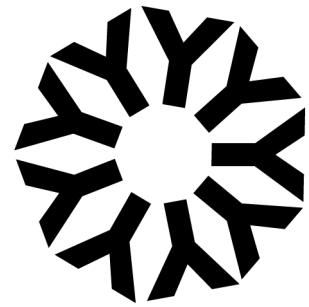


*Commission for Social Care Inspection
Estyn
Healthcare Commission
Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HM Inspectorate of Probation
Office for Standards in Education
Social Services Inspectorate for Wales*



Joint Inspection of Youth Offending Teams of England and Wales

Follow-up Inspection Report on:
Sandwell
Youth Offending Team

2006

Foreword

This inspection took place some seven months after the publication of our initial report on the Sandwell Youth Offending Team and was undertaken at the same time as the Joint Area Review of Children's Services. We were pleased to see that the Management Board had continued to progress and a new Manager had finally been appointed. Again, the staff continued to impress with their enthusiasm and overall commitment. Thus, although the process of change and improvement in practice was still at an embryonic stage, it had the potential to ensure that children and young people would be given a good service in the future.

Much work still needed to be done; particularly around the cornerstone of dealing and working with children and young people, namely Asset and risk of harm completion, and supervision planning. The improvements in national standards for contact with young people and enforcement of orders now needed to be replicated into other areas. Likewise, the good work formulating the protocol with the Drugs Education, Counselling and Confidential Advice Service needed to be taken forward and used as a model when formulating and updating other much needed policies, procedures and Service Level Agreements.

We felt that the Youth Offending Team now had the foundations in place to ensure effective practice and systems. With continued drive, support and commitment from all concerned, we look forward to hearing of its improved performance in the future.

Andrew Bridges
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

June 2006

<p>The file reading took place week commencing 13 March 2006. The Joint Area Review fortnight commenced on 8 May 2006.</p>
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Glossary

ASBAT	Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team
ACPC	Area Child Protection Committee
Asset	Assessment tool developed by the Youth Justice Board
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CSCI	Commission for Social Care Inspection
DAAT	Drug and Alcohol Action Team
DTO	Detention and Training Order
DECCA	Drugs Education, Counselling and Confidential Advice Service
Estyn	HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
ETE	Employment, Training and Education
HMIC	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary
HMI Prisons	HM Inspectorate of Prisons
HMI Probation	HM Inspectorate of Probation
ISSP	Intensive Supervision & Surveillance Programme
LSB	Local Safeguarding Board
National Standards	National Standards for Youth Justice Services
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PCT	Primary Care Trust
SASSI	Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bounded
SSIW	Social Services Inspectorate for Wales
YJB	Youth Justice Board
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. The programme is being implemented in three phases, and will cover all 155 YOTs in England and Wales over a five year cycle.

The initial inspection of the Sandwell YOT, conducted in April and May 2005, during the second phase of the programme, revealed a range of shortcomings in the work of the YOT. Actions were being taken at the time of the inspection to address these concerns but had still to produce tangible results. We therefore decided to conduct a brief follow-up inspection in 2006, focusing on the recommendations contained in the initial report.

This follow-up inspection was conducted at the same time as the Sandwell Joint Area Review of Children's Services and Corporate Assessment Judgements, and findings from the follow-up inspection informed both these processes.

Next steps

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. 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.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmiprobation>

Key findings

Management and partnership arrangements

We found a strong Management Board, chaired by the acting Chief Executive, with good attendance by the majority of members. The link with children's services had been significantly strengthened by the recent appointment of its strategic manager. His impending position on the Management Board would build on the partnership arrangements that were being developed. There was evidence that the YOT had been integrated into mainstream Sandwell Borough Council business, and was receiving the managerial support, across the agencies, that it needed in order to deliver an effective service.

A new Manager had been appointed in February 2006 and he had quickly identified priority areas that needed to be improved. He had engaged with the staff to ensure that they were fully involved in any changes proposed, and was given full backing by the Management Board. He needed to ensure that messages were effectively communicated to all staff at all levels so that they were delivered consistently across the YOT.

