the same boat with them. I'm also attending the senior leadership meetings, the Youth Justice Management Board. So, there's no single point of contact.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Lead professionals

A number of practitioners noted that while the service was not integrated at a delivery level (i.e. youth justice case work was not being delivered by another service), they adopted a flexible approach to allocating the Lead Professional to engage with a child and their family. The role of the Lead Professional is to take the lead to coordinate provision and act as a single point of contact for a child and their family when a range of services are involved and an integrated response is required. They will be one of the practitioners who are working with the family. In most cases, the YJS case manager may be the Lead Professional but where the child is looked after or subject to a Child Protection or a Child in Need plan, the Lead Professional may be the Social Worker. This is often context dependent and negotiated locally.

“So [service G] have a lead professional model. So ordinarily that would be the social worker if the child is open to social care. But that can be quite flexible and it that's more about who's going to coordinate the plans. But if a child is open to social care and gets a youth justice disposal, we won't allocate that to that social worker. We will always have a worker involved if they're open on that basis, but we're not integrated as teams, and we don't hold each other's cases.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Shared workstreams

When discussing other forms of integrated work, two service managers also highlighted that while their service structure had not changed to become more integrated, and was not going to change in the future, they were carrying out pieces of integrated strategic work with other agencies within the local authority. This shared work often coalesced around a particular emerging issue or leading fora.

“We don’t have plans to integrate on an operational level, but having said that, there’s myself and the adolescent service lead who kind of we work as a bit of a triangle with that head of service. So, I’m chairing and leading on that forum, but it’s not a youth justice forum, so we’re integrating areas of work.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Strategic integration

Strategic delivery

Practitioners highlighted the ways their services placed children at the centre of their strategic integration, with representation across different forums being used to enable interface with youth justice and effectively address the needs of children who have engaged with YJSs and the wider criminal justice system.

“It is recognised that in order to effectively influence strategic decision making, service delivery and practice across the partnership, the YJS is represented on a number of key partnerships and forums in the borough. The inclusion with these forums has resulted in children who have come into contact with the criminal justice system consistently being considered in the strategic planning, resource allocation and service delivery of key stakeholders.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at directorate level | Metropolitan borough council

Both service and case managers across different YJSs outlined the different boards that they attend as part of their roles. Some of these were board meetings that YJSs sat on, and others were held specifically by YJSs themselves to facilitate important strategic discussion.

“We have strategy discussions... I have a number of strategic panel meetings which is just to sit on... There’s a number of different meetings that the service also holds that we will then ensure that children’s services, colleagues, and partners are invited to... So, I would say wherever there’s an appropriate meeting and it’s discussing a child young person where the services potentially involved or could be involved or is involved, then the service is sat in those meetings.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

The Corporate Parenting Board was identified as an advantageous forum by one service manager. Given the beneficial work that has emerged from this board, plans for future strategic delivery were suggested to build on existing strategic integration rather than reinventing something new.

Strategic oversight

Services cited the importance of strategic oversight panels, meetings, and fora regularly in their youth justice plans. These panels worked across services and areas to ensure an integrated strategic approach. Children and Families Boards, Criminal Justice Boards or specific sub-boards dedicated to “supporting adolescents” were viewed as important ways of ensuring the YJS was sighted on emerging issues but also to agree strategic priorities and coordinated working.

“Criminal Justice Board – to provide a structure for strategic leaders to meet, discuss and agree measures to improve the criminal justice system in [youth justice region] for victims, witnesses, and the public and all those who come into contact with it”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at delivery level | Non-metropolitan county

Areas of strategic oversight were also highlighted throughout practitioner interviews. One of the key oversight areas flagged by service managers was presence at Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation (MACE) meetings. These meetings varied in frequency on a service-dependent basis, however enabled oversight and identification of children who being or at risk of exploitation.

“There's a weekly risk assessment meeting that the child vulnerable to exploitation team own and chair, but we sit on every week, so some will be our children, some won't be. So that's another process that kind of manages that vulnerability angle and exploitation angle but with our youth justice lens on.”

Service Manager, Service C | Integrated at portfolio level

Findings: Integration with wider services

Children's Social Care

Operational and strategic integration with Children's Social Care

Integrated teams and responsibilities

Analysis of youth justice plans suggests that just under half of services (38% in England and 47% in Wales) sat within the Children's Social Care division or strategic focus area in their local authority. Several youth justice services (YJSs) were structurally integrated with Children's Social Care either as part of a wider umbrella service or at service manager portfolio level (i.e., the YJS manager had additional responsibilities for Children's Social Care).

In several cases, the umbrella service or portfolio only contained a small part of the Children's Social Care remit, such as an Edge of Care service, Residential Children's Homes, Leaving Care/Care Leavers. We found two examples in the youth justice plans of a service manager who also held responsibility for all children in care services, but these appear to be unique examples in smaller local authorities.

"The service is called "Youth Offending Service and Care Leavers," this umbrella service contains Youth Justice, Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The service also leads on 16 plus supported accommodation, supported lodgings, and Staying Put schemes."

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated in an umbrella service| Non-metropolitan county council

We also found several examples of specialist "adolescent" Children's Social Care teams which sat within the same umbrella service or managerial portfolio as the YJS. These teams primarily worked with children aged 11 to 17 and were often described as being dedicated to supporting those children requiring support to prevent them entering care and/or custody. They were often framed as "Edge of Care" services, focussing on Contextual Safeguarding and extra familial harm (risks posed outside the family home).

“To provide a comprehensive and cogent response to complex needs of this cohort, key teams in [local authority] have been brought together to form one co-located Adolescent Service. This multi-disciplinary service consists of the Youth Offending Service alongside other key services including an Adolescent Social Work Pod who work with the most vulnerable and risky young people in the city.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated in an umbrella service | Unitary authority

Joint auditing

While structural integration can facilitate closer collaboration between youth justice and Children’s Social Care services, it’s important to emphasise that the features explored in this section are often present in most youth justice operational structures. They have been included below as services, either in their youth justice plan or as part of interviews, overtly mention them as benefits drawn from their integrated structure.

We heard about various strategies to promote integration between youth justice and Children’s Social Care services with a strong focus on oversight and auditing. Some services have implemented shared quality assurance policies and moderation panels comprising senior managers from both services, ensuring regular casework reviews. Others have placed the YJS manager in direct oversight of cases involving Looked After Children. Additionally, we heard examples of services using joint audits with criteria that encompass both youth justice and Children’s Social Care standards.

