



**YOUTH
OFFENDING
TEAM**
Inspection

Press Notice

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Independent inspection of probation and youth offending work

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 07/01/09 PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORT Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service

The latest report from the fourth phase of inspections of Youth Offending Teams (YOT) in England and Wales was published today. A multi-agency inspection team carried out Blackburn with Darwen Youth Justice Service (YJS) inspection.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

The YJS was closely linked to the Local Strategic Partnership Board and to both the Children and Young People's Trust and the Community Safety Partnership. The Board's YJS improvement plan had recently been agreed and actions had recognised many of the issues contained in our inspection findings.

We found a motivated and well-supported staff group willing to positively engage with the challenges presented by their work with children and young people. However, Risk of Harm management work could be strengthened further with more effective structural links to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

The report's main findings are:

Work in the courts

- There was an experienced, well-prepared court team with good communication between the YJS and the court. The YJS was recognised as delivering a quality service that had the confidence of sentencers. There were a number of examples of child-friendly approaches to court reports to help younger children and young people with disabilities to contribute to, and understand what was being said about them in the report.

Work with children and young people in the community

- The initial Asset assessments for children and young people who had offended were not of sufficient quality in more than half of the cases. Few Risk of Serious Harm assessments had been completed and improvements were needed in case reviews and planning. Interventions were only likely to address Risk of Harm in half of the cases.
- In most safeguarding cases the YJS worker had made a referral to children's social care services where this was necessary. Improvements were required in the delivery of services to address health needs.

Work with children and young people subject to custodial sentences

- Assets were completed and sent to the secure establishment in good time. However, they were not considered to be of sufficient quality in most cases. There was evidence that this had been

recognised by managers and steps taken to improve these. Improvements were needed in the screening of the Risk of Harm and in the completion of the Risk of Serious Harm assessment.

- Most children and young people had complied with the requirements of their order and attention had been given by the YJS to community reintegration. However, there were some poor outcomes and few benefits to the community were identified, with more than half convicted of another offence during the community stage of the order.

Victims and restorative justice

- Victim feedback was generally quite positive and victim safety had been given appropriate priority in the majority of cases. In many cases victims had been invited to engage in restorative processes but there were very few examples where this had happened.

Management and leadership

- The YJS Board had a good range of representation from across the local authority and its partners at a senior level. The membership included key strategic representatives as well as operational specialists and core funding bodies.
- The Board had established an improvement plan for the YJS in July 2008. There was a commitment to establish a three year plan building on the one year plan and the findings from this inspection.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The inspection of Blackburn with Darwen YJS took place in July 2008
2. Blackburn with Darwen had a total population of 137,470 measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 12.6% were aged 10-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was higher than the average for England, which was 10.4%.
3. Nine Inspectorates conduct the Youth Offending Team/Services Inspections. They are Commission for Social Care Inspection, Estyn (HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales), Healthcare Inspectorate 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 157 YOTs within England and Wales are being inspected over a five 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, principally the Joint Area Reviews of children's services (led by Ofsted) and the Corporate Assessment (led by the Audit Commission)
 - takes account of YOTs' recent development as organisations.
6. Comprehensive standards and criteria have been developed to cover the fourth phase of the inspection, focusing on:
 - Work in the courts
 - children and young people in the community (both those at risk of offending and those who have offended)
 - children and young people subject to custodial sentences
 - victims and restorative justice
 - management of the YOT and partnership arrangements.