There was an urgent need to ensure that policies, protocols, SLAs and strategies, yet to be completed, were prepared and implemented across the YOT. We saw this deficit as a significant barrier to improving performance and effective partnership working. Of particular concern were the arrangements for assessing educational needs, and the lack of any strategy for monitoring and addressing the deficits in education and training of children and young people engaged with the YOT. This issue had been highlighted in the previous report and little progress appeared to have been made in addressing it.

With a full-time Manager in place, a new staffing structure agreed and a sound financial standing, it was imperative that the Management Board now ensured that recommendations highlighted in the previous report were implemented promptly.

Work with children and young people and their parents/carers

Despite the YOT having had to negotiate some difficult times, the staff remained committed and full of drive and enthusiasm. They were extremely encouraged by the support and aspirations displayed by the Management Board, and genuinely felt that the YOT was now in a position to deliver a more effective service to the children and young people of Sandwell.

We found areas of improvement in national standards in the work with referral orders, timely completion of Asset, appointments offered to children and young people and enforcement of orders. We were disappointed that the quality of the Asset and its link to intervention planning had not been improved. Furthermore, risk of harm assessments

were not completed, where necessary, or reviewed and endorsed by managers as appropriate.

Other areas of work that needed addressing, and had seen minimal improvement since the last inspection, were parenting and the retention of volunteers.

There was now a process in place for managers to deliver one-to-one supervision to all staff on a regular basis. This more intrusive supervision was a positive step towards embedding improved practice across the YOT. There was some confusion, which needed to be clarified, regarding when staff appraisals would be completed and who would be the countersigning officer.

We were told about many initiatives that were in the planning stages to address some of the recommendations; however, we were unable to comment on them as there was no evidence of them having had any impact on outcomes for children and young people. With the management structure now in place, it was time to deliver results.

Overall assessment

We were pleased to find that there had been some improvement in the performance of the YOT, which had seen it move up to level 2 at the time of our inspection in the overall judgement made by the YJB. The Management Board had continued to strengthen. A stable membership had been established with good attendance overall, and partners were being made accountable for a full range of performance and staffing issues, with realistic goals being set. There were signs that this was providing the necessary strategic oversight to impact on the overall performance.

Nevertheless, of all the recommendations made at the last inspection, only 50% had been fully addressed and there was still action required at different levels with those outstanding. Greater attention needed to be given to partnership working, particularly with education. We saw and heard about a number of pieces of work that were in progress or would be taken forward in the future, but at the time of our inspection these were not impacting on service delivery. We recognised, however, that the YOT was developing a sound platform on which it had the potential to improve.

There was belief amongst the staff that the YOT had now turned a corner and, with a new Manager and a focused Management Board, they could start to deliver an improved service. The staff themselves remained committed and, with continued strategic support, we were optimistic that improvements would continue to develop. Training had been carried out in key areas such as Asset and risk of harm completion, and other inputs were planned.

Our overall assessment of the performance of the YOT was that, whilst it was moving in the right direction, it still **required improvement**.

Overview

- ◇ The Metropolitan District of Sandwell is situated in the West Midlands in 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, which was 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 2.3%.
- ◇ The level of employment in Sandwell, 55.3%, was lower than the average for England of 60.9%. The level of unemployment, at 5.3%, was correspondingly higher than the average for England of 3.4%.
- ◇ There was a higher percentage of permanently sick or disabled residents in Sandwell at the time of the census, 7.4% compared to 5.3% in England. There was a lower percentage of students resident in Sandwell, both economically active and inactive, 5.8% compared to 7.3% in England.
- ◇ Sandwell Council was awarded 1 star in the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005.
- ◇ The YJB figures for youth offending for the period April 2004 to March 2005 show that 69.3 offences were committed per 1000 children and young people aged 0-17 years in Sandwell.
- ◇ The YJB summary of YOT overall performance for April 2005-March 2006 awarded Sandwell YOT a performance level of 2.