“[Youth justice service] has a combined quality assurance and staff oversight policy. Each month, 20% of the caseload is quality assured, with the findings subject to a moderation panel made up of senior managers from [Youth justice service] and children’s social care. These procedures ensure that casework is routinely monitored. In addition, they have identified concerns both in relation to behaviour at specific schools and child exploitation, and ensured these concerns are addressed.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated at portfolio level | Unitary authority

Referrals

Participants discussed the referral processes between YJSs and Children’s Social Care. The standard protocol for referrals into Children’s Social Care discussed by participants was through the Front Door. In some cases, this was also referred to as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team.

“The Integrated Front Door is the term used to cover the services that work across [youth justice region] to manage the referrals received in respect of children and young people. It includes the MASH, the Emergency Duty Teams (Adults and Children) and the Missing Exploited and Trafficked Hub and the Early Help Hub.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated in an umbrella service | Non-metropolitan county

This process was suggested to be more beneficial than previous written referral routes that were considered rigid and could be interpreted differently dependent on who reviewed the referral. Although labelled as a formal mechanism for referrals, communication with the front door tended to be somewhat informal in nature, with email and telephone being the most common means of communication. This conversational-based approach was considered to facilitate effective discussions around referrals into Children’s Social Care.

I'd say our relationship with MASH so that is our front door service, because everyone calls it different things, don't they? But our MASH, our relationship with our MASH, I would say is very good and actually if we put through a referral through or they want to talk it through, we've got that relationship that we can have those discussions with them.

Case Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Knowledge and operation of protocols

There were common references to joint working protocols between both services which outlined the specific roles and responsibilities for both youth justice and Children’s Social Care case workers at different stages of either the youth justice or child protection process.

“The [local authority] social care working protocol outlines expectations of the YJS and Children’s Social Care (CSC), including when a child is remanded to local authority care or youth detention. This protocol details the roles of services, joint working responsibilities and procedures required to manage safety and risks when a child is remanded or receives a custodial sentence. In addition, it clearly states that resettlement activity needs to start promptly and that there will be separate resettlement meetings with appropriate professionals in attendance, where a personalised plan will be developed that takes into consideration the child’s diversity needs.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at directorate level | Metropolitan borough council

Across our interviews with both service managers and case managers there was a good understanding of joint working protocols with Children's Social Care and a strong understanding of roles, this was consistent across all services (both more closely integrated and those which remained structurally separate). This contrasts with the work of Hopkins et al (2010) who found that most practitioners were not aware of or had not been sufficiently trained on the use of joint working protocols. Formal structures and written protocols aside, the day-to-day practice of youth justice workers suggested that there are close working arrangements with Children's Social Care and reports of good practice.

Rationale for integrating with Children's Social Care

Make up of caseload

When discussing the motivation for structurally integrating with Children's Social Care teams, services often referred to the high proportion of children on their caseload also being supported by Children's Social Care teams – not just those in care but also those Children in Need and on Child Protection Plans.

“With around a third of the children on statutory disposals open to Children's Social Care either on a Child in Need, Child Protection Plan or In Care, we are aware of the importance of close partnership working between the youth justice service and Children's Social Care teams. Being in the same department supports collaboration and mutual learning. Several youth justice service staff are part of champion networks within the wider department and through this, contribute to the development of practice within the wider system.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated at directorate level | Metropolitan borough council

The makeup of the integrated umbrella service or service portfolio was often driven by local context. And by 'local context' practitioners emphasised this referred to the specific socio-economic and emerging issues that were present in their area. For example, one service manager highlighted the importance of being in the same portfolio as a specific adolescent service which focussed on transitional safeguarding and transitions post-18 as they were seeing a growth in exploitation-related cases in their area.

“I do think this kind of alignment along the exploitation aspect is working really well. I know there's other models out there, you know where youth justice services might be linked with education or early help services, but I just think in terms of our cohort and the offending that is being that you know drugs, crime, weapons, crime, that kind of stuff. That link with the exploitation services and that extra and transitional safeguarding has been really helpful and will be really important.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Joint planning across agencies

Practitioners emphasised the importance of having an integrated adolescent social care team to ensure the YJS could focus on their primary function of managing statutory youth justice interventions, safe in the knowledge their adolescent social care team would be on hand to support with the more intensive safeguarding work.

“The foundation for youth justice services, as set out in the Crime and Disorder Act, means we are, in a way, a prosecution service first and foremost. We are a service that manages orders. While we all wear that ‘safeguarding cap’ in our work, our vulnerable adolescents team leads on those safeguarding and welfare elements.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

One service manager – operating in a service which was integrated Early Help at delivery level and with Children’s Social Care in the same strategic division – told us that this integrated structure was particularly valuable for situations where there was shared responsibility between youth justice and Children’s Social Care, such as managing changes in placements and housing circumstances following a youth justice intervention or court order.

“So, say we have a young person who has been ordered to wear an electronically monitored tag, you need to make sure that the placement knows about it. There might be other bits like the curfew hour. So, it can become a bit confusing and contested, because you have the remand requirements of the youth justice intervention and they [Children’s Social Care] have to communicate and implement the curfew. That’s where it’s important not to be working in these siloes and working in a more integrated way.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Whole family engagement

Several services had recently restructured, and renamed, their wider umbrella service to focus on the family, often bringing in distinct family support and engagement services to work alongside the YJS in an integrated model. Accessing these interventions allowed practitioners to work with the whole family and directly work on family interventions such as Functional Family Therapy and Family Group Conferencing.

“The co-location of [youth justice service] has provided us with the opportunity to have a multi-agency, multi-response to not only those families whose children are at risk of or involved in crime and anti-social behaviour but to those challenging families where the adult’s behaviour is affecting the community in which they live and the children to whom they are meant to be positive role models. The partnership recognise that a whole family approach is more likely to secure positive outcomes and a reduction in re-offending than working with adults, children, and families in isolation. As YJS orders are time limited ongoing work can be offered by a specialist family support team.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at portfolio level | Unitary authority

Challenges in integration with Children’s Social Care

Thresholds

Case managers across nearly all the case study sites raised concerns about high thresholds for intervention and case closure by colleagues within Children’s Social Care. This echoes previous research by Hopkins et al (2010) and recent HM Inspectorate of Probation annual reports (2023). In some cases, case managers reported delays or inaction could have serious implications for case escalation, potentially leaving vulnerable children in unsafe situations.

“It could be really difficult to kind of track down and follow up with professionals and children’s social care. Again, I can completely understand they’ve got their own pressures and busy days, but recently we had a child in custody, and I didn’t hear from social care for four hours, and he was ready to be released and nowhere to go. So, if that is really frustrating when you’re trying to get things sorted and you can’t get through to anyone, I think that can be a real big challenge. “

Case Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

However, we also heard from several case managers who had noted improvements in recent years which they attributed to the actions of individual social workers.

“But there are great social workers who are incredible at holding professional meetings where we can all share our concerns. So, I’m seeing kind of a vast improvement in like how frequent they are, how kind of encompassing they are as well that they do take the time to try and get everyone’s opinion.”

