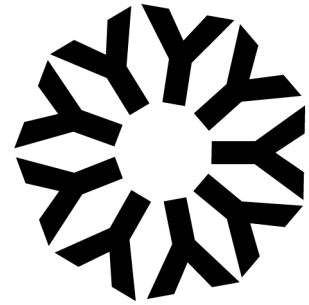


*Audit Commission
Commission for Social Care Inspection
Estyn
Healthcare Commission
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HM Inspectorate of Probation
Office for Standards in Education
Social Services Inspectorate for Wales*



Joint Inspection of Youth Offending Teams of England and Wales

Report on:
Sandwell
Youth Offending Team

2005

Foreword

The Sandwell Youth Offending Team had gone through a particularly turbulent period of transition. Although the recently formed Management Board had taken some positive steps to deliver a strategic lead to the team as a result of an earlier review by PA Consultants, we were disappointed to see that a full-time manager had not been appointed, despite a long-standing vacancy. Unfortunately, the same progress had not been made with the team development and training.

During the inspection, we observed examples of good and effective work with children and young people, despite the organisational difficulties, and saw this as a testament to the dedication of a workforce committed to serving the needs of children and young people in Sandwell. There is an urgent need to ensure that standard training is delivered to all staff so that the good work can be developed into standard procedures across the YOT.

Our overall assessment of the Sandwell Youth Offending Team was that it was requiring significant improvement. We are confident, however, in its ability to make progress. The management team are aware of the shortfalls and have already taken steps to start to build on the issues identified during the inspection, but the benefits of these changes have yet to materialise. We therefore plan to return to Sandwell later in 2006 to inspect the progress made and are confident that we will find improvements. This report contains a number of recommendations which, together with the actions they are already implementing, we believe will assist the Sandwell Youth Offending Team in taking its agenda forward.

Andrew Bridges
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

August 2005

Fieldwork for this inspection was undertaken in 2005.

- ◆ The file reading took place week commencing 18 April 2005.
- ◆ The second week commenced on 24 May 2005.

Glossary

Asset	Assessment tool developed by the Youth Justice Board
CAHMS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CPN	Community Psychiatric Nurse
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CSCI	Commission for Social Care Inspection
DAAT	Drugs and Alcohol Action Team
DECCA	Drugs Education, Counselling and Confidential Advice Service
DTO	Detention and Training Order
EPQA	Effective Practice Quality Assessment
Estyn	HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
ETE	Employment, Training and Education
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
HMI Prisons	HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HMI Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation
HMIC	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
ISSP	Intensive Supervision & Surveillance Programme
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LEA	Local Education Authority
LTA	Local Training Authority
National Standards	National Standards for Youth Justice Services
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruel to Children
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PA	Personal Adviser
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PI	Performance Indicator
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bounded
SSIW	Social Services Inspectorate for Wales
VLO	Victim Liaison Officer
YISP	Youth Inclusion Support Panels
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YOI	Young Offender Institution
YOIS	Youth Offending Information System
YOT	Youth Offending Team

Introduction

The joint YOT inspection programme commenced in September 2003 and is the first full inspection to examine the work of YOTs, established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The programme is being implemented in three phases, the first of which was completed in July 2004 and focused on establishing benchmarks for the later phases of the inspection.

This, the second phase of the inspection, started in September 2004 and builds on the findings from the first. Few changes have been made. Emphasis has continued to be placed on two core areas:

- ◆ the management and partnership arrangements, including the role and functioning of the local Management Board
- ◆ work with children and young people, which now encompasses prevention of offending, work with children and young people who have offended and work with their parents/carers.

The third core area to be covered by the inspection is work with victims and restorative justice. Whilst these issues are seen as no less important, it is acknowledged that YOTs may be at different stages of development in this area of work. We do, however, expect a high level of engagement with victims to be demonstrated, with appropriate arrangements for restorative justice.

Key findings

Management and partnership arrangements

- ◆ The Management Board was being developed, led by the Deputy Chief Executive with all partners taking an active role.
- ◆ Work was being undertaken to develop a performance management culture.
- ◆ The education, PCT and Connexions representatives on the Management Board were not of sufficient seniority to commit resources and make decisions on behalf of their respective agencies.
- ◆ There were few protocols and SLAs with either partners and other organisations associated with the YOT.
- ◆ The YOT funding required urgent clarification.
- ◆ The YOT had had no manager for a significant period, although one was being recruited and an acting manager was now in place.
- ◆ All partners were contributing either staff or funding equivalents, but there were a number of shortages within the YOT staffing, particularly with social workers. The staffing numbers did not allow for cover if a keyworker was not present.
- ◆ PA Consultants had been brought in to help the development of the YOT, but their Improvement Plan had not been progressed apart from in relation to the Management Board.
- ◆ The JYB Plan had not been a practicable document in the past, but the Management Board was working to develop a more realistic and practical document for the forthcoming three years.
- ◆ Supervision of staff had been sporadic, but was now improving as managers had received training. There is currently no appraisal system for non-seconded staff.
- ◆ Staff training had been variable, with core work like Asset and YOIS being learnt from other team members. An induction programme had been developed and staff were also accessing appropriate professional training.
- ◆ All staff and volunteers, except the administrative staff, had received CRB checks, but none had had a CRB renewal within the past three years.

Work with children and young people and their parents/carers

- ◆ YISP had a good assessment process involving both the child or young person and their parents/carers, with some good interventions, but these could be developed further.
- ◆ The standard of Asset completion varied considerably and required attention.

- ◆ A full risk of harm assessment was not completed in a large proportion of relevant cases.
- ◆ There was poor interaction with social services in a number of areas, from the initial contact for information through to involvement with children and young people involved in sex offences, as well as in the care of the local authority.
- ◆ There was good access to all specialist workers, but not enough workers to meet the needs of the YOT.
- ◆ Specialist workers provided good links to their organisations, but there were still problems getting children and young people into special education provision.
- ◆ Police had fully adopted the 2002 Home Office/YJB final warning guidance, and all offenders were put through a four-session intervention package as standard.
- ◆ The standard of completion of supervision plans was unsatisfactory and needed to be reviewed urgently.
- ◆ The YOT experienced difficulty in retaining sufficient volunteers for referral panel meetings which were consequently sometimes filled by staff members. Also, referral order contracts were not delivered as required in a high proportion of cases.
- ◆ DECCA needed to review its confidentiality policy around voluntary drug testing for children and young people subject to court orders.
- ◆ Just over a half of all cases were offered sufficient levels of contact.
- ◆ Breach action was taken in only a small proportion of all relevant cases.
- ◆ There was no parenting policy, although the YOT provided both voluntary and court ordered parenting programmes, as well as a large amount of undocumented parenting support.
- ◆ Sandwell had seen a decrease in youth crime over the past 12 months, and that was supported by the reoffending rates from the file read.

Victims and restorative justice

- ◆ The police passed on the victim information within 24 hours which meant victims of final warnings were contacted and consulted before the delivery of the final warning.
- ◆ The VLO contacted all victims initially by letter, followed by a phone call.
- ◆ Good use was made of restorative justice interventions.
- ◆ There was an effective reparation scheme, with practical placements and good feedback to staff.
- ◆ The YOT did not have the sufficient flexibility to cover either the VLO or reparation worker during periods of temporary absence.

Overall assessment

The inspection raised significant concerns about the overall performance and management of Sandwell YOT which was assessed as **requiring significant improvement**. We based the judgement on the lack of strategic direction to the YOT until the recent establishment of a Management Board under the Deputy Chief Executive. Many of the issues identified in the inspection had previously been raised in a report by PA Consultants and we were looking for evidence of progress. We were therefore disappointed to find that no one had been appointed to the vacant post of YOT Manager, even in an acting or temporary capacity until the first week of the inspection some four months later. As a result, the YOT had been left without leadership or guidance over a significant period.

