

Evaluation of Sector-Led Peer Assessments in Youth Justice

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Executive Summary

Key findings

- Youth Justice Peer Review (YJPR) is viewed positively by those who have experienced it.
- YJPR shares many of the features of similar effective peer review processes in other sectors.
- The current arrangements between YJB and the sector are working well, and the role of the YJPR Facilitator is key to this.
- In most cases, respondents agreed that the Peer Review Teams had achieved an appropriate balance between being rigorous and challenging whilst also being informal and supportive (i.e. they were successful in the role of 'critical friend').
- The skills and experience of the YJPR teams were valued by host YOTs.
- The Framework Guidance and the training for reviewers were well received and seen as useful.
- The 'non-shaming' approach of YJPR creates a receptiveness to feedback and enables an open discussion of strengths and challenges.
- All the participating YOTs identified specific ways in which YJPR had made an impact on their governance, organisation, practice or morale.
- There is more to be done to foster engagement from the wider youth justice sector and a need to communicate the value of YJPR more effectively.
- There is potential to better capture and share good practice flowing from the Peer Reviews.
- The benefits YJPR offers to Peer Reviewers are a significant strength of the process.
- Continuation and development of YJPR requires appropriate resources, particularly to support the critical role of a central coordinator.

Key Recommendations

1. Peer Review in Youth Justice should continue to be a sector-led approach, with consideration given to how best to provide the resources required to develop the process further and strengthen its impact.
2. Develop a communications strategy designed to encourage greater engagement with YJPR amongst YOTs across England & Wales.
3. Revisit and refresh the training and guidance, particularly as it relates to formulating Key Lines of Enquiry.
4. Reflect on suggestions for incorporating some minor adjustments to the process as highlighted in this evaluation, particularly those that may ease the time pressure for reviewers.
5. More firmly embed evaluation tools within the process to capture feedback and impact as a matter of course.
6. Consider ways to promote wider dissemination of the good practice and impact stories encountered as part of the YJPR process.

1. Introduction

Peer Review (PR) is a form of sector-led improvement. It is recognised as an important tool for services who need to drive forward 'their own self-assessment and self-improvement' (Easton et al: 2). In the local government sector, for example, PR has been widely adopted for its 'positive impact' on the sector's 'capacity to take responsibility' for its 'own improvement' (Downe et al 2014: 3). Evaluations of PR in other contexts have shown that a sector-led approach can work well and impact on organisational change (White et al 2015; Downe et al, 2017).

1.1 Evidence from research

Different sectors have developed their own more specific definitions in relation to PR. Implementation also varies across sectors. However, common key principles are identifiable, such as:

- the activity is voluntary;
- the organisation retains full ownership of the process;
- peers are reputed, esteemed and trained; and
- both the activity and the feedback are framed in a constructive and supportive way (Nicolini et al, 2011)

PR is different from other performance improvement processes such as inspections or compliance reviews. It is viewed as a process for use by all services, regardless of their perceived level of performance. PR is not just for struggling or failing teams. It is also for high performing services who want to improve further (Downe et al, 2017).

A key benefit of a sector-led, or peer-led, approach is the 'greater legitimacy' it offers compared to programmes run by external organisations. Those offering suggestions for improvement are perceived as having a grounding in the sector and, in turn, credibility (Institute for Government, 2016).

Research highlights a range of contributory factors underpinning a successful sector-led PR process:

- the experience and integrity of the reviewers;
- pre-visit dialogue and communication;
- clearly defined goals;
- effective preparation; and
- specificity in relation to recommendations (Wren, 2004 cited in Purcell and Hawkins, 2010; White et al, 2015, Downe et al, 2017).

A fuller analysis of the findings from research conducted in relation to PR in other sectors is available at [Appendix 1](#).

1.2 Peer Review in Youth Justice

The Youth Justice Peer Review (YJPR) programme was developed in partnership between the sector and the Youth Justice Board (YJB) as part of a new approach to youth justice oversight and increasing accountability to local authorities.

YJPR aims to help Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), and their partners, identify their strengths and highlight areas for potential improvement. It is intended as a 'supportive yet challenging process' and guidance for YOTs on the process makes it very clear that YJPR is not an inspection. The review is undertaken at the request of the YOT partnership and the outcomes are for the partnership to act on as they see fit.

The YJPR is built around a set of hypotheses or theories to be tested, known as the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) and these will be agreed at a pre-review scoping meeting. A team of Peer Reviewers comprising senior staff from other Youth Offending Services carry out the YJPRs. All PRs complete training in advance. Each Peer Review Team (PRT) is headed by a Team Leader (or Co-leads) and, as far as is feasible, the members of each PRT are selected to provide an appropriate mix of skills and experience to match the focus of the review in question.