Case Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

Organisational structures also played a role. One service manager – integrated with Early Help at delivery level but in the same portfolio as Children’s Social Care – explained how

their structure empowered them to address differing professional opinions, demonstrating the benefits of clear escalation paths and a focus on collaborative problem-solving.

“I can escalate that and have a conversation to really bottom out where they might be a particular difference of professional opinion and what we always try and facilitate is some discussions between managers.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

Another service manager, overseeing a service integrated at delivery level, highlighted the ease of expediting referrals and encouraging inter-agency collaboration within their own service remit.

“Let's be honest, it's easier to put a service in that's within your own gifts into something rather than wait for a referral from somewhere else. You can say, well, we can help them.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

Early Help

Just over a third of YJSs in both England (38%) and Wales (34%) were in the same division or strategic area as the Early Help service in their local authority. While the definition of Early Help differs between local area, this section refers to early prevention services, described as support for all children (with no linked offence) to address unmet needs and/or welfare concerns. This may include support for substance use, employment, and/or education needs.

Operational and strategic integration with Early Help

We also found several examples of service integration with Early Help at delivery level, in other words youth justice casework being delivered by a distinct and often targeted Early Help service within the local authority. In most cases this took the form of out-of-court disposals, other diversion and targeted prevention activity being delivered by Early Help workers.

“Alongside the broad range of early help interventions available, Early Help practitioners deliver Group Work, Youth Work/Positive Activities, undertake Return Home Interviews for children who have been missing from home and lead on out-of-court disposals.

Out-of-court disposals) are delivered by [local authority] Child & Family Early Help Services, they are an effective prevention and diversion mechanism. The Child & Family Early Help Service and Youth Justice Service will offer targeted support to all children meeting the Turnaround eligibility criteria.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at delivery level | Metropolitan borough council

In other cases, the Early Help service within the local authority had embedded workers within the YJS managing and delivering early and targeted prevention activity. A common feature across all the services interviewed was the significance of the YJSs preventative strategy as a key point of alignment with Early Help. Several services specifically mentioned Turnaround and Turnaround funding as integral in allowing them to provide a joined up, integrated early prevention offer.

“[Area] YJS has highly successful prevention and diversion model that has been a key tool in ensuring low 1st time entrants. By using Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Turnaround monies, the service has been able to evolve our delivery model to widen the remit of our prevention and diversion ‘offer.’ This model places youth justice and early help practitioners together in a team working using evidence-based approaches that engage the whole family, so children do not enter the criminal justice system.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at delivery level | Metropolitan borough council

Rationale for integration with Early Help

Diverting from stigma

Practitioners who were operating in an integrated delivery model with Early Help (or equivalent) highlighted that this structure allowed the service to divert children more adequately from stigma and forming a criminal identity, ensuring a large proportion of their prevention and diversion work minimised the criminogenic contact with the system. One service manager specifically noted their service was designed so that children and families who accessed out-of-court disposal provision would not be linked to the youth justice system or associated with the YJS itself.

“After the 0 to 19 commissioning review, a decision was taken to move the out-of-court disposal team to the prevention and early help part of the council. The main aim is that children and families who access out-of-court disposal provision will not be linked to youth justice, associated with the YOS, or perceived as having a criminal identity.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at delivery level | Unitary authority

Longer-term interventions and exit planning

Practitioners also highlighted the value of a wider range of interventions which could be provided by the Early Help service, often for a longer duration than could be guaranteed as part of any diversion or prevention activity.

“Our Early Help offer is really important for this. When a young person finishes that targeted, preventative or diversion intervention from Early Help, the integrated set up means that it’s not the end of our involvement with them. We don’t want to leave them just because their prevention or diversion work ends. We know many young people who work with us have some needs that are not necessarily child protection needs or statutory social work appropriate.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Other services mentioned that being integrated with Early Help improved their exit planning offer for children being supported by the YJS. This prevented a drop off in service provision for children who reach the end of their youth justice intervention and do not reach the threshold for child protection or statutory social work support.

“Early Help has developed a step-down protocol for children within the Youth Justice Service to support exit plans from the service for children and their families with ongoing needs.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at delivery level | Metropolitan borough council

Challenges in integration with Early Help

Lack of specialist skills

Other service managers who had not adopted a similar integrated model were cautious about integrating with Early Help at a delivery level for targeted prevention activities, especially without sufficient training and resourcing.

“I’d be worried about putting offending into Early Help itself, I think you need to have staff know about offending and the behaviours and the triggers.”

Service Manager, Service B | Integrated at directorate level

One service manager told us that while Early Help is often seen as a broad preventative approach, it should be viewed as primarily a children’s social care function aimed at preventing children from entering formal care systems. They believed that preventing youth offending requires specialised skills that traditional Early Help staff may not possess. Maintaining a clear separation between these concepts was seen as crucial to avoid

confusion and ensure staff have the appropriate training to best support children in their respective areas of need.

“Often people talk about prevention and diversion, and they frame it as Early help. But to me, Early Help as I see it is not prevention and diversion. I see Early Help as part of Children’s Social Care and stopping children coming into care. You know that really sort of more of the social care side of Early Help. I think sometimes keeping them separate is what’s required. I think I think the Early Help staff do not always feel that they have the right skills to work with children who are with their services for their offending behaviour.”

Service Manager, Service B | Integrated at directorate level

Capacity

Several participants raised concerns about the increased waiting times in Early Help, which impacted on their desire and ability to incorporate Early Help within their integrated service structure. One service manager highlighted a contrast between the swift response within their own service (usually within one or two weeks) and longer waits associated with Early Help services. This difference was attributed to Early Help’s high demand, leading to delays that could frustrate those seeking timely support.

I think usually for Early Help the real challenge is waiting times because they’re usually heavily oversubscribed. You know they’ve got a lot of people that need their services. And I think the challenge for us is just about the waiting times sometimes for our children. So, if they come to us, they usually get a very, very quick response, maybe within a week to two weeks. If you go to, if you seek help from early help services, usually there’s a bit of a waiting time and that can cause delays and people don’t always feel that they get the service at the time that they need it.

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

Thresholds and handovers

Thresholds, specifically understanding where Early Help’s universal early intervention work ended and where the YJS early preventative work began, was raised as an issue in a number of the practitioner interviews. Across the services we engaged with there were fewer references to joint working protocols with Early Help, than with Children’s Social Care. Several practitioners mentioned it would be a “good idea” to codify roles and responsibilities between the YJS and Early Help, but it had not been done as of yet.