We observed inconsistencies in the work with children and young people who offended. Work with parents/carers and victims of children and young people who had offended also required development. The inconsistent supervision process, which was only now starting to take a proper place within the YOT, compounded that, and there was no appraisal system for non-seconded staff. There was a concern about the lack of partnership/team protocols and policies and clear funding streams.

We felt throughout the inspection that the Management Board and the YOT were starting anew. The appointment of a new Head of Service should give the team the opportunity to re-brand and re-launch the YOT as a new vibrant organisation and draw a line under the past. Despite all, we were impressed with the positive attitude of the new Management Board and management team but, above all, the drive and commitment shown by the staff, and believe that the YOT has the potential to develop into an effective team in the future.

Recommendations

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that:

- ◆ an action plan is devised to address the following recommendations and forwarded to the lead inspector within three months of the publication of this report
- ◆ the recruitment of a permanent appointment to the post of YOT Manager/Head of Service is undertaken and progressed as a matter of urgency
- ◆ the funding streams, partner contributions, and the staffing requirements of the YOT are reviewed
- ◆ arrangements are made to provide an appropriate level of cover in the event of staff absence so that the work of the YOT is not impaired by their absence
- ◆ there is appropriate partner representation on the Management Board
- ◆ all protocols/policies/SLAs are updated, agreed, implemented and subject to regular review.

The YOT Manager should ensure that:

- ◆ the quality of Asset completion and supervision planning is improved in accordance with the relevant standards and guidance, with training to support a common standard across the YOT
- ◆ risk of harm assessments are completed on all relevant cases, regularly reviewed and endorsed by managers
- ◆ referral panel meetings are held in accordance with the national standard and YJB effective practice guidelines, to include appropriate numbers of panel members and in local community venues
- ◆ children and young people are offered appointments in accordance with the national standard
- ◆ orders are enforced in accordance with the relevant national standards
- ◆ a review is conducted of the YOT policy for recruiting and retaining volunteers to help improve their retention
- ◆ a parenting policy is developed so that parents/carers receive consistent help in accordance with their assessed relevant needs.

The Education Authority should ensure that:

- ◆ the educational needs of children and young people supervised by the YOT are appropriately assessed
- ◆ a strategy is introduced to monitor and address deficits in education and training opportunities for children and young people engaged with the YOT.

Social Services and the YOT Manager should ensure that:

- ◆ common thresholds for referral are agreed and communicated across all relevant agencies to improve joint working for the benefit of children and young people.

DECCA should ensure that:

- ◆ a review is undertaken of their confidentiality rules around voluntary/court ordered drug testing of children and young people so that the needs of children and young people supervised by the YOT can be effectively addressed.

Overview

- ◆ The Borough of Sandwell is situated in the West Midlands of England. It is one of the four Boroughs of the Black Country. The other three boroughs are: Wolverhampton located to the West, Dudley to the south west and Walsall to the north.
- ◆ Sandwell had a total population of 282,904, measured in the Census 2001. Of this population, 24.4% were aged 0-17 years at the time of the census. This figure was higher than the average for England and Wales of 22.7%.
- ◆ Sandwell had a predominantly white population, 79.7%, and this was much lower than the average for England of 90.9%. The percentage of Asian or Asian British residents, 14.0%, was much higher than the average for England of 4.6%. The percentage of Black or Black British residents, at 3.8%, was also higher than the English average of 2.1%.
- ◆ The level of employment in Sandwell, 55.3%, was lower than the average for England and Wales of 60.6%. The level of unemployment was 5.3%, higher than the average for England and Wales at 3.4%. 18% of those unemployed in Sandwell were aged 50 and over, 11% had never worked and 38% were long-term unemployed. There was a higher percentage of permanently sick or disabled residents in Sandwell at the time of the census, 7.7% compared to 5.5% in England and Wales. There was a lower percentage of students resident in Sandwell, both economically active and inactive, 5.8% compared to 7.3% in England and Wales.
- ◆ Sandwell Council was classified as fair in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2004.
- ◆ The YJB figures for youth offending for the period April 2003 to March 2004 show that 67.1 offences were committed per 1,000 children and young people aged 0-17 years in Sandwell.
- ◆ The YJB summary of YOT performance against the key performance indicators for 2003/2004 ranked Sandwell YOT in 145th position.

1.

MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

1.1

Leadership

Inspection criteria

The Management Board:

- ◇ *provides strategic oversight and direction and coordinates the provision of youth justice services by the YOT and partner organisations*
- ◇ *is made up of appropriate representatives who attend and participate actively in meetings*
- ◇ *ensures the provision of accurate and timely data returns, both for its own use and that of the YJB*
- ◇ *gives support and guidance to the YOT Manager, ensuring that they engage with local and national priorities*
- ◇ *ensures that the Youth Justice Plan is implemented.*

The Sandwell YOT had originally been part of the Social Inclusion Division and had had no separate Steering Group. Strategic leadership had been provided by the Crime and Disorder Group but, although the YOT was a standing item on its meeting agenda, it had generally been afforded little time for discussion. As a result of poor performance in both the KPIs and the EPQA assessments, the YJB had commissioned PA Consultants to carry out a Strategic Analysis in October 2004. Their report had included an improvement plan, recommending the appointment of a Management Board, with members supported by training. Unfortunately, at the time of the inspection, this improvement programme plan had not been fully implemented and needed to be progressed as a matter of urgency if the YOT was to become fully effective in all areas. This inspection report will concentrate on work undertaken since the development of the action plan.

As a result of the report, and discussions by the partners, a Management Board was developed to give the YOT a strong strategic leadership which had previously been missing. The Management Board was set up under the chair of the Deputy Chief Executive, with representation from the various partners. The Chair brought previous experience of a YOT Management Board, and was giving the Board positive direction, supported by other key members. All the Board members were interviewed. There was a consensus that it was still in its early days of development, but we felt that the potential was present to make the Management Board a strong body, which would give good strategic lead to the YOT in the future.

We found evidence during the inspection and in the YOT's overall results to support the Management Board's members' assertion that they were

working hard to turn the situation around. On the whole, we felt that the right partners/groups were represented on the Management Board. Most members attended all the meetings, despite their frequency, thereby demonstrating their commitment to raising the performance and effectiveness of the YOT, although action needed to be taken to ensure that all members were actively involved. We were pleased to see partners like the Court and Connexions on the Management Board.

The YOT had also moved from a social services management structure and was now located within the Community Safety Directorate. The Management Board was still considering where the YOT would ultimately be placed but, in the meantime, we were pleased to see that the Children's Trust was represented on the Management Board and was building the appropriate links.

We were concerned at the level of seniority of some of the Board members. The health representative was a public health nurse who, although aware of the health needs of vulnerable groups, did not have the authority to commit resources on behalf of the PCT. The education representative to the Board had only recently been appointed. As Exclusion Services Manager she was able to make an effective contribution to operational matters, particularly in relation to the authority's long-term absence strategy, but the role did not, however, provide her with sufficient seniority to contribute fully to the strategic oversight and direction of the YOT.

The performance management culture of the Management Board was being developed and it now received performance updates at each meeting, and was holding the YOT to account on performance effectively. The YOT was currently in the process of developing action plans for each PI, with direction from the Management Board.