Key statistics

File reading statistic	YOT file read score	Average for phase two YOTs	Range for phase two YOTs	YJB targets ⁽¹⁾
	(% cases)			
Initial assessment completed in accordance with national standards requirements:				
– timeliness	81%	84%	70-97%	100%
– adequate quality	50%	71%	29-93%	
Full risk of harm to others completed on relevant cases	0%	54%	17-83%	
Evidence of management oversight in risk of harm cases	n/a	41%	0-100%	
ISP meets the content requirements of national standards and contains SMART objectives	33%	52%	17-96%	100% ⁽²⁾
Frequency of appointments arranged broadly conform to national standards, to the requirements of order/licence, and to any risk of harm considerations	73%	75%	52-100%	
Judgements about acceptability/unacceptability of absences are appropriate	88%	71%	40-96%	
Breach/recall action has taken place, if required, within the national standards timescale	75%	49%	13-100%	
Evidence of any criminal activity during the course of the order	25%	29%	15-48%	
Appropriate action has been taken if a child or young person is considered vulnerable to harm from self and others.	100%	95%	67-100%	
Effective action is taken where there is evidence of educational difficulties	40%	60%	33-81%	90% ⁽³⁾
Appropriate referrals are made in cases of:				
– physical health	n/a	n/a	n/a	
– mental/emotional health	80%	n/a	n/a	100% ⁽⁴⁾
– substance misuse	38%	n/a	n/a	100% ⁽⁵⁾
Victim was consulted about restorative/reparative justice work with child or young person	33%	45%	6-72%	
Assessment of overall quality of PSRs	n/a	n/a	n/a	

- (1) If appropriate.
- (2) Relates to detention and training plans.
- (3) In full-time ETE.
- (4) CAMHS referrals.
- (5) Screening and referrals.

1. MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

1.1 Leadership

Recommendation

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 the (previous) report.

An action plan was submitted which addressed the issues raised in the original report. The document was comprised of the Community Safety Plan and the YOT Improvement Plan for Sandwell 2005/2006 to 2006/2007. We were pleased to see that the YOT was being incorporated into mainstream council planning, but felt that greater clarity and purpose could have been achieved by highlighting linkages between the two documents. Many actions had excessively long completion dates, which might hinder future improvements to the service as opposed to encouraging them.

It was evident that the Management Board itself was fulfilling the promise, previously identified, of developing into a strong body. Not only did the Chair have significant previous relevant experience, but the Community Safety Manager, who had responsibility for the YOT, was also formerly a YOT Manager. Their knowledge and understanding of youth justice issues provided some much needed strength, which manifested itself in the development of a stronger focus on performance. The report prepared by the Manager for each Board meeting highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the YOT's performance.

Overall, the YOT's statutory partners demonstrated a strong commitment to the Board, and there was evidence to suggest that there was a clear desire to take the YOT forward, recognising it as a key service in delivering improved outcomes for children and young people.

With a sound structure now in place, the YOT should review the plan, paying particular attention to completion dates. Opportunities for 'quick wins' should be seized. This would reinforce the positive message coming from the management team and instil belief within the YOT that the organisation was achieving realistic milestones.

Recommendation

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that that the recruitment of a permanent appointment to the post of YOT Manager/Head of Service is undertaken and progressed as a matter of urgency.

A new Manager was appointed in February 2006. Whilst this was to be applauded, it was disappointing that a matter highlighted as being urgent had taken such a long time to progress. In effect, the YOT had been without a permanent full-time Manager for over 12 months. We were informed that the recruitment process had been hampered by significant problems within the personnel department of the borough, many of which were outside of the control of the YOT.

The inspection took place four weeks after the appointment and it was apparent that the new YOT Manager was making an impact and involving staff in the decision-making process. He had established three task groups, comprising a cross section of management and staff, with a focus on improving delivery of three respective areas: PSRs and court work, risk management, and intervention. He had also already set up meetings with union representatives to improve dialogue and promote effective communication at all levels. We were impressed by the fact that in his short period in post he had identified areas of work that needed addressing as a priority, and had established a good working relationship with his staff.

Recommendation

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that there is appropriate partner representation on the Management Board.

There was now an appropriate level of seniority of Board members from all partner agencies. Attendance was good from most agencies, although the PCT and Mental Health Trust needed to emulate the other partner colleagues who were showing a real commitment to the YOT. It was vital that their attendance at the Board was improved in order that the YOT received the support and resources it required to deliver an effective service in respect of all health matters. The Chair was considering rearranging the schedule of meetings so that the Management Board followed on from the Safeguarding Board, which was attended largely by the same group. This would hopefully promote improved attendance and enable partners to manage their time more effectively.