Eighteen Peer Reviewers were initially trained in 2011. The first YJPRs were conducted in 2012. Since then:

- 118 Peer Reviewers and 31 Peer Review Leaders have been trained.
- 34 Peer Views have been completed.¹
- This represents just over one-fifth (22%) of the sector.
- At least one Peer Review has been conducted in each region.
- The Yorkshire and Humber region has the highest rate of YJPRs (over half of all YOTs in this region have received a Peer Review) followed by the South East (42% YOTs reviewed) and North East (27% YOTs have been Peer Reviewed).
- To date, only 7% of YOTs in London and 7% of YOTs in South West have received a Peer Review – representing the lowest rates of Peer Reviews across all regions in England and Wales.

A fuller outline of the process and its implementation on a regional basis is available at [Appendix 2](#).

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation and methods

The Youth Justice Sector Improvement Programme Board (YJSIP) commissioned this evaluation to look at four key areas:

1. A critical assessment of the peer-review process
2. A measurement of the impact of the peer-review process
3. A comparison of the process (with other organisational sector led programmes)
4. Recommendations to improve and ‘future-proof’ the process.

The evaluation adopted a realist approach, that is, it explored the *mechanism* of YJPR (the process) and the *context* (situational factors affecting both the host YOT and the PRT) in order to understand the *outcomes*. Methods included a review of relevant literature; review of documentation from completed Peer Reviews; an on-line survey (30 responses were received in total, 18 from reviewers; and 12 from staff in reviewed YOTs); qualitative interviews (10 Peer Reviewers and 14 YOT staff) conducted between October to December 2018.

For more information on the Methods see [Appendix 3](#).

2. Key Findings: Preparation for Youth Justice Peer Review

‘We had high expectations for the review...that it would be a rigorous and challenging process’ (Chair of Management Board)

2.1 YOT Motivation and expectations

In committing to this process, YOTs repeatedly stressed the value of having ‘a fresh pair of eyes’ look at their services, although they varied in what they wanted the fresh eyes to look at. For example:

¹ As at 8th August 2018

- To improve consistency and ensure all young people had access to the same services regardless of their location;
- ‘To find out more about...our assessments and planning, how we were in getting other partnerships engaged in the assessments, making sure we have management oversight on everything as well, getting enough information from parents’;
- Looking for ideas to move things forward in areas such as managing high risk cases and moving to a desistance-based approach;
- Needing external input to kick start improvement; and
- Looking for a way to ‘test out where we’d got to’.

The perceived link with inspections was mentioned regularly. The guidance framework indicates that YJPR is not meant to be used as a pre-inspection audit. However, a common theme amongst YOT interviewees was that it was still helpful in this regard in having some reassurance that their practice was on track. Reference to the link with inspections was also apparent in responses from YOTs to the on-line survey. One respondent described YJPR as a ‘useful test of strengths and weaknesses ahead of a formal inspection’. Similarly, another respondent from a different YOT commented on how YJPR was ‘good preparation’ for an upcoming inspection as ‘...[it] helped focus staff on the importance of achieving good quality work, experience something of a real inspection’ and how YJPR was a ‘chance for staff to highlight good work’ and support them in ‘inspection preparation’.

Others referred to a past inspection and were looking to YJPR to provide a progress check on how far they had come in implementing inspection recommendations. The inspection history of the YOT affected perceptions of YJPR and, as one manager commented, the PRT come into a context of ‘existing dynamics, legacy and history’. Recognising this, one reviewer asked if it was possible for the PRT to be provided with a short briefing document summarising important contextual issues relevant to the receiving YOT.

YOTs generally had high expectations of the process although some staff expressed nervousness about an unfamiliar process. One team said that they were unaware of any other YOTs who had been through a YJPR and it would have been valuable at the early stages of their planning to talk to someone else who had experienced YJPR as this would have helped them to feel more relaxed about it.

2.2 YOT self-assessment

This seemed to be a somewhat neglected area of the process. The framework guidance provides a self-assessment template for YOT staff to complete 2-3 months before the review and these should be passed to the PRT to inform their thinking. Some staff couldn’t remember doing these although ‘knew that we supposed to have done it’. Feedback from reviewers suggested that self-assessments should not be collected via a named individual at the host YOT (as currently stated in the framework guidance) as there were concerns about anonymity.