During the time that the new Management Board was being set up and developed the YOT had had no manager. We were told that the post had been advertised but with no suitable candidate forthcoming, and that the position was now being upgraded. It needed to be progressed as a matter of urgency. No one had been appointed to cover the vacancy temporarily until the first week of the inspection which left a gap of several months. One of the operational managers had been asked to act up and had been given the title Senior Operations Manager. He was expected to cover the role of YOT Manager and to ensure service delivery, performance and delivery against PA Consultants action plan. We noticed a dramatic change in the YOT after the appointment of the Senior Operations Manager, who was well supported by his fellow operational managers and team. The Management Board also gave him full support, and he was able to access members for advice.

Strengths:

- ◆ A new Management Board was being developed.
- ◆ Partners were committed to the Management Board ethos.
- ◆ Work was being undertaken to develop a performance management culture.

Areas for improvement:

- ◇ PA Consultants Improvement Programme Plan had not been fully implemented.
- ◇ The education, PCT and Connexions representatives on the Management Board were not of sufficient seniority to commit resources and make decisions on behalf of their respective agencies.
- ◇ The YOT had been without a manager during a significant period of its development.

1.2 Partnership and resources

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *A range of interventions and services are provided to meet the needs of children and young people who have offended and those at risk of offending.*
- ◇ *YOTs are appropriately staffed by partners according to legislation and Home Office guidance.*
- ◇ *The Youth Justice Plan reflects partner strategies.*
- ◇ *Protocols have been agreed between the YOT, its statutory partners and other organisations, outlining the level of service, human resources issues and funding arrangements.*
- ◇ *Contracts are in place with other agencies to ensure the coordination of work and the appropriate delivery of services to meet the needs of children and young people.*

The YOT had access to a wide range of interventions both internal and through their partner agencies. YOT activities were, however, restricted by the lack of a community venue. At present all interventions were delivered in the YOT office, requiring lengthy bus trips for some children or young people. We were pleased to hear that links were being developed with the Youth and Leisure Services, to enable the YOT to move into local venues within the six towns that make up Sandwell. There was talk of also setting up outstations in some areas. We were also encouraged to hear that the Management Board was considering the feasibility of expanding the current two YISP programmes to cover the whole of Sandwell.

Partners offered the YOT access to their own intervention programmes where appropriate. The police were developing close links with the YOT as part of the Catch and Convict Strategy, and had seconded two further officers to run the Offender Management Unit which was producing positive results on persistent offenders.

Although all partners provided staff or funding equivalent, we felt that their contributions should be reviewed to ensure the correct resources were being provided to meet the needs of the YOT. Social services did not

second staff and funding for these places appeared to have been lost in the very confused contributions from the local authority. There were a number of vacancies, mainly for social workers which, we were informed, were currently being advertised. The absence of seconded staff from social services was a factor, in our view, in the generally poor relationships we found between the YOT and the social services department. It was therefore important that the funding agreements were supported by appropriate SLAs with partners.

The education service seconded a full-time EWO who acted as a link between the YOT and secondary schools to improve access to education. A Connexions PA was seconded part-time to the YOT, with a similar function for those over 16. A CPN, from health, dealt with both the mental and general health issues of the children and young people. We felt that this level of provision needed to be reviewed as she could not be expected to meet such a wide range of needs. The drug workers were employed through the local authority, from YJB and DAAT funding, but provided a service to a wider audience than just the YOT. It was apparent from the interviews with staff that better links needed to be developed with the Youth Service to allow the YOT to link into its service provision in order to offer support to the children and young people beyond the length of their orders.

The YOT had a high staff turnover and, as well as carrying several vacancies, a number of staff were or had been on long-term sickness. There appeared to be no procedures for managing sickness absence, although we witnessed a change in approach during the inspection with individuals returning to work over a phased period. Both staff and managers were still, however, unclear on the actual process which needed further monitoring with a clear policy made available to all staff.

We were informed that the YOT had reviewed its structure and was about to advertise for three 'senior practitioners', who would be located between the operational staff and managers and have responsibilities for the management and supervision of staff. We were not sure whether funds would be available to finance these positions, as well as the increase in the cost of the new Head of Service post. As far as we were aware, no agreements had been reached about how to meet these increased costs.

During the inspection we found an absence of current protocols/policies/SLAs between the YOT and its partners and other organisations. Some dated back to 1999, before the inception of the YOT, and had not been revised or reviewed. This issue needed urgent attention, particularly as it had been raised by PA Consultants and listed as a task for December 2004. We saw a couple of recent protocols, one of which, with Connexions, had been written and agreed immediately prior to the inspection. None of the protocols/SLAs seen made any reference to the finances of the YOT. Although we challenged both Board members and the Senior Operations Manager, and all agreed that the situation was confused, we were unable to identify the YOT funding streams.

Many of the services supplied were developed through good interpersonal relationships and contacts between different members of staff and management, but needed to be clarified through proper contracts/SLAs/protocols. Equally, we found a lack of understanding amongst YOT staff of partners' policies. For example, we were informed that YOT staff had difficulty in placing children and young people in alternative education. We were then assured that the LEA's policy had been adapted to allow all long-term absences to be assessed for the PRU, although YOT staff were apparently not aware of this change at the time of inspection.

All those interviewed felt that the earlier Youth Justice Plans had not represented partner agencies' different perspectives, and had been somewhat tokenistic in approach. The Management Board and the YOT were working hard to develop a Youth Justice Plan that reflected their current position and their ambitions for the next three years and had recruited a consultant to help them prepare the new plan. There were concerns from the Management Board that it might not have time to give a proper strategic steer to the report, due to the timing of its submission, but felt it better to work within the timescales set down by the YJB. The Board believed that as it and the YOT improved, they would be able to stamp their strategic direction on the 2006/2007 plan with more effect and ensure that it reflected partners' strategies. Partners, when interviewed, emphasised the importance of reducing offending as a shared priority, which crossed all strategies and needs.

Strengths:

- ◆ Work was being undertaken to review and strengthen the Youth Justice Plan.
- ◆ All partners were contributing either staff or funding equivalents.
- ◆ The police were developing close links with the YOT which were having an impact on persistent offending.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Many of the protocols/SLAs/contracts with partner organisations needed to be updated.
- ◆ There were a number of staff shortages within the YOT, particularly with social workers.
- ◆ The staffing numbers did not allow for cover if a keyworker was not present.
- ◆ The YOT funding required urgent clarification.

1.3

Staff supervision, development and training

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Staff are regularly supervised in accordance with their developmental needs and assessed level of competence.*
- ◆ *Annual appraisals contain objectives which are linked to local and national targets.*
- ◆ *All staff are provided with appropriate training opportunities to equip them to meet the requirements of the Youth Justice Plan.*
- ◆ *Staff are appropriately qualified and have had a satisfactory enhanced criminal record check within the past three years.*
- ◆ *Volunteers are appropriately trained, available for YOT activities and have had a satisfactory enhanced criminal record check within the past three years.*
- ◆ *Joint agreements are in place for the management of disciplinary, capability and grievance procedures.*
- ◆ *Complaints are properly managed.*

The supervision of staff was random and of varying quality. To their credit, the operational managers had recognised this issue as a concern. Although they had not been given, and urgently required, training to conduct meaningful supervision, they had devised a more structured supervision process, with a draft supervision document, which they were now using. They also operated an open door policy, which helped deal with urgent issues, and staff commented positively about the support that they were now receiving from the current management team.

Good news

We were impressed by the constructive attitude of the staff, who were appreciative of the work that the new management team had done to give them direction and support, although agreeing that there was still a long way to go.