It was evident that Board members were committed to integrating the YOT into other key strategic areas within Sandwell. For instance, the new Head of Children's Services, who was about to take up his role as a Board member, was keen to see the YOT utilise resources within his department, and was in the initial stages of investigating the feasibility of operating a joint remand foster carer's scheme.

The Management Board was considering establishing an internal governance board with the brief of focusing on delivery of the improvement

plan. This would provide the opportunity for senior managers within the council to address issues relating to crime and children and young people, leaving the Management Board to concentrate on partnership arrangements. We were uncertain about this proposal, and concerned that another layer of bureaucracy would be added unnecessarily. In order for these arrangements to work, there would need to be strong terms of reference for each group, and a commitment from the parties concerned to attend further meetings.

Recommendation

The Education Authority should ensure that a strategy is introduced to monitor and address deficits in education and training opportunities for children and young people engaged with the YOT.

We were extremely disappointed to see that no progress had been made in this area. Whilst a member of the YOT attended the Long Term Absence Meeting, there was no specific strategy in place to address the deficits in education and training opportunities, and the education welfare officer was often left trying to make suitable arrangements for children and young people engaging with the YOT with no or little support from education managers or schools within the borough. We continued to see examples of poor collaborative working involving the education department, a situation that we regarded as unacceptable and which needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

1.2 Partnership and resources

Recommendation

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that the funding streams, partner contributions, and the staffing requirements of the YOT are reviewed.

We were pleased to see that the YOT had been working hard to clarify its financial status and a budget plan for the next three years was being developed. The Head of Community Safety was responsible for the finance arrangements of the YOT and was clearly focused on ensuring that it had a sound footing. There appeared to be little prospect for growth in the short-term, but we were satisfied that the uncertainty regarding the funding arrangements, which had been highlighted in the previous inspection, had now been resolved.

During interviews with Board members, we established that they were satisfied with contributions made from partner agencies. We saw evidence that these issues were discussed at Board meetings. There was a clear expectation that the representatives from partner organisations were accountable for providing sufficient information about their own

organisation's staffing commitment and financial contribution, in order that the stability of the YOT was maintained.

After consultation with the workforce, and agreement by the Management Board, a new staff structure was to be implemented in May 2006. The proposed model was based on a risk framework and would hopefully provide the necessary springboard to embed improved performance.

Recommendation

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that 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.

Since the last inspection, two new senior practitioners had been appointed to provide some resilience in the supervision structure and a parenting worker had also started.

A staff absence policy had now been adopted. Despite a significant increase in sickness in the last quarter of 2005, it now appeared to be at an appropriate level and staff understood the new procedures.

It was apparent, however, that there were no formalised procedures for providing cover in the event of staff absence, other than an expectation that managers would resolve staff absences on an ad hoc basis. Covering the work of specialist personnel such as the CAMHS and education worker appeared to work satisfactorily, with arrangements made through the relevant agency. The absence of the caseworkers needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency as it was clearly impacting on the ability of the YOT to comply with national standards. We found, for example, during our file reading, that there was very little victim work completed, as a result of the member of staff taking maternity leave.

We were pleased to hear that DECCA, during the absence of their worker for a period of a month, had made arrangements to ensure that the position was filled in the interim period.

Recommendation

The Chair of the Management Board should ensure that all protocols, policies and SLAs are updated, agreed, implemented and subject to regular review.

Protocols with DECCA, Drug Concern, the courts, Connexions and the Children's Fund had been implemented. There were still a large number that needed to be agreed, including one with CAMHS, and common thresholds had still to be established with the various agencies working with the YOT with children and young people.

During interviews with staff, they themselves identified the need to have up-to-date policies, procedures and SLAs on all areas of work. When they were unsure of the action they needed to take on a particular case, they

felt that a concise uncomplicated document would help them to find the correct answer. They also felt that it would formally standardise and recognise the work that they carried out in their specific roles, and enable staff to cover others' work with more confidence during absences.

We were informed that the new Manager had identified this area of work as a priority, and were optimistic that this essential task would be completed.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that a review is conducted of the YOT policy for recruiting and retaining volunteers to help improve their retention.

The YOT did not have a policy for recruiting and retaining volunteers and this needed to be developed in line with other policies in the YOT.