2.3 Guidance and training

The framework guidance was well regarded as useful by the majority of YOTs as well as reviewers in the evaluation. However, it was acknowledged that it was now ‘a bit out of date’ and would benefit from a refresh. YOT staff who had been members of a Peer Review Team were asked to rate the training they had received to prepare them for their roles as part of the on-line survey. Of those who responded, most indicated the training was ‘Excellent’ or ‘Very Good’.

2.4 Key Lines of Enquiry

Feedback from YOT staff about the scoping process was positive, ‘that part of the process was good...getting a thorough understanding of what the scope was...helped us really tune in...dialogue was good there’. There was a ‘useful dialogue with the PRT asking ‘why do you want to look at these

areas?’ which helped focus on what we were really trying to achieve.’ One YOT noted difficulties involved in having a lot of people at the scoping meeting but felt that they had made it work through having an internal meeting before then to agree what the service really wanted to focus on.

Reviewers highlighted the importance of having a face to face scoping meeting (on occasions where it’s been necessary to discuss this by phone the outcomes have been less satisfactory). One reviewer said that ‘more emphasis should be placed on that part of the process...it’s important to have clarity of understanding at that stage to ensure all the energy involved in the process is directed appropriately later on’. Other challenges identified at this stage of the process included:

- Getting a good balance between breadth and depth, for example, KLOEs need to be ‘not too vague and broad and, also, not so narrow as to warrant the resource’;
- YOTs wanting to focus too much on inspection type issues;
- Navigating local political pressures, for example, some senior managers try to steer the review towards topics that are ‘safe’ and where they are already doing well but this is not best use of YJPR;
- Competing agendas within the service;
- YOT expectations being too high or unrealistic; and
- Needing clarity over the real reasons the YOT is asking to look at certain issues (to avoid YJPR being used as a pre-inspection tool)

One reviewer suggested that, given the short length of time, it’s best not to have too many KLOEs as ‘it’s better to have a strong focus on one area than covering 3, 4 or 5 areas less well’. Several others suggested providing additional guidance on what is feasible when setting KLOEs, providing some examples from previous reviews of well-written KLOEs and providing more guidance on getting a good balance between strategic and operational issues.

Clear communication from co-leads to the rest of the team about the reasons for the choice of KLOEs is important. Without this, team members can feel left on the backfoot initially. As one interviewee put it, without this knowledge s/he was ‘...left wondering ‘Why am I talking to this person?’’. Fuller sharing of information following initial scoping meetings had other benefits, as one interviewee stated - it meant ‘we could get into it more quickly’.

2.5 Strategic or operational focus?

There was one area in which differences of opinion emerged between reviewers and host YOTs. This was where the focus should lie - strategic or operational. Reviewers most commonly felt that the resource required for YJPR, particularly the time commitment from senior managers, was best used to focus on strategic or governance questions. For example, as one reviewer explained, YJPR ‘is best focused on strategy and partnerships...need this ‘top end’ to be right first and then the operational stuff will often sort itself out’. Similarly, another reviewer commented on a review s/he was involved in which focused on operational issues: ‘...we weren’t confident that’s the best use of Peer Review. Plus, some Peer Reviewers are in roles that don’t deal with that process’.

The feedback from YOT staff suggested that they clearly still wanted a focus on operational issues. The motivations for undertaking a review (see [Section 2.1](#)) were often related to operational questions, as were many of the points included in the YJPR application forms. A comparison of application forms and scoping documents seems to show a shift towards more emphasis on strategic issues in the agreed KLOEs. When asked for suggestions about how to improve the YJPR process, several YOTs made comments such as ‘have a bit more on the operational side’.

2.6 Analysis of KLOEs

KLOEs were available from 13 (out of 34) of the receiving YOTs. These were sourced from the YJPR final report or presentations and so represent the KLOEs as agreed between the receiving YOT and the PRT. Analysis revealed the following findings, although these are indicative only as the information on KLOEs was available for less than half of YOTs reviewed.

- The number of agreed KLOEs ranged from 4 to 7 in number.
- KLOEs did not easily fall into one of the three themes identified in the YJPR Guidance. Quite often KLOEs as stated cut across the different themes.
- PRs did tend to focus more on issues falling under Governance, Partnerships and Resource Themes. Outcomes and Performance were least represented in the KLOEs reviewed.
- The KLOEs reviewed varied in their focus. Some addressed a very specific issue. For example, one YOT designed its KLOEs around Looked After Children. Another framed their KLOEs around the need to address re-offending. Others defined their KLOEs on a more general level. One YOT, for instance, invited the PRT to review 'how effectively are young people kept safe'.
- In some reviews, KLOEs, were stated as questions, in other reviews, KLOEs were phrased as statements.
- KLOEs tended not to be time-bound, in other words, reference made to a particular time frame, for example, in the last 12 months.
- There was little reference to issues relating to equality and diversity in the available KLOEs.

