



**YOUTH
OFFENDING
TEAM**
Inspection

Press Notice

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Independent inspection of probation and youth offending work

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 11/03/09 PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORT CARMARTHENSHIRE YOUTH OFFENDING PREVENTION SERVICE

The latest report from the fourth phase of inspections of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in England and Wales was published today. A multi-agency inspection team carried out the Carmarthenshire Youth Offending Prevention Service (YOPS) inspection.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

“The inspection of Carmarthenshire YOPS took place in October 2008 as part of the fourth phase of our YOT inspection programme. We found a YOPS that is providing a high quality service, with a committed staff team. The Management Board gives clear leadership and direction. Our overall assessment of the Carmarthenshire YOPS is that it is achieving high standards in most areas and there are many good examples of innovative and constructive work. There is a thorough understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and it has good prospects for future development.”

The report's main findings are:

Work in the courts

Youth court magistrates, Crown Prosecution Service personnel and court officials had confidence in the support and supervision services offered by the YOPS. Formal written feedback from the Llanelli Youth Court was being analysed and, if successful, would be extended to the other two youth courts in the area. Pre-sentence and specific-sentence reports were of a good quality and used the approved format, but copies were provided for the child or young person and for parents/carers in only a small proportion of cases.

Work with children and young people in the community

The YOPS had a Carmarthenshire Child Inclusion and Support Panel in place to prevent offending and antisocial behaviour by high-risk children and young people from eight to 13 years of age. There was a range of interesting and challenging activities in place to divert children and young people from antisocial behaviour and offending.

We found some excellent work with parents/carers. Parents/carers were assessed for suitability and a range of programmes and resources utilised to meet the assessed parenting needs. The YOPS had developed a successful parent mentoring scheme, which trained and encouraged parents/carers who had benefited from parenting interventions to become volunteer mentors.

Assessments drew on a range of sources and an internal YOPS risk panel had been successfully introduced in October 2007 to consider cases considered to be a Risk of Harm to others, or a children and young people were considered to be vulnerable. There were weaknesses in the areas covered by this panel, but they were being addressed. We obtained evidence to suggest that the child or young person had been at

risk to themselves and at risk from others in a high proportion of the case sample, but a vulnerability management plan had not been produced to meet the identified need in the majority of the relevant cases inspected.

We found a lack of consistency in meeting the requirements of the initial intervention plan. Whilst plans were completed in a high proportion of the case sample, they had not been informed by contact with children's services; did not meet timescales; did not specify clearly who would deliver the interventions; and the child or young person and the parent/carer had not signed the plan in a high proportion of the cases inspected.

A number of posts within the prevention and early intervention team were dependent on short-term funding creating some uncertainty and impacting on forward planning and staff morale. Some services were available through the medium of Welsh, but were constrained by the number of qualified staff and volunteers available.

Work with children and young people subject to custodial sentences

Where children and young people were remanded or sentenced to a secure establishment, key information was sent immediately. Both assessment of children and young people subject to custodial sentences and communication with institutions was generally good, and the YOPS helped facilitate visits by parents/carers and the delivery of the training plan together with preparation for release.

There had been demonstrable benefits to the community by a reduction in the seriousness of offending, frequency of offending and threat to victims and potential victims. Consultation with children and young people and parents/carers indicated that things had improved because of their contact with the YOPS.

We found weaknesses with regard to the assessment of the Risk of Serious Harm to others. Assessments and the risk management plan had not met the required standard. Furthermore, we saw evidence that children or young people who had been at risk to themselves or from others and had not had a vulnerability action plan prepared to reduce the identified risks.

However, during the inspection we did not find evidence that there had been benefits to the community through reparation in any of the case sample and the child or young person's individual learning plan had not continued following release in a high proportion of the cases inspected.

Victims and restorative justice

Victims who were interviewed and/or completed questionnaires for the inspection were mainly positive about the work of the YOPS. All victims were invited to provide feedback and received forms for this purpose. This feedback was discussed as a standing item on the weekly allocation and review meetings agenda and used to improve services.

The YOPS had a range of restorative justice interventions available and these included letters of apology, face-to face meetings and various community reparation activities. Victims were also able to participate in youth offender panels but rarely attended.

Management and leadership

The Management Board was chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive of Carmarthenshire County Council. It was properly constituted and had provided effective leadership and direction. The Youth Justice Plan 2007/2008 had continued to develop the progress made in previous years, and there was good evidence of integration with the Community Safety Partnership, Children and Young People's Partnership and other plans and strategies.

Staff morale was high and positive with regard to management, practice and future direction.

Diversity issues and requirements of the Welsh Language Act (1993) for a Welsh Language Scheme were being met, but the specific language and cultural requirements of parents/carers and children and young people in receipt of YOPS services had not been fully addressed.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The inspection of Carmarthenshire YOPS took place in October 2008. Carmarthenshire had a total population of 172,842, measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 10.4% were aged 0-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was the same as the average for England/Wales. With 64% of the population possessing Welsh language skills, it was ranked as the third highest frequency local authority in Wales. 71.7% of children and young people aged between five and 15 years old were able to speak Welsh.
2. Nine Inspectorates conduct the YOT inspections. They are: the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Estyn (HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales), the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, the Healthcare Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Prisons, HM Inspectorate of Probation, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales.
3. The YOT inspection programme started in June 2003. All 157 YOTs within England and Wales are being inspected over a five year cycle.
4. 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.
5. 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.