There was a suggestion that YOT staff were reluctant to engage in any effective communication with volunteers, which led to them feeling undervalued. We felt that this issue needed to be explored in some more detail by the YOT. The management team, in devising a new policy should consider conducting an exit survey to establish the reasons for their high turnover of volunteers.

Discussions were ongoing with children's services to develop a joint initiative which would result in a pool of Appropriate Adults being recruited that could be called upon by both services. This work was very much in its early stages, but was a good example of the cooperation that appeared to be developing across the borough. In order for it to be successful, however, we felt that the issues highlighted above would need to be resolved.

Recommendation

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.

With the new YOT Manager having started in February 2006, this was an area of work that had not been progressed. However, the previous inspection report had highlighted the need to improve the liaison between the YOT and social services generally. With the move from social services into children's services, we found some evidence of collaborative working, albeit in its infancy. The YOT Manager was now a member of a performance manager group within children's services, and also attended the ACPC, which was about to become the LSB.

Some examples of ideas that were being considered included discussing the feasibility of children and young people subject to a tag being accommodated in children's homes as opposed to being placed in secure accommodation. Also, children's services in Sandwell owned residential centres where they ran programmes for children with specific needs. It was

planned that opportunities would be made at these centres for children and young people who had offended.

The new Head of Children's Services was about to take up his position on the Management Board and we saw this as a very positive step in progressing some of the initiatives planned. With the improved communication, links between the YOT and social services had been forged and agreeing common thresholds could be viewed as a realistic objective. There was no doubt that, overall, there was an improved working relationship between the two organisations, which would enable formalised referral mechanisms to be constructed.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

This section is judged as satisfactorily met.

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

2.1 Children and young people who have offended

Recommendation

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.

There were 81% of initial Assets completed within the national standards time limit. The overall quality of the assessments, however, was variable. Only 50% of the Assets seen were considered to be of a satisfactory standard. These figures were very similar to those outlined in the previous report.

We were pleased to see an improvement in supervision plans being completed within national standards in 83% of the cases read, compared to 43% at the last inspection. However, only 33% met the standard of content required compared to 59% previously, and 60% compared to 61% last time showed the interventions planned were proportionate to the child's or young person's risk of harm and likelihood of reoffending. In general terms overall, we felt that whilst the Asset had been completed in full in most cases, it was merely a paper exercise in many and did not form the basis required for effective intervention planning.

Within the case files, the YOT now included a case management assurance checklist. Such forms could provide much needed guidance, but there was uncertainty amongst a large proportion of staff as to who was responsible for their completion. Within the files that we read, there was a large disparity, ranging from a few where the form was fully completed, to those where there were no entries at all. We were informed that all staff now received regular supervision, which comprised of one-to-one meetings and the issue needed to be addressed in this forum.

Quarterly performance improvement review meetings were now held and included the Head of Community Safety, the YOT Manager and lead senior staff. This was a recent initiative aimed at developing a performance management culture. Furthermore, individual managers had specific responsibilities to lead on key areas of work, and Asset completion, linked to supervision planning, should be driven forward through this framework.

The YOT had organised a two-day training package that was mandatory for all staff, focusing on the quality completion of the Asset. They had found this training to be both informative and relevant to their role and it was to be hoped that the full effect would be seen over the following months. This

training had taken place just prior to our visit, so had not impacted on the cases in the file read exercise. We were encouraged to see a training plan for 2006 that included inputs on key subjects such as PSRs, diversity, parenting, child protection and YOIS.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that risk of harm assessments are completed on all relevant cases, regularly reviewed and endorsed by managers.

As with the first inspection, the file read reflected a poor understanding of the risk of harm assessment. We were extremely concerned to find little evidence of any improvement in this area. Not one of the files read included a full risk of harm assessment, despite the fact that in our view we would have expected to see one in 62% of the cases. As a matter of urgency, the YOT needed to ensure that the training and newly developed policy was embedded into practice amongst all staff. There was little evidence of risk of harm assessments being reviewed or indeed endorsed by line managers.