2.7 Communication about the PR within the host YOT

There was significant variation between YOTs in terms of how well staff understood the purpose of the YJPR before it took place. For example, one case manager stated that 'there was good communication about the purpose of the review beforehand and why the team were coming. There might have been a little anxiety amongst the team initially but they were reassured it was a learning opportunity'. In contrast, an operational manager in a different YOT commented that they didn't really understand the process until after the review was completed. This had negatively affected their ability to explain it to other staff. Some of the team might have thought it was for inspection preparation and operational managers didn't know enough at the time to correct that misunderstanding. One reviewer suggested that managers could be asked at the scoping meeting to explain how they would be briefing staff in order to help ensure that an accurate impression of YJPR was conveyed to staff.

3. Key Findings: The On-Site Process of Youth Justice Peer Review

*'The PRT were motivated and energised by youth justice...
it was important knowing that they wanted to be here.'* (Senior Practitioner)

3.1 General perceptions

YJPR was generally experienced by YOTs as being positively different from an inspection: 'we had previously been through an inspection...this felt different, more of a learning opportunity'; 'it was a dialogue'; 'more of a two-way conversation'; 'it [YJPR] was stylistically different to an inspection'. This was not always the case, however. One YOT interviewee described how the review, initially at least felt to him/her and the YOT staff, like an inspection 'I wasn't expecting 7 or 8 people to descend on us...the senior managers [i.e. Peer Reviewers] kind of went into the war room and blackened out the windows.' Another YOT also expressed concern about the blacked-out windows in the PRT base room as they felt it gave the impression that something 'secretive' was going on.

3.2 The Peer Review Team

Reviewers commented on the need to have a mix of skills on the team and, preferably, co-leads with different strengths. Having a balanced gender mix, as well as a representation of members from

large/small YOTs and city/shire areas was also emphasised. Feedback from YOTs showed that they appreciated the attempts to build teams with skills and experience matched to PR requirements. Two YOTs from urban areas specifically mentioned how relieved they were to have PRT members from areas with similar demographics to their own. This was viewed as critical to the success of the reviews and they were clear that it would have worked less well if the team had been drawn more from rural services.

In one review there was a point of contention with one member of the team coming from a neighbouring service and the management of the host YOT were potentially anxious about inviting in someone from a 'competing YOT'. Interestingly, the differences in youth justice between England and Wales did not have an adverse effect (for example where a team drawn from all English YOTs were conducting YJPRs in Wales) because there was still much common ground on what counts as good practice. When asked for suggestions for how to develop YJPR in the future, one YOT suggested how the makeup of the PRT could be more representative of the multi-disciplinary nature of YOTs, so as to include individuals with specialist knowledge in, for example, health or education.

3.3 Organisation and data collection

There were mixed experiences from both YOTs and Reviewers in terms of the administration of YJPR and getting the practicalities right was identified as one of the main challenges of the process. With isolated exceptions, most reviewers felt welcomed into the YOTs, although it was noted that PRTs are very dependent on the administrator or designated 'go to person' for all the practical aspects such as having a good base room, computers and logins, pens, access cards for the building.

The process of asking for information from YOTs in advance usually worked well and reviewers reported that they generally got what was asked for: 'Generally speaking, [it has] not been difficult...comes down to being as clear as possible about what is required.... and additional information while on site has never been a problem either'. However, 'some YOTS...don't have a performance manager which makes it more difficult to run reports, collate data.' One reviewer noted that if the YOT has difficulty in finding the data requested, that is a finding as it tells the PRT something about how the YOT is working. One YOT reported frustration with the PRT requests for additional information on arrival: 'As the first day un-folded...they were demanding lots more from us.' A manager in a different YOT felt that the PRT's approach to data collection did not show any evidence of them having taken on board information from the self-assessments.

For reviewers, having too much information was sometimes a problem and the co-leads have to then filter out what is most relevant and focus on what is in scope with the KLOEs: 'Some YOTs provide too much and there isn't time to read it all. Maybe in future we could give them a list of what's required in all PRs and then there will be additional more specific stuff needed depending on their KLOEs.'

