

<i>To:</i>	Derek Higton, Chair of Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Service Management Board
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<i>From:</i>	Helen Mercer, Assistant Chief Inspector (Youth Justice)
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## Report of Short Quality Screening (SQS) of youth offending work in Nottinghamshire

The inspection was conducted from 11-13 May 2015 as part of our programme of inspection of youth offending work. This report is published on the HMI Probation website. A copy will be provided to partner inspectorates to inform their inspections, and to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

### Context

The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people. Good quality assessment and planning at the start of a sentence is critical to increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. We examined 34 cases of children and young people who had recently offended and were supervised by Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Service. Wherever possible, this was undertaken in conjunction with the allocated case manager, thereby offering a learning opportunity for staff.

### Summary

The published reoffending rate<sup>1</sup> for Nottinghamshire was 25.4%. This was better than the previous year (28%) and significantly better than the England and Wales average of 36.1%.

Overall, we found that work to reduce reoffending, to protect the public, children and young people, and to ensure sentences are served was of good quality. It is clear that Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) have continued to work hard and successfully in their work with children and young people since our last inspection in 2012. We found the performance of the YJS to be very creditable.

### Commentary on the inspection in Nottinghamshire: Reducing reoffending

- 1.1. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) and panel reports are the principal means by which the sentencing courts and panels, that oversee referral orders, are advised about the causes of offending and the work required to address it. All of the PSRs in the sample were of a good quality, and the child or young person and their parents/carers were engaged in the development of all PSRs. All panel reports were also of a good quality. Local management arrangements were effective in ensuring the quality of reports. An inspector noted: *"The pre-sentence report had an excellent assessment of risk of harm and vulnerability, with all*

<sup>1</sup> Published January 2015 based on binary reoffending rates after 12 months for the April 2012 – March 2013 cohort. Source: Ministry of Justice

*factors explained, and a logical conclusion as to how and why the levels were assessed as they were."*

- 1.2. The initial assessment of the child or young person's likelihood of reoffending was done well in the great majority of the cases in the sample. Most were thorough and provided a full picture of the child or young person's circumstances, such as how living arrangements, family and personal circumstances, and emotional or mental health might impact on reoffending.
- 1.3. Children and young people's lives can change very quickly and, as a result, assessments need to be reviewed. We found that assessments had been reviewed well in most cases. Of the three cases which were not reviewed sufficiently well, this was because the assessment was not reviewed post-sentence, or following a significant change.
- 1.4. Planning to reduce reoffending was done well in almost all cases, both in custody and in the community. The YJS has adopted the integrated plan (I-Plan) approach, which incorporates sentence plans, and risk and vulnerability management plans. We found that objectives were clear, most plans paid attention to barriers to engagement, and in almost all cases, children and young people and their parents/carers were sufficiently involved in the planning.
- 1.5. Initial plans had been reviewed sufficiently well in all but one case in the sample.

## **2. Protecting the public**

- 2.1. We expect to see a thorough assessment of the risk of harm a child or young person poses to others. This should cover all relevant information, including past offending behaviour, and impact on victims. We found risk of harm assessments to be of good quality overall. They had been done well in all but one case, where in this instance we felt the risk of harm classification was too high. All PSRs contained a clear, thorough and sufficient explanation of the risk of harm to others.
- 2.2. Having assessed the risks, appropriate plans should be put in place to manage them. Nottinghamshire YJS incorporates the risk management plans into the I-Plan. We found that planning to manage the risk of harm to others in the community had been done well in almost all cases, and, during the custodial period of a sentence, in all cases. An inspector commented: *"Cases assessed as high or very high risk are co-worked to assist in the complexities that arise."*
- 2.3. The assessment of risk of harm to others had been reviewed well in all of the cases in the sample, and reviews of plans to manage risk of harm in all but one case.
- 2.4. The risk of harm to known and potential victims was well managed in the great majority of cases. Where it was not, this was mostly because plans did not incorporate victim work sufficiently well. We did, however, see good evidence of contact with victims. Management oversight in ensuring the quality of risk of harm work was effective in most cases.

## **3. Protecting the child or young person**

- 3.1. Children and young people can be at risk of being harmed by others, or at risk as a result of their own behaviour, by placing themselves in dangerous or potentially harmful situations. It is the YJS's role to work with others to help protect them. Initial assessment of safeguarding and vulnerability had been done well enough in almost all cases in the sample. All PSRs contained a clear and thorough explanation of safeguarding and vulnerability needs that applied in each case.