There was no appraisal system in operation, although Sandwell Borough Council was developing a Professional Development Plan system. It would be essential if it was to be effective that both management and staff received training in the system that the YOT adopted. Seconded staff received appraisals from their parent organisation: in some cases these appraisals were prepared in conjunction with the YOT whilst in others there was no clear link with the YOT. Seconded staff appraisals needed to be linked in the future with the objectives of both the YOT and the parent organisation, and should be prepared by both agencies.

Staff had received sporadic training in the past, but a new training programme was being developed, led by the operational managers. We were informed that an induction programme was being developed, which would include basic Asset and YOIS training, to ensure a common basic

standard across the YOT, along with colleague mentor support. We welcomed the assistance given to individual staff to gain qualifications including the Professional Certificate in Effective Practice, as well as Social Worker qualifications. The team as a whole would benefit from inputs by those staff members on what they have learnt from the courses, particularly the Effective Practice, to ensure the spread of good practice and knowledge across the team.

All staff and volunteers had received enhanced CRB checks, although none had as yet been reviewed.

The YOT used a number of volunteers, mainly for referral panels, although there appeared to be a high turnover amongst the group. Volunteers received comprehensive initial training in preparation for the panels, but there was little further training. We were unable to obtain any reason for the high turnover of the volunteers, and would suggest that the YOT carry out exit interviews in future as a method of evaluation to help reduce the loss of such a valuable resource.

Managers and Board members were confident that they had a robust process for dealing with grievances and disciplinary matters which, they stated, would be dealt with according to the parent organisations' procedures. They were unable to inform us how they would deal with grievances or complaints across two partner agencies.

Strengths:

- ◆ The positive attitude of the staff.
- ◆ An induction programme had been developed and staff were accessing appropriate professional training.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ The formal supervision and appraisal process needed consolidation.
- ◆ Staff required training in a number of core areas of work.
- ◆ CRB checks needed to be reviewed every three years.
- ◆ No action had been taken to investigate the high turnover of volunteers.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

This section is judged as partly met.

2. WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS/CARERS

2.1 Assessment

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF OFFENDING

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *There is a mechanism to identify those children and young people within the area who are at risk of offending.*
- ◇ *There are arrangements to assess the needs of those individuals identified as being at risk of offending and these arrangements take account of cultural differences, diversity and safeguarding issues.*

The YISP had an effective referral process including the agencies that supported the prevention programme, as well as concerned parents/carers. The referral form, although basic, contained sufficient information to support the reason for the referral, and was completed well.

During the file read phase we reviewed seven prevention files and found that these were comprehensive in their assessment and supporting information. The YISP used ONSET as its basic assessment tool. In most cases the child or young person and their parents/carers each completed the appropriate self-assessment form 'over to you' to support the assessment. The files suggested a supportive approach, which dealt with specific individual needs. These assessments also included some very thorough reports from health, social services and education. The process provided examples of good practice which could and should be adopted for children and young people who offend.

Strengths:

- ◇ There was an effective referral process.
- ◇ Assessments were comprehensive and inputs from the child or young person, their parents/carers as well as other relevant agencies.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFFENDED

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *An Asset assessment is satisfactorily completed at the beginning and end of all interventions which takes account of cultural differences, diversity and safeguarding issues.*
- ◇ *Risk of harm to others is fully assessed.*
- ◇ *Risk of harm, either to self or from others, is fully assessed.*
- ◇ *Specialist assessments are undertaken on those with specific needs or who are assessed as a risk of harm to others.*
- ◇ *Resources have been identified and capacity exists to meet assessed need.*

85% of the initial Assets were completed within the national standard time limit. We were also aware that the completion rate had further improved, due to the monitoring processes being developed during the inspection period. However, the overall quality of the assessments was variable, reflecting different levels of understanding about the process amongst the staff group as a whole. Only 52% of Assets seen were considered to be of a satisfactory standard. Some of the information given in the assessment was very good, and supported the scoring given by a caseworker, but too many had very little in the way of evidence. In some instances no score was given. We found that in 63% of the files read the child or young person had been involved in the assessment, but only 50% of files contained a completed *What Do You Think* form. The YOT had already recognised that the assessment process required improvement and was taking action.

The file read reflected a poor understanding of risk of harm assessment. We were extremely concerned to find that a full risk of harm assessment was completed in only 17% of all relevant cases. Furthermore, 48% of the remaining files should, in our view, have been subject to a full risk of harm assessment. In discussion, many caseworkers claimed to carry out a risk of harm assessment in their minds whilst completing the initial Asset but, because they felt the risk was low, did not complete the full risk of harm form. This approach is not acceptable. We were informed that, as a result of our findings, the YOT had now prepared a draft risk guidance document.

The YOT had contacted social services in 67% of cases involving a child or young person who was looked after, but only 7% of non-Looked after Children. This result was in our experience exceptionally low. When challenged about the lack of contact, the YOT informed us that it had no access to the social service's computer.

Caseworkers could access specialists in the team very easily. The specialists worked in what was described as a 'fluid' way and there was a simple and effective internal referral system. Communication was greatly helped by most staff being in one large open plan office.

The education worker had devised her own basic assessment form which provided her with information on education issues but did not include basic skills assessments for numeracy and literacy. For those with special educational needs, a statement was not requested unless the child or young person had received a DTO. The education worker had also developed a referral form, as the previous process had lacked rigour and consistency with caseworkers relying on information provided by the child or young person about their education status. Under the new system, the caseworkers completed the initial referral form during their initial assessment and forwarded it to the education worker. The information was then used to liaise with the school to try and negotiate solutions to educational difficulties.

We were concerned over a number of examples of poor cooperation between some schools and the YOT. Despite liaison, issues were often not resolved during the length of the order. All cases of educational concern were raised at the YOT education panel meeting and the LTA was informed if non-attendance was an issue. The panel had unearthed cases where the school had not triggered a referral to the LTA. Post-16 children were assessed by the part-time Connexions PAs, whose role was to refer them to appropriate training providers who carried out the basic skill assessment. The PA then liaised with the provider to review the progress and to monitor attendance and feedback to the caseworker.

Since the present nurse specialist started in the YOT, the systems for identification of the mental health needs of children and young people had been reviewed and, currently, the Asset score was the catalyst for a caseworker to refer a case to the health worker. The file read showed a third of the children and young people to have emotional or mental health issues. The co-location of the health specialist within the YOT facilitated joint work for individual children and young people, with the generic workers able to access advice and support quickly and informally. There were reported to be no delays for urgent referrals to CAHMS and, where required, adult mental health services, but that success sometimes achieved by knowledge of informal routes of access rather than established protocols.

The drugs workers from DECCA oversaw the screening carried out by caseworkers, and had arranged training sessions with them to achieve a more consistent approach. The service also took self-referrals direct from children and young people, as well as other agencies. We were informed that DECCA was to be moved out of the YOT building in the near future, and staff expressed fears of then losing the service, as they felt it would be more difficult to refer cases to an out-of-office service. We recommend that the provision of drugs workers is reviewed beforehand to ensure that staff can easily access the service under the new arrangements.

Strengths:

- ◆ Timely completion of Assets.
- ◆ Access to specialist workers was good.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ The quality of Asset completions varied considerably and required attention.
- ◆ A full risk of harm assessment was not completed in a large proportion of relevant cases.
- ◆ Specialist education and training programmes provision was insufficient to meet needs.