3.4 Timetabling and scheduling

The tight timescales presented some difficulties for both YOTs and reviewers. For example, one YOT felt they had been too ambitious in the number of interviews they tried to arrange for staff. The result was that key operational managers only had an hour or so to feed in to the process and consequently felt they were unable to 'bring as much to the table' as they could have done. For reviewers, the packed timetable can mean having little time or space between interviews. One reviewer highlighted the need to be clearer with YOTs about what is required, for example, that the PRT need breaks between interviews and for meals, plus time to write up interview notes. This could perhaps be achieved through providing YOTs with an example or template of an appropriate schedule.

A further issue is the difficulty of rescheduling or adding appointments within the limited timescale. In one YOT for example, the smaller than intended size of a focus group led to a situation where staff

felt the PRT hadn't heard the full range of views on a contentious topic, but there was no time to arrange a further session. Or, problems can occur when staff are called away at short notice as 'meetings can be called at any time when people are in crisis'.

Some concerns were expressed about the issue of how the timetables are set up and by whom. One reviewer, for example, felt that on some occasions the process has been too 'controlled' and that 'the PRT co-leads should be more directive and take more ownership of the timetable so they don't just see what people want them to see'. From the YOT perspective, there was an example in one team of practitioners and operational managers feeling as if they were being 'kept away from the process' (for example, only having one short interview). They were frustrated that the PRT spent most of their time talking to senior managers in partner services and didn't see enough of the work YOT staff were actually doing. The KLOEs for that review were focused mostly on strategic/governance issues which would explain why the PRT used their time in this way, but as staff were unaware of this it created a perception that the timetable had been set up in a way to exclude them.

3.5 Interviews and focus groups

Staff from host YOTs who were interviewed either individually or in a focus group setting as part of a YJPR were very positive about their experiences. They described how 'sensitive topics were covered openly and honestly', indicated that the YJPR felt for them like 'a safe environment' in which issues could 'be aired, challenged and discussed', and commented on a process that 'was supportive and very informal'.

In keeping with the findings from other research (White et al, 2015), YOT participants agreed that they felt able to be honest in YJPR interviews. One senior manager realistically observed that 'it's inevitable that people will want to present their best face when someone external is looking in...it's very difficult to be genuinely warts and all...so I wouldn't say that people are inevitably going to be completely honest, but it was certainly a much more relaxed and open process than an inspection'.

This fits with the reviewers' perspective as they agreed that people were generally honest and open. As one reviewer explained: 'people have been very frank...speaking very straightforwardly...I've never had a sense that people were sticking to a party line...they welcomed the opportunity to get something from it'. Another described how YOT staff they spoke to were 'candid and open'. The exceptions were either where staff misunderstood the process and thought it was an inspection so were more guarded, or an occasional Board member who appeared to have been coached.

3.6 Role of the YJPR facilitator

The importance of the role of the central facilitator was evident at every stage of YJPR. The input from the facilitator in matching and pulling Peer Review Teams together was found to be critical. At the application stage, one YOT manager outlined how the facilitator has supported them in 'fine-tuning their scope'. There were also examples of significant assistance being provided whilst reviews were in progress. For example, one reviewer commented on the facilitator as 'particularly helpful in a YOT where co-leaders were leading for the first time...s/he was able to provide advice during the review and suggestions for getting the tone of the presentation right'. Another reviewer commented on the importance attached to this role in terms of coordination, particularly as PRs were 'so time-limited'. From the YOT perspective, a manager highlighted the facilitator's valuable role in resolving differences in expectations. This led to the PRT then being more sensitive in their requests for information.

4. Key Findings: Feedback and Reports

Key messages from the fieldwork were that the feedback process could be challenging but that host YOTs were receptive to it because they knew that the focus was on improving practice. ‘The PRT are professionals from the field so there is “nowhere to hide” but they are giving feedback to you to help you improve, not naming and shaming.’

4.1 Collation of feedback by PRT

Reviewers gave a consistent picture of how teams decided on the key messages for feedback and reports i.e. ongoing discussions through the week based on the evidence collected would generally lead to a shared view on what the feedback should include. The report is generally a shared product with contributions from all team members but authored and drawn together by the lead/s.

Challenges encountered included:

- Finding strengths can sometimes be difficult but it’s very important to do so;
- Sometimes as leader it is necessary to steer team members away from being overly-critical;
- Keeping team members on track to focus on the KLOEs rather than other areas of interest.