Integration with other agencies or services

Universal youth service

Several areas had incorporated universal youth services within their wider umbrella service or youth justice service (YJS) portfolio. These services offered broad early interventions which focussed on encouraging positive activities such as sports or music, as well as promoting education and training. Many areas included universal youth services as part of a "graduated response" to low-level issues, often addressing concerns such as anti-social behaviour. Universal youth services such as detached youth work and outreach efforts formed the initial point of contact, providing subsequent pathways to more targeted interventions if needed. Other areas overtly mentioned the value of incorporating detached community-based youth work within their service, as it allowed them to respond to the "contextual safeguarding needs" of the children in their area.

"The vision was to create a single identity for the Youth Offending Service, Targeted Youth Service (TYS) and Edge of Care which had almost been seen as 'parts of a whole' but also to have a structure to adapt to the fast-changing contextual safeguarding needs of our children in our communities. The TYS is made up of youth workers who carry out detached youth work as well as delivering workshops in schools."

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at portfolio level | Unitary authority

Services frequently used universal youth service spaces as a setting for practitioners to engage with children and their families. This shared physical space was perceived to foster collaboration and created a welcoming, non-stigmatising environment for children.

"[Location] enables the service to provide a non-stigmatising offer to children being supported. [Location] provides a range of facilities that support children and allows them the space to socialise, learn, participate in activities, and develop their personal skills. This includes co-located services provided by the voluntary sector."

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated in an umbrella service | Metropolitan Borough Council

Universal services were seen to play a crucial role in exit planning for children exiting more targeted prevention or diversion activities. One case manager spoke about the value in maintaining positive youth involvement within universal youth hubs, promoting engagement in constructive activities after the completion of targeted intervention.

“So, we are actually based with the local youth hub. So, our building has both the Youth Justice Service and the Youth club in the same building which I think can be really useful, especially when we're looking at when we're coming to the end of our intervention work and building that relationship with young people. So, we can like kind of use that as part of our exit plan.”

Case Manager, Service C | Integrated at portfolio level

Other areas noted that the universal youth work part of their umbrella service allowed them to support a wider age range of children, often extending beyond the statutory age of responsibility of the YJS.

“Early Intervention and Prevention services are delivered through three Youth Hubs where partners work together to provide universal and targeted support to children and young people 11 to 25. Youth Hubs have a specific focus on increasing participation in employment and education, improving health and wellbeing, reducing youth-led crime and anti-social behaviour, and delivering more universal open access provision across the six cluster areas of the district.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 | Integrated at portfolio level | Metropolitan borough council

Schools' teams

Analysis of the interviews with YJS managers and case managers uncovered the ways that Schools' teams worked alongside YJSs in integrated structures. For one YJS in particular, a Schools' team was integrated as part of their umbrella service. Seconded and fixed-term Early Help workers made up this team, with their responsibilities including managing a caseload in a secondary school in the region and delivering valuable workshops around issues such as anti-social behaviour or online safety. The integration of the Schools' team in this service meant that this could be considered as an alternative option where appropriate, as opposed to a more generic Early Help worker. However, given the fixed-term nature of this integration, concerns were raised around permanency and the wider impact this can have for children.

“It’s [integration with schools’ team] only a fixed term project, so I guess it will be piloted to kind of all look at its success... So again, it’s not something that is a permanent fixture so that would be a challenge, I guess building those relationships and kind of formulating it in an integration as a part of a wider service, but then to be withdrawn later down the line as a possibility... I guess the worry is what happens with anything is if you lose a service, you lose that expertise, you lose those relationships, you lose that knowledge of the wider impact so ultimately with those services, it’s our young people that are going to miss out.”

Case Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

Findings: Benefits of integrated structures

Responsiveness and efficiency

Timeliness of provision

Streamlined communication routes were highlighted consistently as a key benefit of service integration. Integrated structures – especially when wider teams were within the same umbrella service or portfolio – were perceived to enable immediate, informal communication between staff in different services, accelerating processes such as escalating placement notifications.

“I think we're quite a fluid and quite an integrated service as a whole that we can quite easily access information, so if we're looking for social workers would go to duty social workers. Often, we know who line managers are, so we can send them an e-mail, or we use Google so we can drop them like a little hangout and actually they're quite responsive.”

Case Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

This integration often fostered a system where potential issues were proactively identified early through open communication and a single management structure. One service manager emphasised that success stems from the integrated structure itself, rather than relying solely on personal relationships.

“The team manager for the ‘Vulnerable Adolescents’ is part of my service. So, one of the benefits is I can just talk to them and say “Look, we need to escalate the placement notification so that the placement team can outsource the placement straight away. The young person is due to be sentenced in the next few weeks.”

I think that's the success in terms of our resettlement programme here, because issues are flagged at the earliest opportunity, not because I've got an informal contact with that person, but because we are part of the same service.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Sharing resources

We also heard a consistent message from both service and case managers about the value of service integration in providing flexible resource allocation and collaboration across different teams. In most cases, the integrated model allowed for responsive shifting of personnel to address fluctuating workloads or the need for specialised expertise.

“But think about this. Our set up means that if we’re stretched in one month or we need a specialist, we can ask a detached worker or another worker from Early Help. Because we are one service under [service manager], I can easily say, look, this child has an out-of-court disposal and I need some clinical practitioner support. Then in the future, if they don’t have a clinical practitioner, they can use the clinical practitioner in my team.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Structural integration was often perceived as presenting an opportunity to pursue funding sources creatively and across service boundaries. One service manager noted that by pooling resources and considering diverse funding streams tailored to specific needs, services can maximise funding potential.

“I think there’s an opportunity to increase funding opportunities. So, some areas are eligible for particular types of funding. So, there’s an opportunity to think more creatively about that pooling resources. I think particularly in the tight times that we’re faced with, it’s a really, really important opportunity to look at how we can maximise funding as best as possible.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

One service manager noted that managing multiple teams within an integrated service structure led them to scrutinise the frequency and potential redundancy of meetings. In this context, integration offered a chance to challenge established practices and reduce burdens on individual practitioners.

“What [managing other services] does give you is another different perspective; it makes you think ‘why have we got these many meetings? That’s where you start to look at all the time when you when you’ve got these sorts of services about well, how can I join that together? Would that work? Could those things come together? So, we don’t have to have those meetings and that meeting. So, you try and reduce. So that’s what you’re trying to because we all have limited resources.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

Reducing duplication

When asking practitioners about the benefits of challenges of integrated structures, there was much less focus in our discussions on the different roles played by Children's Social Care (and to an extent Early Help) with their welfare functions and the YJS with its justice function. This contrasts with previous work on service integration carried out by Hopkins et al. (2010) and Fielder et al (2008). While all areas involved in this study, and particularly those who had not integrated at umbrella or portfolio level, noted the importance of the youth justice team maintaining its specialism (see p33), there was an overwhelming emphasis on reducing duplication of efforts.