PARENTS/CARERS

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *An assessment of the parenting skills and needs of the parents/carers of children and young people who have offended or are at risk of offending has been undertaken and is used to inform any intervention.*

The YOT did not have a parenting policy in place, despite the need having been identified on the YJB improvement plan since April 2004. There was no parenting assessment tool for first contact with parents/carers, and caseworkers would refer any parents/carers as they considered appropriate to the parenting coordinator who would then carry out their own assessment. In the absence of any policy or guidance, it was difficult to see how the process could be implemented consistently.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ A parenting policy needed to be developed.
- ◆ There was no initial assessment tool for parents/carers.

2.2 Interventions

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF OFFENDING

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *There are arrangements in place to provide interventions for those children and young people who are assessed as at risk of offending.*

Preventive initiatives were described by staff as disjointed, with new ones pulled together from the different funding streams. The YISP had access to a number of different projects to which they could refer children and young people, including 'Head to Head', a bereavement counselling project and a young person's carer's project. As well carrying out one-to-one work, the caseworkers could take the children and young people to an Arts Centre or even a riding stables.

Strength:

- ◆ There were a variety of interventions.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ Interventions needed to be linked together more.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFFENDED

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Interventions with children and young people who have offended are targeted in areas of assessed need, such as education, health and parental relationships, etc.*
- ◆ *Interventions with children and young people who have offended are specific to the needs of girls and young women, children and young people from minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities and take account of safeguarding issues.*
- ◆ *Supervision plans are written in accordance with national standards, emanate from Asset and contain SMART objectives.*
- ◆ *Interventions are structured, evaluated and consistent with the principles of effective practice.*
- ◆ *Frequency of appointments for children and young people who have offended is consistent with national standards and Home Office/YJB guidance for final warnings, referral orders, community penalties, DTOs (custody and post-custody) and ISSPs (where they exist).*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended, enforcement follows non-compliance.*

The standard of completion of supervision plans was poor and needed to be reviewed urgently. According to our file read only 43% had been completed within the national standard for timeliness, and just 59% met the content requirement. There was a close fit between the assessed risk of harm and the interventions proposed in less than half (44%) of all the cases examined. Only 34% of files read showed progress against initial supervision plans, and 61% showed the interventions planned were proportionate to the child's or young person's risk of harm and likelihood of reoffending. Staff were seen to motivate the child or young person by reinforcing work undertaken by others in 62% of cases.

Very little group work was offered, and interventions were mainly delivered by caseworkers on an individual basis. We were told that some group work facilities were available through the voluntary sector but were not always accessed by the YOT. We were given some examples of group work through the Geese Theatre Group, aimed at an all-girl group. The YOT also made good use of the knowledge and contacts developed by the YISP coordinator in referring individual cases to diversity groups to ensure appropriate interventions. Caseworkers commented about the

inaccessibility of the YOT office for many children and young people which, they felt, limited the interventions they could deliver. The YOT had a resources room, from which workers could select appropriate intervention packages to deliver to the children and young people. Some of the packages were taken from national schemes and projects, whilst others were developed by individual staff. We could find no evidence of any evaluation of the interventions on offer.

The YOT made use of the independent Brandon Project, provided by the Educational Psychology Service, as an intervention tool. The project employed psychological therapeutic interventions (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Counselling) on a one-to-one basis in order to stop recidivism, specifically with burglary related crimes. The programme lasted 40 weeks and was able to take between eight to 14 children and young people at a time from the YOT. Nationally, it had been shown to be effective in 75% of cases. We were concerned to hear, however, that some caseworkers had little knowledge of the project, whilst others did not maintain contact with the children and young people they referred during the duration of the programme. It was apparent that the YOT needed to review its use of the project to see how it could improve communication and strengthen the effectiveness of the support given to children and young people.

Good practice

The Sandwell YOT was the only YOT in the Black Country to link into the Leaps and Bounds Project, run by the International Youth at Risk Company. This project brought the corporate, media and arts world together with the statutory and charity sectors in order to 'create a life experience that allows for the transformation of the lives of disadvantaged children and young people'. Four young people had joined the project and were actively involved with all participants and staff. The project supported them beyond their order, and there was regular liaison between the regional manager and caseworkers. The young people themselves felt the experience was beneficial to them and had not reoffended since joining the project.

The YOT also had a SLA with the NSPCC to deliver interventions for children and young people who had committed sexual offences. The NSPCC had trained two staff to deliver the Sexual Intervention Programme. It involved a six-week assessment period during which time the worker carried out interventions to address the issues identified. However, a representative from social services did not attend the assessment planning meetings, despite the presence of other partners, thereby preventing further intervention by the NSPCC and limiting the potential of the programme.

We were also informed that a number of children and young people who had committed sexual offences received a final warning without any referral to other agencies. This process clearly needed to be re-examined.

Overall, the availability of specialist education interventions to which the YOT could refer children and young people with educational difficulties was limited and insufficient to meet demand. We were also told that education

welcomed assessments by the NSPCC, but not from the YOT, when asked to take a child or young person back into school. These issues, we felt, reflected the need for a common understanding, formalised through policy/protocol between all the agencies involved.

Work within the YOT for mental health and substance misuse was delivered by specialists who had the necessary knowledge and skills. Although they were able to access a wider range of mainstream and other specialist health services, they experienced some difficulties in engaging children and young people, and their families, from the black and minority ethnic communities as they were said to be mistrustful of the services provided.

DECCA delivered the necessary drugs and alcohol interventions, and we received good comments about its work from both caseworkers and children and young people interviewed. DECCA was empowered to carry out drugs testing and could undertake voluntary drug tests as part of the police/YOT work with the persistent offenders, although we were informed that it was unable to inform the YOT/police of the test result due to its policy on confidentiality. As a result, the YOT/police were currently using a service outside the local authority area to carry out the testing. We felt that this issue required further debate in the best interests of the children and young people involved, particularly where they had agreed to the test as part of their order.

The police had fully adopted the 2002 Home Office/JYB guidance for final warnings. They bailed the child or young person for 28 days during which time they were contacted by the YOT police constable who carried out a home visit and assessment, prior to delivering the final warning. If both the victim and child or young person were amenable, the final warning was delivered via a restorative justice conference.

After the delivery of the final warning, the child or young person was involved in a minimum of four interventions, consisting of anger management, *Prison? Me? No Way!*, a letter of apology and the impact road show. The YOT police officers also had volunteers available who would involve the child or young person in reparation work if appropriate.

Good practice

Once a final warning had been delivered, along with the planned interventions, the YOT police officer would e-mail the investigating officer with an update of the result of the arrest and intervention.

The YOT needed to review its commitment to the referral panel process. From interviews with staff and volunteers, we were concerned to hear of the difficulties experienced by the YOT in filling panels, due to the lack of lay members. Despite recruiting and training high numbers of volunteers, the YOT had problems in their retention and was normally only able to secure one or two members for a panel, with the third place being made up by a member of staff. Our file read showed that 60% of referral panels sat within the required 20 working days and that, although there was a close fit between the interventions planned and the assessed risk of harm in 88% of cases, only 50% of contracts were delivered in accordance with the

agreed requirements. However, we were pleased to see that reports were submitted to all panels and the content was good. The file read also showed that 60% of victims contacted attended the panels.

In relation to the DTO files read, we found good links between the YOT and the YOIs, with 87% of cases showing the YOT staff had contributed to planning during the custody period. Unfortunately, work started in custody was continued post-release in only 45% of cases, usually through ISSP. The file read showed that the main areas of weakness for continued work were around drugs, alcohol, and ETE, all of which were poor. Other work, on more general interventions, showed a 100% continuation once released. The YOT and partners needed to review the availability of specialist work in the community around drug, alcohol and education for children and young people on DTOs who were not subject to ISSP. We were informed that, when appropriate, Connexions attended the pre-release meeting in custody.