Time limits can be a problem. ‘The process and tight timescales can sometimes drive you to finish too quickly. The PRT are often bombarded with information whilst there and may need more time to think about it. It’s better to give provisional findings and then come back later with the more detailed report.’ For example, one team gave brief headlines only at the feedback meeting and then went back 3 weeks later to present to the Management Board once the report was written.

4.2 Dialogue and negotiation over feedback

Host YOTs and reviewers both raised the issue of negotiation over the feedback. For example, ‘people are honest in what they say in interviews. The challenge can be in how to present that in a format that works. Senior managers will read the report and sometimes don’t want certain messages to come across – needs a process of negotiation.’ One reviewer described a situation in which the DCS (the review sponsor) asked the night before the presentation for certain points to be emphasised. The co-leads had to work out an appropriate balance between those requests and what needed to be said.

Sometimes it is YOT staff requesting amendments. In one case, some staff felt that the PRT hadn’t fully understood the complexities of a difficult partnership and that this had led to an imbalance in the feedback. ‘I raised this at the feedback meeting and asked if the report could include information on how children’s services could improve its relationship with the YOT but nothing was included.’

4.3 Communicating feedback

All YOT staff interviewed felt that that there had been good communication over the feedback, mainly through team meetings. In one area, information was provided on the staff intranet and was still available a year after the review for staff to refer back to. One YOT commented on how helpful it was that the PRT left their presentation slides with the team as they could use these as a basis for discussions whilst waiting for the final report to come through.

There was more of a mixed picture in relation to management board attendance at the feedback meetings, with several YOTs commenting on the disappointing turn-out from partner organisations. One suggested that partners just didn’t ‘get it’ and that this was partly linked to a general lack of a ‘peer review culture’ in that area.

In addition to the formal channels of the presentation and report, reviewers also noted the value of 'end of day conversations which supported more candid feedback'. If issues came up which were not really in scope for the YJPR, this was dealt with through these daily conversations which could alert the YOT manager to a particular problem, but it wouldn't be formally referenced in the feedback.

Giving feedback could be difficult when YOTs were essentially looking for affirmation of their work. 'I've been in YOTs that they've just definitely want to show a rosy picture. There's one in particular they just wanted to show how brilliant they were. There was lots of really good stuff we saw there.... but there's always room for improvement isn't there? But I'm not sure they particularly wanted to hear that... trickier with a Board who were expecting to hear how brilliant they were'. This links back to the challenge of getting the scoping right in the early stages to ensure appropriate expectations. One reviewer commented that they can only relay 'as much as people are able to hear...quite a difficult process...' and suggested that PRT training could give more attention to how to give feedback to individuals.

4.4 Reactions to the feedback

One YOT suggested that their managers would have found it easier to take criticism from inspectors rather than from their peers. Overall, however, there was a sense that the PRTs' own experience of youth justice made people more open to receiving their feedback. YOTs generally felt there was a good balance in the feedback between the identified strengths and areas for improvement and that it was presented in a constructive way. 'The feedback identified a lot we could move forward on, there was no shame with that and there was no judgement with regard to those bits.'

In some cases, a benefit of the feedback was in confirming the YOT's own perceptions, 'I don't think they told us anything we didn't already know...but that was fine...because it reinforced our understanding and they did give us fresh ideas about how to approach certain areas'. Even where there were differences of opinion, there was still appreciation for the way in which the process was carried out, 'even though I didn't agree with everything they identified, there was no 'side' to that....and doesn't take away from the fact it was a genuine piece of work and constructive process'.

There were criticisms also. One manager commented that the feedback had been too heavily influenced by one of the reviewers who was 'very into this particular topic' and 'lots of the recommendations seemed to reflect her/his expertise in that area'. Another manager explained that one of the key findings from their review had been that there were still problems in areas which the YOT thought they had already dealt with. The review was helpful in showing that the policies which had been put in place weren't really being used in practice. However, the feedback came across as being 'overly-criticising' and didn't recognise the efforts that the YOT had already made. It was suggested that PRTs should be careful about assuming that a YOT is unaware of a problem or hasn't previously tried to address it. There was a suggestion from one YOT that PRT members may have had a 'bias towards their fellow senior managers' and that they were so respectful of each other that there was a reluctance to challenge or rock the boat.

One member of a management board commented that the feedback was very good and helpful but could have been improved further by including some more examples of good practice, for example, '...we recommend you look at this YOT or that way of doing 'things''.

4.5 Reports

YOTs were generally happy with the reports and there were no surprises in the findings because the feedback had already been discussed with them. Reviewers noted that some teams just accept the draft report as it is. Others requested small changes to the wording or recommendations, however, none to the extent that impacted on the key findings.

