

Peer Review of Slough Youth Offending Team

10 – 12th March 2020

Feedback Report

1. Background and Scope

In January 2020, under Partners in Practice Sector Led Improvement support, Slough Children's Trust requested Hampshire Children's Services to undertake a Peer Review of Slough Youth Offending Team (SYOT). It was agreed that the purpose of this review was to support the Trust and the YOT in preparing for their inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), due in the next 24 months. Hampshire was asked to assess the quality of the work against domains two and three of the HMIP Youth Offending Inspection Criteria. In addition, it was requested that the review looked at the YOT's work in relation to serious youth violence, exploitation, gang prevention and contextual safeguarding and joint working with CSC.

Domain one of HMIP standards was out of scope for this review.

2. Approach to the Peer Review

The review was asked to replicate inspection conditions as much as possible in order to enable the staff to familiarise themselves with the experience.

As it was focusing on domains two and three, the review was focused on the audit of cases. It was thought that 18 cases, ten court orders (domain two) and eight out of court disposals (domain three) would be a sufficient number to provide adequate evidence. A list of cases was provided by SYOT and the audit team selected those cases which would provide the best evidence of practice i.e. cases which had been running a minimum of three months. Further, domain two, containing two custody cases were included.

It was agreed that of these 18 cases, nine would be audited together with the staff member responsible for the case. The remaining nine were file reads only. The audit tool used was based on HMIP's standards for the two domains. A timetable was drawn up on this basis in the same way that HMIP carry out inspections.

It was further agreed that the peer review team would not be giving an indication of SYOT's likely inspection outcome/grade, but rather would provide feedback on what they assessed as strengths and areas for consideration. It was also acknowledged that as HMIP's criteria was constantly under review the criteria when SYOT is inspected means it could change.

In advance of the review, SYOT provided evidence to support the reviewers to understand the operational context.

3. The review

A team of three managers from Hampshire and the Isle of Wight YOTs spent three days in Slough between 10th and 12th March 2020.

At the end of each day findings were shared with the Assistant Director of Quality Improvement Practice and Performance for the Trust, the Head of Service, and the Team Manager. The purpose of this was to explore themes that were emerging.

On the final day, the review team collated the findings into a presentation. This presentation followed HMIP's criteria and identified strengths and areas for consideration in each area.

4. Findings

Overall, the staff group in SYOT were a credit to the organisation, they were enthusiastic, able to showcase their work and embraced the concept of audit and inspection. The principle of 'child first' was a golden thread which went through all the work we reviewed.

There was evidence of consistent and constructive management oversight. Particularly, providing a footprint across a child's file and setting the direction at the point of allocation.

4.1 Assessment

It was clear that in assessing both court and out of court orders that the identification of the child's diverse needs was a strength and that this was followed through to the delivery of interventions. The type of diverse needs assessed was broad, reflecting the multi-cultural nature of the town as well as other diverse needs such as age, learning styles and health needs. One example was the assessment of the impact becoming a young father could have on behaviour and the ability to engage.

We saw evidence of the assessment of a child's motivation and their individual strengths as present in most cases. However, one area to consider would be how to evidence the assessment of a young person's level of maturity more clearly when Asset Plus does not ask this question explicitly.

One area of strength was that the majority of out of court disposals had an Asset Plus prior to a decision about disposal. However, in both out of court and court ordered disposals, there was a lack of evidence other agencies and case management systems being routinely consulted. As a result, not all relevant information was captured. This included the use of information provided by the police. In some cases, staff would allude to what they had been told but this was not

reflected in the assessment. This could be particularly relevant when assessing the nature and extent of a child's involvement in gangs or county lines. A suggestion was made to make social care case management checks a routine part of case management. One notable exception was the involvement of the education worker and the information they could provide.

With reference to the assessment of risk across the three areas, these were routinely completed. However, the reviewers thought that the justification of these ratings could in some cases be developed further. For example, by clearly evidencing circumstances, context, capacity, creating opportunities and imminence.

In two cases, the assessment of risk of harm was too low, possibly because the definitions used by HMIP were not being applied.

A further area to consider was exploring substance misuse more fully in the Asset Plus assessment. For example, this was ticked 'no', even if there were substantial police concerns around drug dealing or if there was suspected drug use. The review team thought that in saying 'no' to substance misuse question in Asset Plus, they were restricting the assessment of needs in that area. In addition, we also thought SYOT could more routinely consider the impact of cannabis use on the likelihood of reoffending and safety and wellbeing.