The YOT had secured funding from the YJB, which had enabled all staff to have a two-day input on risk of harm assessments. Again, this training had been well received by the staff, but that knowledge now needed to be applied, with appropriate supervisory mechanisms in place, to ensure the implementation of this key piece of work.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that a parenting policy is developed so that parents/carers receive consistent help in accordance with their assessed relevant needs.

A document titled 'Parenting Support Policy and Procedures' had been produced in September 2005 by the parenting coordinator, but both managers and staff were unaware of its existence. It clearly had not been signed off and agreed, and the work carried out in producing it had not been recognised. This had resulted in staff being unaware of the process to follow when referring a case for parenting work, and little evidence of parenting interventions in the files read.

Just prior to the inspection, an additional parenting worker had been employed. It was now intended that one member of staff would focus on parenting orders imposed by the court and her colleague would concentrate on voluntary orders. We were informed that the two parenting workers were to deliver some training to all staff on their role and the process to follow when making referrals.

The YOT now needed to seize the opportunity to implement the policy effectively across the YOT so that parents/carers received consistent help in accordance with their assessed relevant needs.

Recommendation

The Education Authority should ensure that the educational needs of children and young people supervised by the YOT are appropriately assessed.

This area of work continued to raise concerns for the inspection team. There was no specific educational tool for assessing the children and young people supervised by the YOT; however, we were informed about some discussions that were ongoing with Tipton College and the Skills Council, which would result in a basic skills tutor being allocated to the YOT.

Children's services were reviewing the staff resources allocated to the YOT and, at the time of the inspection, were considering seconding either another education welfare officer or a teacher. We were later informed that a special education needs teacher had been appointed and was in post.

At our previous inspection, we reported that the continuation of education after release for those on detention orders was inadequate in 44% of the cases. Progress in addressing difficulties with statutory education was recorded in only 8% of cases and the Education Authority had not provided education in accordance with national standards on transfer to the community in one of the four cases read. For those young people post 16, none had been engaged in further education or training and none had had contact with a Connexions personal advisor. At sentence end, only 50% had been reassessed for literacy and numeracy using the YJB approved assessment tool.

In 69% of the cases in the community, the child or young person was experiencing difficulty at school, and actions had been taken by the YOT in 56% of those cases. This compared with 66% and 78% respectively in the previous inspection and indicated a deterioration in performance. In 60% of the files read during the follow-up inspection, action taken was judged to have been insufficient or poor, with a general failure to address the needs of the child or young person.

A major problem for the borough of Sandwell, and subsequently the YOT, was that of 'back door' exclusions. In effect, these children and young people were being excluded from school unofficially, with no plan or support in place to provide alternative provision. Such action increased the likelihood of offending or reoffending. There was a strategy to deal with those who were on the long-term absence register, and the education welfare officer within the YOT had established good systems to ensure that those entering the criminal justice system were dealt with appropriately. We were informed, however, that the long-term absence list was growing, not reducing, as more 'back door' exclusions were being uncovered.

The education welfare officer was working hard to find the appropriate provision for the children and young people referred into the YOT. Both the systems for assessing need and for ensuring that all those excluded from school were given opportunities to access alternative education, training or employment were urgently in need of review.

Recommendation

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 young people supervised by the YOT can be effectively addressed.

This recommendation had been fully implemented, with a protocol developed and agreed by both DECCA and the YOT, and a review date set for March 2007. The protocol effectively outlined how information would be shared between DECCA and the YOT, whether by the DECCA worker inputting onto YOIS, or exchange of information following negative test results. The process addressed both Tier 2 and Tier 3 cases.

The DECCA project manager was very positive about the engagement that had taken place with the YOT, and stated that the process of producing the protocol had helped to clarify the roles of the two organisations, focusing on the best outcomes for the children and young people concerned. The work had clearly been progressed sensitively by the YOT, and had been informed by their understanding of DECCA's role and policies.

Agreement had also been reached whereby DECCA was now undertaking a SASSI assessment on all children and young people referred to the YOT. The assessment consisted of two sessions, the first lasting 1.5 hours, the second consisting of feedback and discussion of further interventions needed. Results of the SASSI were inputted onto YOIS in accordance with the information sharing protocol. The arrangement, which had been running since October 2005, was reviewed in December 2005 and would be subject to further three-monthly reviews. Early indications were that it was working well and monitoring would continue. The data gathered would then be fed back to the DAAT young people joint commissioning officer and YOT Manager.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that 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.