"So, you're going to have to merge somewhat. You're going to have to think about what's best for that child. And I think to have these separate teams who only do certain things is really dangerous for children and families. You end up at loads of referral points and families just, you know, disengaging with professionals completely."

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Child-centred youth justice

Trusted relationships

Integration can also help services put children's needs first by focusing on relationships they already trust. As one service manager told us, an integrated model allowed workers in their service to team up flexibly, making sure the child always feels comfortable and supported, even when things change. For example, if a new worker needs to get involved, they can visit the child together with someone the child already knows.

"The structure allows us to lead with the person who has the trusted relationship [with the child]. If my adolescent social worker has got trusted relationship with young person, the case manager would do a joint visit with them. This helps to bridge some of that distrust."

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Community links

Both service and case managers across different areas specifically mentioned the value of bringing services into the wider umbrella because of their existing and deep community links. These community links could be drawn upon to help support children and address the wider context a child is living their life within. Within a contextual safeguarding approach, interventions are most effective when they address not just the individual but

the broader environmental factors contributing to their circumstances (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2023).

“What we will take advantage of [in our structure] is those very good community links from those services. So, when we want to try and create something or an intervention plan for that young person, there's sometimes better people within that wider context of that service that have already built loads of community links. So, if you're thinking of doing that contextual safeguarding piece they've already put a lot of that in place, there's a lot of community based work being done that we can draw on.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

Service development

Training

Joint working models surrounding training were discussed during the interviews, in particular the ways that training could be delivered between integrated services. Training opportunities were multi-directional, with youth justice practitioners sharing knowledge with social workers, and other specialist teams (such as substance misuse teams) sharing knowledge with youth justice practitioners to broaden their knowledge and awareness. This integrated approach to training was considered by practitioners to be beneficial.

“We're also kind of learning from them as well, which I think is really lovely because it's all an area, you know, that we don't really have much kind of knowledge or understanding with, but most of our children are, you know, have some form of substance misuse concerns. So having that training from another professional around what we can kind of improve ourselves is really a great benefit to have.”

Case Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

One service manager in particular highlighted a bespoke piece of training developed by their service which is now being used as a model of practice across frontline workers. It was suggested that without integration, the delivery, dissemination, and impact of this training would not have been possible.

Interagency partnership working

Practitioners were keen to highlight the value of their integrated service structure in encouraging collaboration and partnership working between organisations and professionals outside of the YJS. The process of moving towards an integrated structure

was seen to encourage service managers and individual case managers to understand and articulate their own organisational identity and clarify their own purpose. This not only empowered youth justice practitioners, but also fostered understanding of the specialism and unique value of other services within the integrated structure.

“This goes back to understanding each other's roles and having respect for those roles and respects for each other's specialism and skill. Ensuring there's a high challenge and high support culture across the service.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

This process of integrating also meant that wider services in the local authority gained a greater understanding the partners roles and responsibilities which helps to build a coherent approach. As one service manager highlighted, the process of clarifying roles during integration helped their family support workers and social workers have a more detailed understanding of what police partners could and could not do in certain situations.

“A lot of the benefit is about understanding each other's roles, and this is important across everything we do. I want our police partners to know what the social workers and the family support workers do in our exploitation team. I want our missing [from education] team to understand what the police do, when can they disrupt and when they can pursue one of the most difficult one. What you want is your people that you work with and everybody else to understand why you can't do that.”

Service Manager, Service F | Integrated at delivery level

Cultural change

Labels and language

Alongside these practical benefits, service managers noted a change in the wider local authority 'culture,' with a greater emphasis on children which was often reflected in both language and approach. Several practitioners emphasised the structure of their service allowed them to educate others in the umbrella service and allowed them to address cultural and philosophical differences. There was a movement away from potentially stigmatising labels from other agencies and a stronger focus on recognising children as individuals with unique needs and strengths.

“So, I think what we've noticed as a team, one of the major benefits I think of having a head of services specifically for adolescents and young adults has been like a real shift in culture and language. You know that Child First philosophy is really being brought to the fore so that the adolescents who may have otherwise previously been described as being children, who put themselves at risk or make difficult decisions to unwise choices, actually should. That culture has shifted.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Focusing on strengths

Service and case managers operating in structurally integrated models highlighted the value of their structure in encouraging a longer-term, strengths-based approach to delivering interventions. One service manager highlighted the value of involving wider agencies in planning stages. This approach was seen as important in determining the right approach for building on a child's strengths holistically.

“It [service structure] also just provides different perspectives. Sometimes if there's a problem or a challenge. Actually, having that broader holistic perspective can be really helpful to try and plan for the future for that child or work out what needs to be done next. And actually, just showing that thinking process with other partners is really helpful.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

Taking this one stage further, another service manager actively advocated for a specialist adolescent service that brings together all services supporting children into one integrated service managing and delivering interventions at a delivery level. This would encourage those across the local authority to move past defining children by their offending behaviour.

“You know, kids shouldn't be defined just by an offence. Unfortunately, that's what it says to a child when you've got, the youth justice team, the edge of care team, the schools' team all separate. We have to mould into what you know I would see as a specialist adolescents type of service.”

Service Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

Managing risk of harm and keeping children safe

The dominant discourse in youth justice policy and practice for the last two decades has been one of risk management underpinned by the risk factor prevention paradigm (Case & Haines, 2019; Byrne & Brooks 2015). While research suggests children are more likely to engage when positive wording is used (Case, Lorenzo-Dus & Morton 2020) – for example ensuring safety and wellbeing – addressing risk of harm by children to themselves, other

victims, and communities is a necessary element of all youth justice work. Several practitioners highlighted that integrated models helped to streamline referrals and inter-agency collaboration in managing risk of harm and keeping children safe, while clear escalation protocols empowered managers to address differing professional opinions.

“I think you're managing risk much better if you are working in a really integrated way. Although we're our own service, we do sit really closely with all the other services. The umbrella we're under includes Edge of Care, which is the kind of intensive team and that's that fits well because they work a lot with young people who have got concerns around offending or exploitation.”

Case Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Findings: Challenges when integrating

Practice issues

Maintaining specialism

Not all youth justice services (YJSs) were seeking to integrate further with other services in the local authority. A small number of services noted in their youth justice plans that they had made a conscious decision to ensure the remit of YJS manager did not become too diluted by structurally integrating with other agencies. While the reasons for this were often locally specific, in many cases this was to allow the service (and service manager) to remain solely focussed on “youth justice work,” often referring to desistance, community safety and public protection responsibilities.