Finally, although team members indicated that they were ACE aware and took a trauma informed approach to practice, this was not explicit in their assessment.

4.2 Planning

In all cases, plans were present. They were also collaborative and underpinned by a planning meeting. The team were trying to improve planning through the introduction of a tool. However, there are some areas which the review team thought should be considered.

The restricted number of partners consulted at the assessment stage was reflected in the plans. Many did not refer to other agencies. Further, whilst the YOT did an impressive number of additional assessments to support delivery, such as the Learning styles and SALT assessments, these were not fully integrated. We also thought that Children's Services plans could be more fully integrated.

Plans could also better use the external controls element of Asset Plus and develop their references to victim safety planning. In addition, the multi-agency risk management meetings were not referenced within this section.

Further, we thought that interventions in some cases could be sequenced in accordance to where the young person was on the cycle of change. For example, if a YCC had identified the completion of intervention work, this was done irrespective of the fact the child may benefit first from some motivational interviewing.

4.3 Delivery of interventions

There was an impressive range of interventions which included both group, individual work, and a specific summer programme. These interventions were tailored in accordance with the child's needs.

Reparation was used widely, however on occasions the justification for imposing reparation was based on the activity being good for the child rather than as recompense for their behaviour. For example, work at a football club. We didn't think this was necessarily wrong but that SYOT could consider rebranding these interventions as Activity or Programme Requirements in some cases.

We saw evidence of good engagement with young people, with the team spending time building a relationship. Engagement, linked to the child's diverse needs for example, considering the impact of a female white worker on her engagement with a child from a different background. There was evidence also of routinely identifying the most appropriate venue to see children to support engagement. The mechanics of good external controls such as timely enforcement action and good levels of reporting in high risk cases were all evidenced.

There was some good collaboration with neighbouring YOTs especially when transfers of children between services were taking place.

4.4 Review

The reviews were timely and involved the young people. The team also thought the work done on exit planning to be thorough, however it could better evidence the involvement of young people.

When closing cases, we did not see how information was made available to partners that the case was closed (for example, Children's Services teams).

4.5 Exploitation, Knife Crime and Gangs

SYOT asked the review team to look at their approach to key issues and groups such as exploitation, knife crime and gangs. As we undertook the review, we became aware that such cases were prevalent.

When addressing learning in relation to assessment, planning, interventions and review we have attempted to make the link between our findings and the application to these specific groups. For example, in our finding that police intelligence is not routinely used to inform the assessment of risk, then the assessment of risk will not be justified and the subsequent plans and interventions to manage these risks may not be enough. A second example is that there are a range of specific interventions to address these issues and these were used regularly. However, on occasion the children attended when they were not ready; whilst they completed the intervention the impact was negligible. Undertaking some work on Motivational Interviewing with the young people may have been more appropriate before they attended.

However, SYOT's ability to engage and get alongside their children is a key strength which will form the basis of any activity to address these specific issues.

The referral of children to the NRM process was not consistently identified and applied. For example, a referral made by another YOT was not followed up. On another case exploitation was identified as a risk factor and the child was being moved, but NRM referral was not considered / discounted despite this being identified as an action in the exploitation screening tool.

4.6 Other findings

From our experience, an area which HMIP could comment on is the use of performance information and data to inform the delivery of services. We understand that this has been a challenge for SYOT.

We could not see much reference to children who behave in a harmfully sexual way, for example the High-Risk panel did not include these cases.

We wondered if colleagues in Children's Services understand the role and responsibilities of the YOT and if this was impacting on including them in providing information about, or inviting them to, meetings on young people.

Finally, we thought the use of reflective supervision could enhance practice and understand that such plans are currently underway to implement such an approach.

5. Conclusion

The review team would like to thank SYOT for the privilege of being invited into the service and are grateful for the way we were received. The review team were invited to be open and honest with our feedback and I think the content of this report evidences that we have done this.

The review team would like to wish SYOT every success in their inspection and look forward to reading the final report.

Nikki Shave
Hampshire and IOW YOT Head of Service

Sarah Herbert
IOW Team Manager

Lauren Whincop
Hampshire Assistant Team Manager

1st April 2020