Good practice

The two local police officers, placed within the YOT in the Offender Management Unit as part of the Catch and Convict strategy, worked jointly with the YOT to target children and young people who offended and would attend the DTO pre-release meeting with the caseworker. They then worked alongside the caseworker to deter the child or young person from further offending. Welfare was high on the officers' agenda, but they were also quick to enforce breaches of the order with the caseworker. The officers built up a good rapport with both the child or young person and their family. They also had access to satellite tracking as part of the monitoring process. Although not running long, the project appeared to be having good success at preventing reoffending.

The YOT needed to review its training around national standards and enforcement. Some staff appeared unaware of the requirements of the national standard for contact, with only 54% of cases meeting the standard for appointments offered to the child or young person and only 49% for those kept. Judgements about the acceptability or otherwise of missed appointments were considered appropriate in just 52% of cases and, of those, only 21% of all relevant cases were dealt with by breach action. In our opinion the low breach activity weakened the credibility of the YOT with the children and young people, as well as other criminal justice agencies and the Sandwell Community as a whole. We were glad to hear positive comments from the court and management team that, since week one of the inspection, the YOT had tightened up on its breach procedures and that it was following national standard guidelines and referring appropriate cases to the operational managers for decisions.

Strengths:

- ◆ The police had fully adopted the 2002 Home Office/YJB final warning guidance, and the YOT was delivering a minimum of four interventions.

- ◆ YOT staff contributed effectively to work undertaken with children and young people subject to DTOs whilst in custody.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ The standard of completion of supervision plans was unsatisfactory and needed to be reviewed urgently.
- ◆ The YOT experienced difficulty in retaining sufficient volunteers for referral panel meetings which were consequently sometimes filled by staff members.
- ◆ Referral order contracts were not delivered as required in a high proportion of cases.
- ◆ Work with children and young people who had committed sexual offences appeared to be inhibited by the lack of a common understanding between social services, the YOT and other agencies of the processes involved.
- ◆ DECCA needed to review its confidentiality policy around voluntary drug testing for children and young people subject to court orders.
- ◆ Just over a half of all cases were offered sufficient levels of contact.
- ◆ Breach action was taken in only a small proportion of all relevant cases.

PARENTS/CARERS

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Parents/carers (where appropriate) are made aware of the requirements of the interventions and are kept informed about progress during the course of the intervention.*
- ◆ *Interventions which are appropriate to the diverse needs of parents/carers are provided for, and taken up by parents/carers of children and young people who either have offended or are at risk of offending in accordance with assessed need.*

A parenting coordinator had been in post since January 2005 and the YOT was currently advertising for a parenting worker. As before, we were not clear how the post was to be funded.

There was no parenting policy in place and we could find no direct evidence of caseworkers keeping parents/carers up to date of the progress made by their child. We were aware of good general communication and support given to parents/carers on an informal basis to help them cope with their child. This was not, however, recorded.

In addition to work undertaken by individual caseworkers, the parenting coordinator had developed programmes for parents/carers whose children had offended, which she delivered either as part of a court order or voluntarily. Any parents/carers not willing to engage were given

leaflets/information. The coordinator was currently looking at other groups she could access to deliver parenting programmes to parents/carers from minority ethnic groups.

Strength:

- ◆ Parenting programmes had been developed.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ A parenting policy needed to be developed and implemented.
- ◆ Caseworkers were not recording work undertaken with parents/carers.

2.3

Outcomes

Inspection criterion

- ◆ *Those assessed as being at risk of offending and undertaking interventions are engaged in activity to reduce their risk of offending and address their needs.*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended examination of the case file provides evidence of progress and a reduction of risk factors.*
- ◆ *The YOT demonstrates a reduction in reoffending for all bands of penalties (pre-court, first tier, community penalties and custody).*
- ◆ *Indicative accounts of outcomes from children and young people, parents/carers and other relevant persons show positive outcomes.*
- ◆ *For those children and young people who have offended, supervision plan objectives are met in areas of assessed need.*
- ◆ *Interventions for parents/carers promote effective parenting.*

Of the seven prevention files read, only one of the children and young people concerned had offended following the intervention of the YISP, thereby suggesting an 86% success rate. Caseworkers also reported improvement in some of the children's and young people's behaviour. These indicative figures needed to be supported by a comprehensive evaluation process and robust exit strategy.

It was difficult to determine the effectiveness of the YOT's work in reducing offending, as the YJB cohort figures had dropped and then slightly risen this year. We were aware that youth crime in the area generally had decreased slightly over the past year (Audit Commission figures). Of the 51 files read, we found evidence in only 22% that the child or young person had reoffended.

We found a decrease in Asset scores in 63% of cases reviewed and in 66% the child or young person had complied with the conditions of the order. In

70% of files read the caseworker had spent between one and three hours per week working with the child or young person.

The file read showed only 4% of parents/carers of children and young people who offended were involved in a voluntary or court parenting programme. They informed us that they felt supported by the YOT, despite not being involved in a formal programme. The court would be informed of any parents/carers who did not cooperate with the voluntary parenting programme, if their child reoffended.

We interviewed a number of children and young people, as well as using questionnaires, and received positive comments about the help that they had received from the YOT. One or two young people spoke negatively about their caseworkers, but their main complaint was about the time it took for them to get to and from the YOT office. Overall, the feedback was positive. We also spoke to a number of parents/carers who were very complimentary about the work done by the YOT to help their child to break the offending cycle.

Offending behaviour

We reviewed the evidence presented during the file read of whether children and young people made progress against the criminogenic factors. Although many of the cases reviewed had only been supervised for a relatively short period of time, we found evidence of positive and identifiable progress overall, which was supported by our interviews with caseworkers. Some areas, where children and young people were identified as having made particular improvement, included cognitive behavioural issues and attitude to offending.

From the interviews with the children and young people, we were given feedback on how the work carried out by the YOT was having a positive effect on them. 84% said that they now realised what they were expected to do differently, and 88% why they had to behave differently.

In 78% of cases, there was evidence that children and young people had not committed a further offence whilst on an order or licence.

Education

We found that 66% of files read showed the child or young person was experiencing difficulty at school, and that actions had been taken by the YOT in 78% of those cases.

The most recent YOT data showed that, taken as a whole, the percentage of children and young people in ETE at 74.6% was in line with the national average. For those over statutory school age, however, that percentage was much lower. According to Connexions data, of a total of 123 children and young people who had offended, 55% were not in ETE. Our file read showed that in cases where educational difficulties had been identified, only 29% of those over statutory school age had been engaged in further education or training. The continuation of education after release for those on detention orders was not sufficient or poor in 44% of cases. Progress in

addressing difficulties with statutory education was recorded in only 8% of cases, and in only 11% of cases for those over statutory school age.

Health

As reflected in other parts of the report, there had been no formal partnership agreements for the health contribution to the YOT. The reorganisation of local health services into three PCTs appeared to have compounded difficulties in establishing what health services should provide to the YOT and how these arrangements should be monitored. The PCTs were to have a single management structure from April 2006 and it was expected that the reduction in overlap and complexity of functions would enable clarity of responsibility and formal identification of funding streams for YOT work.

A health needs assessment process was underway and the results would inform the future health provision to support YOT work. The changes in senior management within the health services in Sandwell would be taken as an opportunity to provide senior Management Board involvement, clarity of partnership responsibilities and more structured commissioning of the appropriate health services for the YISP and YOT work.