“Since January 2021, the Youth Justice Service has been its own service overseen by Senior Manager reporting directly to the Chief Officer for the Education and Youth Portfolio within [local authority]. The decision for Youth Justice to sit as a distinct service was to give greater emphasis to the work of Youth Justice and increased presence within the Senior Management Team within the Education and Youth Portfolio.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated at portfolio level | Unitary authority

Throughout the interviews, service managers voiced concerns regarding the integration of YJSs and maintaining adequate specialism. A prevailing concern was that merging the two could dilute the focus on the specific risks and needs of children involved in offending behaviour. This concern arises from the perception that the broader preventative goals within other services, such as Early Help, may clash with the specialised assessments and interventions required to support children who have offended. As noted by Case & Haines (2019), as long as youth crime is defined and proscribed in law, and as long as some kind of youth justice system exists, there will be the need for specialist practitioners who understand how this system operates and who can contribute their specialist knowledge.

One service manager, who was operating as part of an integrated umbrella service, highlighted they had attempted to create whole integrated service meetings in an effort to move towards full integration, but these became so broad and generic they lost all purpose.

“I do think that [dilution] is a problem. When we first merged with Early Help, we tried to do these whole joint practice meetings with both teams. But actually, a lot of the content didn’t apply to other teams – you know my adolescent team won’t want to talk about victims and Section 10s and the Code of Conduct in youth court. Their work doesn’t go into that. I think the problem is we diluted it so much that it became generic.

There are specific traits in a YOS which you have, you have to talk about mitigation of risk, you have to talk about safety and wellbeing, and you have to talk about risk levels and how you assess them. You know, there's stuff that is really specialised.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Another service mentioned this challenge explicitly in their youth justice plan, noting HM Inspectorate of Probation inspectors had raised concerns that their model of integrating at a delivery level had led to a loss of focus on the specialised work required in a YJS. However, the service acknowledged this risk and made positive steps to address it. Subsequent inspections noted improved outcomes following the implementation of targeted training and development initiatives, specifically focused on risk assessment and “responses to criminal behaviours.”

“Staff may therefore work with children who are not on the YOS caseload as well as those who are. In our previous inspection we found that this had led to a loss of focus on potential risks of harm and offending behaviours of the children on the YOS caseload – where we found their work to be inadequate. Since then, the YOS has reviewed training and development needs to address this and we found the work undertaken by the board and the management team had significantly improved assessment of and planning for risk and responses to criminal behaviours.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated at delivery level | Non-metropolitan county council

Workforce development

Any changes to the structure of a YJS often brings particular workforce and service development challenges (Byrne & Brooks 2015). We heard from service managers who had moved towards a more integrated delivery model where the expectations on individual practitioners had shifted. They noted that there were occasionally issues with more experienced staff members who had become accustomed to a particular way of working, which revolved around delivering prescribed resolutions rather than needs-led approaches. Meanwhile there is a challenge to develop the skills of those from a non-youth justice background and ensure the right balance between the “de-mystification of youth justice practice and ensuring sufficient attention to regulatory requirements” (Byrne

& Brooks 2015; 14). Managing this shift requires robust support systems with bespoke training and mentoring to improve confidence during those transitional periods.

“There’s sometimes a bit of an issue with some of your old school YOT staff. There’s a bit of preciousness around like ‘I only do this, and I don’t do that.’ So, the family work skills for example, I’ve had to really try and push some of my staff. I get it that they’re not there for that home visit, but you can spend half hour with mum and talk to her about what’s going on for her”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated in an umbrella service

Limiting remit

When discussing the challenges of integration, we heard about the inherent tension faced when defining a clear remit during the integration of services. One service manager, for example, acknowledged that focusing solely on the most serious end of offending (in this case, habitual knife carriers) neglects the importance of prevention. However, they also expressed that expanding the scope to include earlier intervention opens a "Pandora's box" of potential issues. Practitioners regularly told us about their concerns about finding the right balance between a targeted approach and addressing the wider range of needs that could contribute to offending. Despite the complexity, there appeared to be a shared understanding among service managers that proactively identifying and addressing these broader needs is preferable to remaining unaware of potential risks.

“When I think about conversations I’ve had with other heads of service and we turn around think, “where do you stop?.” We’ve started off looking at knife crime, so we started off looking at the habitual knife carrier list. But then you don’t want to just focus on that end, you want to focus at the preventative end and start working kids before they’ve been convicted. So, you know, so the more we look the more we find. It’s like a Pandora’s box kind of thing. But then we’re all in agreement that we’d rather be looking and trying to find a way of working with that than not knowing.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

In other cases, internal reviews or HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections had highlighted that the operational responsibility of the service manager was too large. One service manager noted that HM Inspectorate of Probation inspectors felt their integrated remit was too wide, and the size of their operational portfolio was limited as a result.

“I’m currently a service manager for the youth justice team, the adolescent service and the schools’ team, and I was overseeing Early Help as well. However, we had an inspection and I think the inspectors commented the brief was quite wide, quite big for a single service manager. So, I don’t oversee Early Help anymore, but we’re still co-located with them.”

Service Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

Referral pathways

Some practitioners identified issues with referral pathways and how these contribute to children falling through the gap. These issues were suggested to be both as a result of external partners not making referrals into services and internal partners attempting to manage concerns within their own teams and ultimately not making appropriate use of referrals. The importance of communication concerning referral pathways was therefore emphasised, as inefficiencies in communication were perceived to increase the chance of children being overlooked.

“Obviously, post-court is more straightforward, but out of court is you have to have that kind of police report or police Merlin. That’s our starting point. I guess for those where it doesn’t generate that and we see sometimes young people that are open to say social care or whoever and they’re often, they could’ve been stopped and searched quite a few times or engaged in kind of low level ASB, but there’s no kind of real police reports attached to that... So those [children] have got kind of those low-level concerns that haven’t yet had any police involvement and because there’s no police involvement then we almost don’t address it or don’t pick it up or even don’t consider it until we have that, Merlin.”

Case Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

Local contextual issues

Geography

We heard that the size of a local authority can impact integration efforts. For YJSs operating across county-wide local authorities, the number of different local partners involved at both county and district level could feel overwhelming and prove a hindrance to developing integrated working across the authority. Our analysis of youth justice plans suggest integrated delivery is predominantly happening in YJSs operating in smaller geographical areas, with 61% of services integrated at delivery level operating in metropolitan borough councils.

Practitioners highlighted that smaller authorities may find it easier to integrate services, potentially due to closer links between social care workers and youth justice specialists. This implies that larger authorities might face a challenge in establishing clear communication channels and navigating more complex organisational structures, potentially hindering collaboration between services.

“I've always been very conscious as a service lead in a youth justice service that's in a unitary authority that I am the only 'me' in this area. It's not a broad geography and it's actually really self-contained. It's not an easy job, and it has different challenges, but I think that that interconnectedness and that integration is supported the geography and the scope of the area.”