We saw an improvement in the proportion of referral panel meetings being held in accordance with the national standard and YJB effective practice guidelines. Our file read showed that 80%, compared to 60% at the last inspection, sat within the required 20 working days, and that there was a close fit between the interventions planned and the assessed risk of harm in 100% of cases. This compared with 88% in May 2005. A written report had been prepared for the panel in all cases read, and the contract had been delivered in accordance with the agreed requirements. It was disappointing that there was little victim involvement in the process. None of the victims had been offered either the chance to attend the panel or a restorative justice intervention. This was a reflection of the absence of the victim worker in the YOT, and the lack of cover arrangements.

The YOT now had five community venues for holding panels. At the time of the inspection there were 12 volunteers, with eight new recruits waiting for training and to have their CRB checks completed. Due to the low number of volunteers, we were informed that panels often sat with only one panel member. This was not good practice.

The number of interventions available to the panel was limited, and this was an area requiring development across the YOT. There was an urgent need to review this area of work to ensure that there was a range of effective programmes to cater for all children and young people entering the criminal justice system.

The referral order staff had made good links with a voluntary organisation called *Mentorpoint* and engaged with six mentors. This approach was reported as being an effective mechanism for supporting children and young people.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that children and young people are offered appointments in accordance with the national standard.

This was another area that had seen some improvement since our last inspection. In 73% of files read, the frequency of appointments arranged broadly conformed to national standards, the requirements of the order or licence, and any risk of harm considerations. These figures compared to 54% from the first inspection. In 73% of cases, appointments were kept compared with 49% previously.

We were concerned, however, to find evidence of cases not being allocated promptly. A DTO file was not allocated during the young person's four month sentence, and subsequently she was not seen by a YOT worker until four weeks after her release. This was not acceptable. Examples such as these highlight the need for good administrative processes and for the new supervision structure planned for May 2006 to be rigorous in its management of caseloads.

Recommendation

The YOT Manager should ensure that orders are enforced in accordance with the relevant national standard.

Since the last inspection, a new breach policy had been implemented in the YOT, whereby each decision was endorsed by a manager prior to taking any action. During our file read exercise, we found evidence which showed that this proactive supervision had led to the staff having a much improved understanding of the breach process, and the need for enforcing a common standard. In 75% of cases, breach/recall action had taken place, if required, within national standards compared to 52% previously. Furthermore, in 88% of cases, judgements about the acceptability of

absences were deemed to be appropriate compared to 21% beforehand. Clearly, progress had been made on this recommendation.

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

This section is judged as partly met

The joint inspection of YOTs

The joint inspection of YOT is an independent programme, funded by the Home Office and reporting to the Home Secretary. Inspections are conducted jointly, involving CSCI, Estyn, the Healthcare Commission, the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, HMIC, HMI Prisons, HMI Probation, Ofsted and SSIW as appropriate. The joint inspection team is located within and led by HMI Probation.

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 the scrutiny of work to address drug and other substance misuse, and to other relevant criminal justice system 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.

Inspection arrangements

- ◇ The joint YOT inspection is being carried out in line with the Government's commitment to proportionate and coordinated inspection in local government. It is:
 - proportionate to risk, and fieldwork will only be undertaken where necessary to support findings or to disseminate good practice
 - coordinated with, and complements, other inspection programmes, including the JARs and inspection of Young People's Partnership in Wales.
- ◇ The Sandwell YOT follow-up inspection focused on implementation of the recommendations contained in the initial inspection report. It involved a file reading exercise and meetings with relevant managers, representatives of partner organisations and members of the YOT staff.
- ◇ Performance was scored, using a similar approach to that adopted in phase two of the inspection programme. Each section of the inspection was individually assessed. Judgements were 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.
- ◇ **The overall performance of the YOT** was assessed as:
 - **Commendable** – indicating strong management performance and exemplary work with both children and young people and in relation to victims and restorative justice.
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **Requiring improvement** – either the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is assessed as partly or not met.
 - **Requiring significant improvement** – neither the section on management arrangements or work with children and young people is considered to have been satisfactorily met.

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:

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2 Monck Street
London SW1P 2BQ*