Safeguarding

The file read showed that there was poor liaison between the YOT and local social services. We found 33% of cases involving Looked after Children had no contact with social services. In the cases of non-Looked after Children, the figure rose to 82% of the files examined. With regards to children and young people considered vulnerable to harm from self or others, 86% of cases showed action taken by the YOT was appropriate to the needs of the case.

We welcomed the commitment of the Director for the Children's Trust and her active participation within the Management Board. The links to the Children's Trust were not clear and would need to be developed in the near future. We also looked to the appointment of the new Director of the Children's Services as a positive step to build the inter-department relationships between the YOT and social workers within the Children's Services, to ensure the correct management of appropriate joint cases.

Strengths:

- ◆ Good prevention of offending and reoffending figures from file read.
- ◆ Children and young people and their parent/carers spoke positively of the work of the YOT.
- ◆ A health needs assessment was currently underway which would inform future provision to the YOT.

Areas for improvement:

- ◆ Few parents/carers were involved in parenting programmes.
- ◆ Less than half the young people over school leaving age were engaged in ETE.
- ◆ The reorganisation of the local health services had compounded difficulties in establishing provision for the YOT.
- ◆ Liaison between the YOT and social services needed to improve.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS/CARERS

This section is judged as partly met.

3.

VICTIMS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

3.1 Assessment of the needs of victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◇ *An assessment of victims' needs should be made and used to inform planned interventions.*
- ◇ *All victims are given the opportunity to make informed decisions about their involvement in cases of children and young people who have offended and are supported in doing so.*

The YOT police officers received victims' details within 24 hours. They contacted victims relating to final warnings and passed the remaining victims' details to the VLO. As they operated according to the 2002 final warning guidance, they were able to contact the victims prior to the delivery of the final warning and to seek their views with regard to the interventions and possible reparation.

With the court cases, the VLO would send the victim a standard information letter, after entering their details in an allocation book and on to YOIS with an ID number. She included restorative justice leaflets with the letter and, if appropriate, a referral order leaflet. If the VLO did not receive a reply she would then contact the victim and explain her role to them and offer support. If the victim then did not wish for contact, the case would be closed. The VLO would visit the victim if requested and offer to help with transport to panel meetings if needed. The wishes of the victim were fully recorded on YOIS.

We were concerned to find that, as in other areas within the YOT, there were no contingency arrangements to cover the role when the VLO was absent. Following the first week of the inspection, the VLO took maternity leave.

Strengths:

- ◇ Communication of victim details from the police within 24 hours.
- ◇ Initial contact was established with most victims, initially by letter.
- ◇ Victims in final warning cases were contacted before the delivery of the final warning.

Area for improvement:

- ◇ There was no cover for the VLO during her absence.

3.2

Restorative interventions with the victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Victims have access to a restorative intervention tailored to their needs.*
- ◆ *Victims are offered the opportunity to specify any reparative element of the child's or young person's supervision plan and to be informed of their progress.*
- ◆ *Restorative and reparative interventions are provided that are appropriate to the age, vulnerability, culture, ethnicity, language needs, literacy levels and gender of the victims and children and young people who have offended.*

We were aware from the file read that when the victim agreed the police officers used restorative justice conferencing as part of the final warning process which had had a positive effect on both the offender and the victim.

Good news

One young person felt the victim would shout at him, but afterwards he said he found the process was very good and the victim kind. He had been invited to call at the shop where the offence occurred and was going to see the victim to try and get a job.

There was evidence that the victims had received either direct reparation in 8% of cases usually in the form of a letter of apology, or indirect in 34%. This work could be developed further, particularly in relation to the direct reparation elements. We were pleased to see that 80% of the work done with victims took into account their diverse needs, as well as those of the child or young person.

Work was undertaken to raise the child's or young person's awareness of the impact of the offences in some 67% of cases reviewed. This work was informed by a report, prepared by the VLO, that was sent to the caseworker informing them whether the victim attended a referral panel, wanted further contact, and/or a letter of apology, restorative justice, or mediation.

The YOT had a varied reparation work scheme, supervised by the reparation worker and his volunteers. At the end of each session the reparation worker would send the caseworker a comprehensive report on the child's or young person's participation.

Again, we were concerned that due to the reparation worker taking on another role temporarily, the momentum for this work would be lost as there were no cover arrangements. The Management Board must ensure that there will be scope to cover roles operated by one specialist member of staff.

Good practice

Where a letter of apology was not required, we found that a number of children and young people had been asked by the Panel to write an 'essay' to explain why they had carried out the act that they had been arrested for. The essay was seen as another positive method of helping them to address their offending behaviour.

Strengths:

- ◆ Good use was made of restorative justice approaches.
- ◆ Reports were sent to caseworkers by the VLO.

Area for improvement:

- ◆ No cover arrangements had been identified for the reparation worker during a period of temporary absence.

3.3 Restorative outcomes for victims of children and young people who have offended

Inspection criterion

- ◆ *Victims are satisfied with the work undertaken by the YOT.*

We visited a number of victims during the first week of the inspection and received positive comments about the support that they had received from the YOT. All the victims seen said that the VLO had helped to explain the process and their involvement in it. They were also satisfied that the child or young person had been dealt with appropriately.

Strength:

- ◆ Victims were positive about their involvement with the YOT.

3.4 Restorative and reparative outcomes for children and young people who have offended

Inspection criteria

- ◆ *Children and young people involved in restorative interventions make a positive contribution to the victim and community.*

We did not speak to anyone involved in restorative interventions, but felt that they were meaningful for the child or young person and made a positive contribution to the wider community of Sandwell.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT FOR WORK WITH VICTIMS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

This section is judged as satisfactorily met.

The joint inspection of YOTs

The Government announced the establishment of an independent inspection of YOTs in December 2002. The inspection programme is to be conducted jointly by CSCI, Estyn, the Healthcare Commission, HMIC, HMI Prisons, HMI Probation, Ofsted and SSIW. The joint inspection team is located within and led by HMI Probation, and is funded by the Home Office.

Home Office objectives

The joint inspection contributes primarily to the achievement of Home Office Objective II - 'more offenders are caught, punished and stop offending and victims are better supported', and to the requirement to ensure that custodial and community sentences are more effective at stopping offending.

It also contributes to the achievement of Objective III, through our scrutiny of work to address drug and other substance misuse, and to other relevant CJS and Children's Services' objectives.

The purpose of the joint inspection is to report to the Secretary of State and, through him, Parliament and the public, on the effectiveness of the YOTs in fulfilling their statutory duties to prevent offending by children and young people, and thereby protect the public, whilst still safeguarding their rights and promoting their welfare.

The **aims** of the programme are to:

- ◆ assess the impact made by YOTs and partner organisations on the prevention of offending by children and young people through effective supervision
- ◆ appraise the work undertaken by YOTs and partner organisations to meet the needs of children and young people at risk of offending and enable them to lead law-abiding and constructive lives
- ◆ evaluate the role of the YOTs in safeguarding the rights and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- ◆ assess the extent to which the YOTs are meeting the required standards and targets set by the YJB
- ◆ promote good practice in the management arrangements of YOTs and service delivery to the courts and community
- ◆ identify underperformance and make recommendations to promote improvements
- ◆ evaluate the effective use of resources
- ◆ actively promote race equality and diversity as an integral part of the inspection process
- ◆ produce timely reports which contribute to improved performance by informing policy and practice.

Code of practice

Each inspection will:

- ◆ be undertaken with integrity in a professional, impartial and courteous manner
- ◆ enable the development of independent judgements, based on evidence
- ◆ seek to energise and engage with staff
- ◆ promote race equality and diversity throughout its processes
- ◆ be concluded with the timely publication of a report containing findings and recommendations for improvement.

Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within the remit of this inspection programme should write to:

*HM Chief Inspector of Probation
2nd Floor, Ashley House
2 Monck Street
London SW1P 2BQ*

Inspection arrangements

- ◇ The joint inspection programme started in September 2003, following two pilot inspections. All 155 YOTs in England and Wales are to be inspected over a five to six year cycle. As this was a long programme, we decided from the outset to break it down into three phases in order to ensure that the inspection retained its relevance and continued to address local and national concerns.
- ◇ The three phases are:
 - **from September 2003 to July 2004**, when the inspection concentrated on key issues, with emphasis placed on establishing benchmarks and the dissemination of good practice. Fifteen YOTs were inspected during this phase of the programme, all of whom were volunteers
 - **the current phase, up to September 2005**, when the inspection process will be based on the methodology established in the first phase. In so far as possible, fieldwork will be individually tailored to each YOT, informed by examination of the data available and the findings from other inspection programmes
 - **from September 2005 onwards**, when the YOT inspection methodology will be congruent with the five outcomes in the Children's Services inspection framework and complement that of the Joint Area Reviews in England. Although the YOT inspection will remain a separate process, inspections will run within a similar timeframe as the Joint Area Reviews where possible, so that areas of potential overlap and duplication can be reduced and rationalised. Findings from the YOT inspection will, therefore, inform not only the Joint Area Review but also the Annual Performance Assessment and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Work is currently being undertaken to ensure that this process is compatible with the different governance arrangements in Wales.
- ◇ The inspection will be carried out in line with the Government's commitment to proportionate and coordinated inspection in local government. It will:
 - be proportionate to risk, and fieldwork will only be undertaken where necessary to support findings or to disseminate good practice
 - complement, and be coordinated with other inspection programmes, including the Joint Area Reviews and comparable inspection processes in Wales
 - take account of YOTs' recent development as organisations.
- ◇ The standards and criteria developed for the first phase of the inspection have been slightly modified and focus on:
 - management and partnership arrangements
 - work with children and young people and their parents/carers
 - victims and restorative justice.

- ◆ The fieldwork for each individual inspection will take place over two weeks, about two to three weeks apart. The first week will consist of a file reading exercise for which the YOT will be asked to identify a random sample of between 30 and 80 children and young people (dependent on the workload) who have been subject to some form of intervention in the previous months. The cases will cover most orders, including licences.
- ◆ These case files will be examined in detail. In half the cases selected, we will also undertake in-depth interviews with the case manager, any other person significantly involved in delivering the intervention and, where possible, the child or young person themselves and their parents/carers. Where appropriate, we also hope to meet and hear from victims of crimes by children and young people supervised by the YOT.
- ◆ In order to encourage self-assessment and increase ownership of the inspection findings, we are inviting YOTs to second a member of their staff, usually an experienced practitioner, to the inspection team for the duration of the file reading week. We have found this to be a positive way of developing mutual understanding and strengthening the links between inspection and practice.
- ◆ As before, the second week of the inspection will involve meetings with the Chief Executive, Management Board members, YOT Manager and staff. It will cover the management of the YOT, its performance and the contribution made by its partner organisations. Discussions will be informed by the findings of the examination of case files conducted in the first week of inspection.
- ◆ The inspection findings will be compiled in a report which will include recommendations for improvement. These recommendations will be designed to encourage the YOT in its work, to support good practice and to promote improvements.
- ◆ The report will be submitted to the Home Secretary, as the Secretary of State responsible for youth justice, with simultaneous copies to the Education and Health Secretaries, and where relevant, the Ministers for Education & Lifelong Learning, Finance, Local Government & Communities, and Health & Social Services in Wales. A copy will be sent to the YJB. Copies will also be made available to the press and placed on the website of HMI Probation at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/justice/probation/inspprob>

Scoring approach

We have decided to continue a similar approach to scoring in phase two as in phase one, in order to allow some broad comparisons of performance, but with certain provisos. First of all, it should be noted that this second phase of the inspection covers only three core areas, rather than five as in the first phase. In addition, as part of our aim of continually improving performance, two of the categorisations, 'good' and 'good basis for development' (formerly described as 'satisfactory with good basis for development'), have been amended, and whilst exacting a more rigorous standard of performance from the YOT also, we believe, allow for better representation of their actual achievements.

The three sections of the inspection will be individually assessed against the relevant standards, using the supporting criteria. Judgements will be based on:

- ◆ information supplied by the YOT
- ◆ interviews with chief officers, managers and staff both from the YOT and other partner organisations
- ◆ examination of case files
- ◆ discussions with case managers and other people significantly involved in the supervisory process
- ◆ the perspectives of the children and young people, their parents/carers and, where possible, their victims
- ◆ other relevant inspection findings.

The judgements are defined as:

- ◆ **Fully met** – exceptional performance beyond the requirements of national standards and other relevant guidelines
- ◆ **Satisfactorily met** – a sufficient level of performance to assure the joint inspection team that the YOT is progressing satisfactorily
- ◆ **Partly met** – less than sufficient performance on the majority of items
- ◆ **Not met** – inadequate performance on most items.

Some discretion is allowed to lead inspectors for scores to be adjusted if this seems appropriate due to other findings or contextual evidence.

The overall assessment will be determined by the judgements of the individual sections. As in the first phase of the inspection process, no score or grading will be given during this second phase, but instead a general categorisation highlighting particular achievements as well as areas for improvement. This approach was initially adopted as we felt that a more rigid scoring mechanism would be inappropriate given the developmental nature of much of the work of the YOTs and their relatively recent inauguration as organisations.

The overall performance of the YOT will be assessed as:

- ◆ **Commendable** – there is strong management performance and exemplary work with both children and young people and in relation to victims and restorative justice. These YOTs will be setting a standard of excellence which will act as an example to others.
- ◆ **Good** – either the section relating to management or work with children and young people is fully met and the other sections are at least satisfactorily met. YOTs within this category will have addressed most, if not all, key areas of work and be achieving a high standard of performance.
- ◆ **Good basis for development** – the sections relating to management arrangements and work with children and young people are both assessed as satisfactorily met and work with victims and restorative justice is being taken forward. Although some key areas will still require attention, these YOTs will have demonstrated good potential and their work will be sufficient to promote confidence in their future development.
- ◆ **Requiring improvement** – either the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is assessed as partly or not met. In these instances, the inspection will have revealed concerns about key aspects of the YOT's performance which need to be addressed.
- ◆ **Requiring significant improvement** – neither the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is considered to have been satisfactorily met. YOTs within this category will need to take immediate action to address major concerns about core areas of work.

Next steps

- ◆ The YOT will be asked to send a response to the recommendations, to the lead inspector, together with an action plan within three months of the publication of the report. It is anticipated that the recommendations will normally be addressed within 12 months of publication to allow sufficient time for integration within existing developments.
- ◆ Implementation of the recommendations will be monitored by the YJB. The joint inspection programme does not normally include any follow-up action unless issues were to emerge during the course of the programme that were of such serious concern to require immediate attention. Although the inspection of the Sandwell YOT has not revealed any such concerns, we propose to conduct a brief follow-up inspection later in 2006 because the actions being commenced around the time of the inspection had not started to produce tangible results and were considered critical to correct the shortcomings identified.
- ◆ In addition to the reports on individual YOTs, the joint inspection team will also publish periodic reports on findings across a number of teams. Such reports will include comments on race equality and diversity issues and other trend information. These reports will also include comparisons between the performance of YOTs with similar characteristics.