



**YOUTH
OFFENDING
TEAM**
Inspection

Press Notice

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Independent inspection of probation and youth offending work

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 17/12/08 PUBLICATION OF INSPECTION REPORT ESSEX YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

The latest report from the fourth phase of inspections of Youth Offending Teams/Services (YOT/S) in England and Wales was published today. A multi-agency inspection team carried out Essex Youth Offending Service inspection.

Andrew Bridges, HM Chief Inspector of Probation, said:

“The governance and leadership arrangements for the YOS were provided through a two-tier approach consisting of an Executive Group (operational) and Management Board (strategic). The YOS had an enthusiastic staff group, all of whom were committed to working together to deliver effective interventions to children and young people, parents/carers and victims. The YOS performed particularly well with regard to the work in the courts, prevention strategy and substance misuse service provision. However, the YOS now needs to focus on work with children and young people who have offended, in particular the assessment and management of Risk of Harm to others, safeguarding needs and the service it offers to victims through its communication and engagement strategies.”

Overall, we judged that Essex Youth Offending Service was well placed to address the issues raised by this inspection. This report contains a number of recommendations that we believe will assist the team in its further development.”

The report's main findings are:

Management

Essex YOS sat within the Vulnerable Children and Young People division of the Schools, Children and Families Directorate. The YOS Management Board was chaired by the Chief Executive of the authority and, whilst it had appropriate representation from statutory partners, there was little involvement or engagement from the voluntary sector. The YOS was finding it a challenge to deliver a sustainable service with the current levels of funding and resourcing made available to it. The Management Board and Executive Group scrutinised performance information, progress reports and practice developments from within the YOS. However, gaps in performance were identified during the inspection, e.g. the CAMHS provision available to the YOS was inconsistent and not fully effective, with the resulting impact that not all children and young people who required this service actually received the specialist health intervention. Quality assurance processes within the YOS needed to be more robust, and an increased focus on the assessment and management of Risk of Harm and safeguarding procedures required adopting.

Work in the courts

Essex youth courts were satisfied with the service provided by the YOS. We found evidence of bail support packages and supervision services being offered to the court as an alternative to the likelihood of secure or custodial remand. However, data available at the time of the inspection showed that the proportion of remand episodes for children and young people remained high at 16.4% against the revised YJB target of 9%.

Work with children and young people in the community

The early intervention programme took a holistic approach to preventative work and engaged partners to assist in service delivery. The Onset assessment was used to assess the needs of the child or young person and to assist in determining the type of intervention required in most cases. However, the intervention plans did not routinely contain outcome-oriented objectives or appropriate sequencing of each requirement. For those children and young people who had offended, the Risk of Harm to others and safeguarding issues were not effectively assessed or managed, and there was a lack of understanding amongst staff as to the rationale to managing risk. The YOS accurately assessed and identified the health needs and education, training and employment needs of children and young people. However, not all necessary referrals to specialist services had been undertaken.

Work with children and young people subject to detention and training orders

In almost all cases the relevant information and documentation was sent to the secure establishment within the national standards time frames. The YOS worker ensured that the child or young person's accommodation needs were assessed and monitored, actively working with others to secure appropriate provision. The quality of communication between YOS staff, secure establishments and others to facilitate delivery of the intervention plan and prepare the child or young person for release was judged sufficient. However, individual learning plans had not been continued following release, and literacy and numeracy skills had not been routinely reassessed. From the period April 2007 to March 2008 Essex YOS achieved a figure of 6% towards the YJB 'use of custody' target of less than 5%.

Victims and restorative justice

All victims' details were held separately and securely in both manual and electronic forms. The victim care worker having assessed the circumstances of the case would decide if it would be appropriate to contact the victim. However, we found no clear audit for this decision. During the inspection there were very few examples of good victim awareness work being undertaken with children and young people, and only a few cases revealed that the victims' needs had been consistently met in a timely manner. Of the 50 appropriate cases we found no evidence in 40 of those cases that the YOS had invited the victim to participate in a restorative justice process related to the offence committed against them. Only a quarter of children and young people had undertaken any community reparation work. However, of those that had, all work had commenced within the first three months of the order.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The inspection of Essex YOS took place in July 2008 and September 2008.
2. Essex had a total population of 1,310,835 measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 10.2% were aged 10-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was slightly lower than the average for England, which was 10.4%.
3. Nine Inspectorates conduct the Youth Offending Team/Services 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 (Ofsted) and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales.
4. The YOT/S inspection programme started in June 2003. All 157 YOT/Ss within England and Wales are being inspected over a five to six year cycle.
5. Comprehensive inspection criteria have been developed to cover the third phase of the inspection programme, focusing on:
 - management
 - work in the courts
 - work with children and young people in the community
 - work with children and young people subject to detention and training orders
 - victims and restorative justice.