

DEVON YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE - PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORT

The latest report on the second phase of inspections of Youth Offending Teams (YOT) in England and Wales was published today. A multi-agency inspection team between February and March 2005 carried out the Devon Youth Offending Service (YOS) inspection.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

"The inspection of the Devon Youth Offending Service showed a service that was functioning well and, although some of the partnership arrangements required further attention, we were generally impressed by the strategic leadership of the Chief Officer Group and the commitment of the YOS Manager and his staff.

The preventative agenda was developing across the service and some good work was seen, across all orders, with children and young people who had offended. Interventions were often undertaken within an impressive framework of restorative justice and safeguards issues given a high priority.

We also found areas for improvement. Work on assessing and managing risk of harm needed to be improved and greater consistency applied to enforcement. Clearer emphasis on, and better opportunities for the sharing of information and skills were required.

The overall assessment of the Devon Youth Offending Service was that it had a good basis for development. This report contains a number of recommendations that we believe will assist the service to move forward. We are confident that it will make progress in addressing them."

The report's main findings are:

Management and partnership arrangements

- The Chief Officer Group was made up of appropriate representatives who attended and participated actively in meetings.
- The Chief Officer Group had a strong focus on the Youth Justice Board indicators and held the YOS to account over performance.

- There was a lack of clarity amongst members of the Commissioning Group regarding its role and function in relation to the Chief Officer Group.
- Staffing levels were close to full complement.
- Whilst recognising that the geographical spread of Devon and the requirement to reflect local needs had resulted in different practices across the three teams, we felt that the degree of variation between the teams impeded joint working and the development of a corporate identity.
- Staff were eager to enhance their skills in working with diversity and required formalised training to develop a shared understanding and common approach across the YOS.

Work with children and young people and their parents/carers

- Risk management systems in general and management oversight of cases in particular needed to be clearer and more robust, with special attention given to recording.
- Devon and Cornwall Constabulary needed to revise its final warning process to come in-line with Home Office/YJB Guidance 2002.
- Enforcement of orders was not consistent either within or across teams.
- From the file read, over two-thirds of children and young people had not reoffended during the course of their order. However, the Youth Justice Plan Update for 2004/2005 indicated that the overall recidivism picture was 'mixed'.
- Safeguards issues had been addressed in a high proportion of cases.
- There were too many children and young people post-16 who were not in education, training or employment, although the strategic response via the recent LSC funding bid was a positive move.

Victims and restorative justice

- In some cases the police did not pass victim details to the YOS within 24 hours of charge or final warning, preventing staff from obtaining victim details through their access to the police computer.
- The frequency of victim contact and the quality of victim recording required greater consistency across the YOS.
- Some excellent examples of restorative justice work were seen and such techniques were used across orders.

- Victim engagement information needed greater clarity through better recording.
- All victims consulted by the inspection team found the YOS staff to be supportive and encouraging, although some of the YOS's own processes for eliciting feedback from victims lacked rigour.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The inspection of Devon Youth Offending Service took place during between February and March 2005.

2. Devon had a total population of 704,493, measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 20.4% were aged 0-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was lower than the average for England and Wales of 22.7%

3. Nine Inspectorates conduct the Youth Offending Team Inspections. They are Commission for Social Care Inspection, Estyn (HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales), Healthcare Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales .

4. The YOT inspection programme started in June 2003. All 155 YOTs within England and Wales are being inspected over a five to six year cycle.

5. The inspection will be carried out in line with the Government's commitment to proportionate and coordinated inspection in local government, informed by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment results and the Wales Programme for Improvement. A programme has therefore been developed that:

- is proportionate to risk and only inspects those areas of work where a team is performing well in order to disseminate good practice
- complements, and is coordinated with, other inspection programmes, including those currently being developed following the publication of the Green Paper, *Every Child Matters* (2003)
- takes account of YOTs' recent development as organisations.

6. Comprehensive standards and criteria have been developed to cover the first phase of the inspection, focusing on:

- management and partnership arrangements
- children and young people considered at risk of offending
- children and young people who offend
- parents/carers of children and young people who are at risk of offending or who offend