There were some problems. One interviewee felt that the report didn't accurately reflect the time limitations of the review. 'How realistic is it that they can really identify the most important things in such a short time? Something will inevitably get missed...need to be honest about its limitations. It's not a thorough assessment but sometimes the report presents the recommendations as if they were based on a thorough assessment.' Another manager commented on the need to 'take it for what it is...recommendations are just recommendations...not like an inspection'.

There was concern from one YOT that the report looked as if it had been 'written by committee' in that different team members writing about specific KLOEs all had different styles and there was a lack of internal consistency. The absence of any reference to the YOT's self-assessment in the feedback or report was also highlighted. In another YOT there was concern about the language or terminology used '...the final reports side of things a bit lacking there for me...some of the slides that we got back and some of the language that was in I think that it kind of missed or didn't help us or wouldn't have helped us if we hadn't challenged it...certainly around some of the partnership discussion...knowing the local context would have been useful...there were some kind of generic terms used that some of our partners may have felt aggrieved about.'

Examining the reports more broadly, our review of documentation showed significant differences in report length, the level of detail and the style of presentation. From a sample of 12 reports, the 'detailed findings' section (i.e. excluding contents, acknowledgments, background pages) varied between 6 and 15 pages. Some reports had an executive summary and others did not. There were noticeable differences in how the recommendations were presented. In some there was a discussion of areas for consideration and then bullet point recommendations. In others each recommendation was followed by information and discussion about why this was an area that needed to be addressed.

5. Key Findings: Impact of Peer Review

This section considers two key questions: i) what specific changes have taken place in host YOTs following YJPR, and ii) what is the wider impact of YJPR on youth justice services?

5.1 Impact on the practice of host YOTs

Given the different contexts in which YOTs operate, and the locally determined choice of KLOES, we would expect to see a range of different outcomes and impacts from YJPR. As one PRT member noted, 'the type of actions taken will depend on where the YOT 'is' at the point of the PR. Some are in the dark and need direction...others have a good idea what to do next but want a second opinion to support their plans'. In analysing impact, there are other factors which make it difficult to determine the cause of some changes. One practitioner noted that the organisational and staffing changes that had occurred since the review 'muddy the waters' and make it difficult to say exactly how YJPR impacted the service. Nevertheless, all the participating YOTs identified some specific ways in which YJPR made a difference. These include a mixture of indirect/soft outcomes and direct outcomes/deliberate actions, such as:

Confidence and staff morale

For example, one YOT described how the YJPR 'highlighted the good practice, resilience and passion of the staff' and this was extremely helpful for staff who had previously felt their Board did not fully appreciate what they were doing. Another explained how the YJPR 'helped long-standing members of staff who had previously been through a negative inspection.'

Cultural changes

Examples here included improved communication between staff team and Management Board; improved the confidence and motivation of the YOT to take part in other activities involving external scrutiny (university-led research, a 'quality mark' scheme); introduction of new training on different issues; reducing 'professional barriers' between staff from different disciplines.

Specific areas of practice

Examples included reaching a consensus on how to manage a challenging issue; a change in focus (for example, from largely process-driven to thinking more about the needs of individual young people); more creative thinking (for example, on how to divert young people away from the criminal justice system); and idea forming (for example, how the YOT might work effectively with other local services)

Action plans

YOTs either created specific action plans or included targets arising from the YJPR in their existing business plan. One of the areas included a deadline for when they would report back to their Board on progress.

Organisational changes

One YOT, for example, used the findings from the YJPR to inform a restructuring process. This led to significant changes in team structures and roles, including a change in how cases were allocated within and across teams.

Management/governance changes

These included improved induction process for Board members and changes to the Board's terms of reference. In one area, the Management Board is being completely restructured and reconstituted following the YJPR (to provide more strategic focus and ensure key partners have more ownership). In another a new (independent) Chair of Management Board was appointed following YJPR recommendations.

Impact Example: One YOT manager identified the following examples of some of the actions being taken in their YOT following a YJPR, looking at the process to review orders, YROs in particular:

- ✓ Put in place a new system for getting our assessments completed on time
- ✓ Now Quality Assuring cases more regularly
- ✓ Set up a participation group looking at how we can involve young people in giving their feedback on the Service so that we can engage in a better way
- ✓ Making sure that case management supervision of cases is recorded on the case management system to ensure 'that thumbprint of management overview'

In one YOT we found significant differences of opinion regarding impact. For example, a member of YOT staff suggested that the management board hadn't taken the YJPR seriously because (unlike inspection) it was voluntary. The Chair of the Board, however, took the opposite view and thought that the Board had responded meaningfully and taken the recommendations seriously. There were also differences of opinion about the impact of YJPR on the YOT's risk management work with one respondent saying it had made no difference and another suggesting it had led to significant progress.