Service Manager, Service G | Integrated in an umbrella service

Funding

We heard concerns about the impact of financial pressures on local authorities and their ability to support integrated services. One service manager highlighted that budget cuts and short-term funding cycles posed the risk of creating uncertainty, making it challenging to commission services or implement long-term plans, potentially hindering integrated initiatives that require sustained investment and collaboration between agencies. Case managers also raised concerns about building integrated referral pathways for wider agencies, such as specialist schools' teams, only for that service then to be withdrawn later down the line as funding was removed or reduced. This may cause further challenges when Turnaround funding ends on the 24 May 2024.

“There's a lot of local authorities that are in real dire straits with their funding. So, a lot of councils are in trouble out there with the finances and that then makes it difficult to commission pieces. So, part of our funding is for the 'Effective practise grant' which is absolutely great. However, it's short term funded. You never know when you're going to get the funding. You get told six months down the line, 'you've got this pot of money'”.

Service Manager, Service B | Integrated at directorate level

Staff turnover and service performance

The operational structure of some services was directly related to the performance of other agencies in the local authority. One case manager highlighted that their joint working with Children's Social Care, for example, had been limited by high staff turnover, increased numbers of agency workers and changed senior management. This high turnover severed existing working relationships.

If I'm honest and I don't think this is just unique to us, I think there's a lot of areas where youth justice services are pretty stable. But within children's services because of things going on around the agency workers and stuff, there's been a decrease in permanent staffing and an increase in agency [workers]. I don't think that helps integration because you build a relationship and then somebody goes.

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Local authority structures

Two services also mentioned the complexities arising from locally specific council structures. We heard an example of situations where certain linked agencies, like education, remained within a separate siloes or structure within the wider local authority. This in turn created a "strange dynamic" where communication and collaboration involve an additional layer, potentially hindering efficient service delivery, highlighting the challenges of integrating services when some aspects fall under different governance structures.

Findings: Facilitators and best practice

Operational best practice

Co-location

Practitioners regularly highlighted the importance of physical proximity between different services as a key foundation for integration and integrated delivery. Being co-located in the same building or on the same office floor allowed immediate, informal communication which in turn helped to build collaboration between agencies and significantly reduce delays when urgent needs arose. As one service manager explained, it allowed them to go directly to the relevant person for critical needs like placement escalations.

“So, say I need placement for a child, I do not need to go to another building, and I don't need to email the head of service for children's social care and wait for a response. These people are not only in the family directorate, they're in my building, and I can tell them that this child is at risk of remand, can you escalate placement outsourcings now.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Shared access to IT systems

Access to social care systems streamlined service delivery and removed barriers. Teams readily shared information on child protection plans, placement needs, and other crucial details, ensuring that intervention plans were cohesive and aligned. This collaborative approach minimised duplication of efforts and allowed services to focus on providing the most effective support for children.

We have access to the social care system, so we have access to the information around their current plans like child protection plans, child need plans, placement plans, all that kind of stuff, so that our intervention plan can incorporate and work alongside that so that we're not duplicating roles, we're not duplicating work, but equally we're supporting that young person with what they need.

Case Manager, Service E | Integrated in an umbrella service

HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection reports also regularly mentioned the value of shared access to IT systems, including but not limited to the Children's Social Care

platform 'Mosaic.' This access allowed practitioners to check past and present social care contact and provided a solid platform for joint working. In services where this access was not provided, this hindered information sharing and delayed interventions.

“Although current arrangements allow the YOS to complete detailed checks with other services, including education and children’s social care (CSC), practitioners do not have direct access to CSC systems. In our case inspection, we found examples where this had hindered effective information sharing.”

HM Inspectorate of Probation Inspection Report - 2023

This is in contrast to earlier investigations into integrated working. For example, Hopkins et al (2010) highlighted that the mechanisms for accessing information varied across the youth justice areas they investigated, and some respondents suggested it could be difficult to access information on key individuals from the other agency. Information sharing and shared access to IT systems appears to have vastly improved since that study, with no participants across any of the areas raising it as a day-to-day issue and instead highlighting its usefulness in achieving frictionless joint working across different services within the local authority.

Leadership and oversight

Children’s Social Care experience

We heard that prior experience in Children's Social Care played a crucial role in successful integration. Service managers with a deep understanding of both the youth justice system and broader social care processes were suggested to be better equipped to bridge communication gaps and foster collaboration. Their expertise in navigating the complexities of both sectors reduced potential misunderstandings and streamlined processes.

“I'm an experienced operational manager in youth justice, but at the same time I'm a qualified social worker with many years of experience in different children's safeguarding teams[.]. I know the processes so no one can lecture me about section 47, for example. I've done that in my in my practice for many years.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Modelling behaviours

Practitioners consistently stressed that a commitment to integrated working must start at the leadership level. When leaders demonstrated open communication, trust, and collaboration with other services, staff were more likely to adopt a similar approach and

break down silos. This top-down modelling of positive behaviours was seen as essential for fostering a culture where integrated services were the norm.

“It has to start from the leaders. Because if you do not show and model good practice as a leader. And by that, I mean you have regular communication with other heads of service and you trust their professional opinion, that then mirrors to your staffing team.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Managing structural change

Maintaining the unique identity of a youth justice service

Services which had moved towards a more integrated model, be that integrated delivery or being part of an umbrella service or portfolio, were keen to emphasise that their service retained its unique identity and specialism.

“Although this is to fully integrate approaches to adolescent safeguarding and contextual risk, the Youth Justice Service will still maintain its identity within the wider arrangements, so that the sharpness of the strategic partnership and operational interventions focused on desistance and public protection is not diluted.”

Youth Justice Plan 2023-24 | Integrated in an umbrella service | Metropolitan borough council

Both service and case managers across all areas recognised the importance of maintaining specialist knowledge and skills within their teams, particularly around youth justice. Ensuring staff with in-depth knowledge of the youth justice system remained part of the integrated team was seen as essential for effective interventions and upholding legal safeguards for children.

“I do think in any model you have to have your specialisms. I think you have to have people who know their job. So, for example, having someone managed so the Youth Justice Service for me. You know, I've got lots of experience in youth justice now. I think it works better if you've got somebody who's managing the service, who has got experience. I think it's having the right level of experience at the right levels.”

Service Manager, Service H | Integrated at delivery level

Staff buy-in

We heard that involving staff throughout the integration process was essential. Consultation, clear communication, and efforts to help staff understand the larger vision fostered a sense of ownership and engagement and significantly improved the chances of the structural model being embedded.

“I think it's about making sure everybody has a clear bigger picture, understands where we're all moving. But I think I think there's always a genuine will and a desire for everybody to work more closely together.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

Listening to children

Children's feedback was consistently emphasised as a crucial metric for evaluating the success of integrated service approaches. By collaborating with children, encouraging their participation, and actively seeking to understand their journey, services can gain invaluable insights into how well their new structures and processes are meeting children's needs. Respecting children's knowledge of their own experiences and recognising their unique perspectives is essential in building Child First YJSs (Case et al. 2023).