- 3.2. The safeguarding needs of children and young people change over time and need to be kept under review. Reviews of safeguarding and vulnerability assessments had been undertaken as required in all but two relevant cases.
- 3.3. Nottinghamshire YJS incorporates the vulnerability management plan into the I-Plan. We found that suitable plans were put in place at the start of the sentence for work to address safeguarding and vulnerability in almost all relevant cases. Where there were gaps, it was mostly because contingency plans were lacking, or because there was insufficient planning for the emotional or mental health needs of children and young people. In all of the nine custodial cases in the sample, there was good planning in place throughout the custodial period for work to address safeguarding and vulnerability. Reviews of plans had been undertaken well enough in most cases.
- 3.4. Management oversight in ensuring the quality of work to address safeguarding and vulnerability was effective in almost three-quarters of relevant cases, and was therefore somewhat less effective than for risk of harm work. This was mostly because deficiencies in planning for safeguarding and vulnerability work had not been addressed.

#### **4. Ensuring that the sentence is served**

- 4.1. We expect to see that the YJS is doing what it can to help children and young people to complete their sentences successfully. This includes engaging them and their parents/carers in the assessment and planning processes, identifying and addressing barriers to engagement, and putting measures in place to ensure that they comply with the requirements of their sentence.
- 4.2. There was good engagement in almost all cases in the sample, between case managers, children and young people and their parents/carers in carrying out the initial assessment, in the planning processes, and in all PSRs. An inspector noted: *"A well managed case, good evidence of contact with the young person and his family pre-sentence for the preparation of the ASSET and PSR. Parents have been kept in the loop every step of the way, for example, at planning and review stages."*
- 4.3. In almost all cases, good attention had been paid to addressing the child or young person's diverse needs and any barriers to engagement in the initial assessment, and in most plans. Where there were gaps, this was mostly because the specific needs of girls were not reflected well enough. All PSRs took appropriate account of barriers to engagement and diversity factors. Consideration had been given in almost all cases to the health and well-being of the child or young person, and how this may affect their ability to complete their sentence.
- 4.4. The YJS had a clear and well-balanced approach to ensuring children and young people complied with the requirements of their sentence, giving clear boundaries and fair warnings as appropriate. We saw good evidence of the use of compliance panels, and, where necessary, a robust approach to returning children and young people to court. The YJS response to children and young people who did not fully comply was sufficient in all cases.

#### **Operational management**

We found that staff in the YJS were committed and knowledgeable in their work with children and young people, and we saw some very good examples of case management. Almost all staff felt that they were provided with effective and appropriate supervision, and that management oversight of risk of harm and safeguarding work was an effective process. An inspector commented: *"At all stages of this case there was evidence of effective management oversight, PSR, ROSH, I-Plan and so on - where actions were recorded by the manager, and we found*

*evidence of the actions being completed*". Case managers said their training and skills development needs were met for their current role. However, a gap identified was training in recognising and responding to speech, language and communication needs. There were some robust quality assurance processes in place, for example, in ensuring the quality of PSRs and risk of harm work. We saw some effective examples of peer quality assurance processes.

### **Key strengths**

- Good quality pre-sentence reports to inform sentencing, and initial assessments of children and young people provided a firm foundation for work to reduce future offending.
- Risk of harm and vulnerability assessments were of good quality, informing the work that needs to be undertaken to protect the public and children and young people.
- Planning to reduce the risk of reoffending, protect the public and children and young people was very good, and was incorporated within an integrated plan (I-Plan).
- Staff worked well with children and young people to ensure their compliance with the requirements of their sentence.

### **Areas requiring improvement**

- There should be more focus on the specific needs of girls in initial assessments and planning processes.

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

If you have any further questions about the inspection please contact the lead inspector, who was Sue McGrath. She can be contacted at [susan.mcgrath@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:susan.mcgrath@hmiprobation.gsi.gov.uk) or on 07557 848458.

Copy to:

YJS Manager/Head of Service	<i>Samantha Morris</i>
Local Authority Chief Executive	<i>Anthony May</i>
Acting Corporate Director of Children's Services	<i>Derek Higton</i>
Lead Elected Member for Children's Services	<i>John Peck</i>
Police and Crime Commissioner for Nottinghamshire	<i>Paddy Tipping</i>
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Ofsted – Further Education and Learning	<i>Sheila Willis</i>
Ofsted – Social Care	<i>Simon Rushall, Carolyn Adcock</i>
Care Quality Commission	<i>Fergus Currie</i>
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary	<i>Paul Eveleigh</i>

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

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

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