“I think it's also about hearing children and young people's experiences when we're looking at stuff, hearing what works best for them. Usually, they'll be able to give you a clear indication that actually integrated working is usually the most effective process for them because for me that's where the evidence is very, very clear that if we are working more effectively together than it does improve outcomes for children, young people.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

Building the evidence base

Practitioners highlighted the importance of building the evidence base as a way of not only convincing both senior and operational staff of the benefits of moving towards a particular model, but also highlighting best practice. As one service manager explained, case studies have the potential to provide tangible evidence of the benefits and challenges associated with integration, offering insights into the successful implementation of a particular structure and the challenges encountered along the way. Integrated approaches often faced scepticism or resistance due to concerns about feasibility, effectiveness, or potential drawbacks.

“I guess it's about building the case, isn't it? So, it's about giving examples or sharing case studies where there's been good practise of integrated working where you can share the benefits, sometimes talk about the challenges. Maybe then services can reach out or talk to other areas where they've had that success and why that's worked really well for them and to be able to share examples of good practice. I think that's probably key.”

Service Manager, Service D | Integrated at portfolio level

Conclusions

This research has attempted to provide an overview of the diverse approaches to structural integration being implemented across youth justice services (YJSs) in England and Wales. It highlights the increasing trend towards structural integration, with services becoming more closely aligned with wider services for children within their local authorities. The driving forces behind this integration appear to be multi-faceted - from national policy directives emphasising joined-up working, advances in Child First practice, to local priorities around contextual safeguarding and child exploitation. Financial pressures and an overall reduction in funding may also be prompting leaders to re-evaluate traditional service boundaries.

Through analysis of youth justice plans and practitioner interviews, we observed four key models of structural integration:

1. **Integrated at directorate level** – 29% of services.
2. **Integrated at portfolio level** – 26% of services.
3. **Integrated in an umbrella service** – 19% of services.
4. **Integrated at delivery level** – 17% of services.

While each model has its own unique local nuances, some common benefits of integration emerge across typologies. Streamlined communication routes and physical co-location foster responsiveness and timely intervention. Resources can be pooled flexibly, allowing specialised skillsets to be deployed where needed. Moreover, integration often aids a more Child First approach - reducing duplication, building on existing trusted relationships, and providing cohesive support plans oriented around the child's strengths.

However, the challenges of integration must be carefully navigated. Services highlighted the importance of maintaining their specialist youth justice identity, ethos, and statutory responsibilities. There were concerns that full convergence with other services could dilute this expertise. Contextual factors like geographical boundaries, funding constraints and high staff turnover in partner agencies also hampered joined-up working in some areas.

This research set out to describe and analyse different structural models, but it did not attempt to make any value judgements about what has 'worked.' Ultimately, YJSs must thoughtfully assess the complex web of local circumstances, service needs and resources to determine their ideal structural model. Integration is not an end in itself, but a means of delivering comprehensive, efficient and Child First support. This research highlights that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, the insights gathered may help to guide strategic decision-making as the youth justice landscape continues evolving through further integration, policy developments and new practice innovations.

Youth justice services looking to structurally integrate with other services locally may wish to:

- Maintain the specialist youth justice identity and training for staff within integrated structures to ensure the unique needs and strengths of children are supported through specialised assessment and interventions.
- Establish clear protocols, including clear outlining of roles and responsibilities, joint auditing processes to enhance case management, delegated responsibilities, and handover between YJSs and other agencies.
- Involve staff throughout the integration process through consultation and clear communication to improve buy in and successful implementation
- Actively seek feedback from children, respecting their knowledge to assess the effectiveness of integrated approaches to ensure that services are meeting their needs and promoting their strengths in a responsive and Child First way.
- Prioritise co-location and ensure shared access to IT systems.
- Document and share successful case studies and best practice of integrated working.

Future analysis and research

- Future research may usefully analyse of the effectiveness of services, using the updated youth justice key performance indicator (KPI) measures¹⁴ and/or HM Inspectorate of Probation ratings, comparing services within each of the different integrated typologies to support service improvement.

¹⁴ [Key performance indicators for youth justice services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-performance-indicators-for-youth-justice-services)

References

- Byrne, B., & Brooks, K. (2015). *Post-YOT Youth Justice*. London: The Howard League. Available from: https://howardleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/HLWP_19_2015.pdf
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Deloitte. (2015). *Youth Offending Team Stocktake*. London: Deloitte. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a758ac9ed915d6faf2b3cc7/yot-stocktake-report.pdf>
- Fielder, C., Hart, D., & Shaw, C. (2008). The Developing Relationship between Youth Offending Teams and Children's Trusts. National Children's Trust: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/7998/1/Developing_relationship_between_YOTs_and_Childrens_Trusts.pdf
- Case, S., & Haines, K. (2019). The future of youth justice. *Youth justice*, 18(2), 131-148. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1473225418791416>
- Case, S., & Browning, A. (2021). *Child first justice: the research evidence-base*. Loughborough University. Available from: https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/report/Child_First_Justice_the_research_evidence-base_Full_report_/14152040/1
- Case, S., & Hazel, N. (Eds.). (2023). *Child First: Developing a New Youth Justice System*. Springer Nature. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-19272-2>
- HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2021). *Multi-agency work in youth offending services*. HM Inspectorate of Probation: Research & Analysis Bulletin 2021/04. Available from: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/07/Youth-multi-agency-work-RAB-v1.0-1-1.pdf>
- HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2023a). *Exploring Contextual Safeguarding in youth justice services*. HM Inspectorate of Probation Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/02. Available from: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/06/Exploring-Contextual-Safeguarding-in-youth-justice-services-1.pdf>
- HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2023b). *Annual report: inspection of youth offending services (2022)*. HM Inspectorate of Probation Research. Available from: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/inspections/year-2022/>
- Hopkins, M., Webb, S., & Mackie, A. (2010). *A review of YOTs and children's services' interaction with young offenders and young people at risk of offending*. London: YJB.

Available from:

<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/1322/1/Review%20of%20YOTs%20and%20Childrens%20Services.pdf>

Smith, R., & Gray, P. (2019). The changing shape of youth justice: Models of practice. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 19(5), 554-571. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1748895818781199>

Stapley, E., O’Keeffe, S., & Midgley, N. (2022). Developing typologies in qualitative research: The use of ideal-type analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 16094069221100633. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/16094069221100633>

Youth Justice Board (YJB). (2015). *Youth offending teams: making the difference for children and young people, victims and communities*. London: YJB. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f8dcbed915d74e33f725e/Board_Visits_Final_Report.pdf

Youth Justice Board (YJB). (2024). *Youth justice statistics*. London: YJB.