There were clear examples of impact being lost or weakened due to:

- Budget cuts and reduced staff numbers;
- Key personnel being absent through illness;
- Organisational restructuring.

Such developments led to loss of knowledge and/or loss of momentum in implementing the action plans.

Interviews with reviewers highlighted that there is a gap in the YJPR process when it came to impact. One reviewer explained how it needed to be given more priority given 'the time and resources spent on the process'. S/he went on to say: 'if it was an inspection there would be an action plan afterwards and more accountability...it's not an inspection but should still give proper thought to what the actions will be.'

The lack of a formal follow up process increases the potential for actions to be put off, ignored or lost through organisational changes. 'There needs to be more evidence about organisational impact'. Suggestions for addressing this problem included:

- After 6 months the host YOT writes a couple of pages to summarise what action has been taken
- Have a follow up visit from 1 or 2 PRT members 9 months later (6 months is too soon and 1 year feels too long) to meet with key players and challenge them e.g. we suggested x, what have you done about it? This could reinvigorate the process if action plans have stalled.

5.2 Wider impact on Youth Justice services

'I've thoroughly enjoyed my experiences as a peer reviewer, and I would highly recommend it to any YOT manager. I feel the opportunities afforded to me...greatly helped my development as a manager and offered me the chance to develop networks with managers from all over the country.' (YOT Operational/Team Manager)

PRT members taking knowledge back to their own areas

All of the PRT interviewees emphasised how much they benefited from the process in terms of professional development and seeing examples of good practice in the host YOTs. They gave examples of ideas they took back to their own areas including a system for dealing with out of court disposals and the innovative work of a Speech and Language Therapist. As one reviewer explained: 'PR is intense but generates plenty of material you can use in your own setting.'

Responses from the on-line survey further evidenced these benefits. One respondent, a reviewer, stated 'The peer reviews have provided excellent opportunities for development and sharing learning across services.' Another highlighted how the opportunities afforded as a reviewer and peer review leader 'greatly helped [their] development as a manager' as well as 'the chance to develop networks with managers from all over the country'.

Feedback to PRT members on their effectiveness

YOTs are not currently required or expected to provide any feedback to the PRT, but reviewers frequently said that they would like to know more about the impact of a review. The lack of feedback is not therefore a criticism of host YOTs, as this is not part of the current YJPR framework, but it highlights an area for consideration for future development.

Reviewers said that typically they only had anecdotal information about the effectiveness of the YJPRs they have completed and would like to know more about the impact. YJPR is a significant investment of time and reviewers want to know what the 'legacy' will be. 'Such a clear gap to not go back to the Area...without doubt the biggest missing part of the process...I think if you ask any Peer Review Team - they would have preferred to have had this. Makes the process a lot more valid. We received some great feedback initially (e.g. directly after review from Area, positive feedback about value of the process and feedback)...but nothing [later]'.

There is a significant gap between reviewers' lack of information and YOTs' perceptions of the effect of YJ PR. For example, one reviewer stated: 'I don't know if we had a positive impact or not' whereas one of the staff from that particular host YOT stated that, one year on from the review, 'there has been learning from the process and actions we are still doing'.

The suggestion of a follow up visit after a review was noted in [Section 5.1](#). This could additionally contribute to the 'cycle of learning'. It would give PRT members feedback about the effectiveness of their advice e.g. the host YOT may say that 'you recommended X, but we have tried that, and it hasn't worked in this context for these reasons'.

Recommending PR to others

All survey respondents and interviewees agreed that they would recommend PR to other services. One reviewer shared an anecdote about going back to their Head of Service after being involved in a YJPR and asking about the possibility of doing one in their Area and she said you could almost see the 'fear' but 'The more people who understand the benefits, the better, there's so much to learn from it...'.

Sharing the learning from PR more widely

Many YOTs are dealing with similar issues and could benefit from seeing the lessons learned from the YJPRs completed so far. Currently, however, completion of feedback forms after a review seems to be rather sporadic and there is no means to capture any learning points from these. The process 'needs investment in capturing impact and sharing learning. To maintain credibility and 'sell' the model back to the sector you need evidence of its usefulness'. Several reviewers commented on how there needs to be some coordinated analysis of data emerging from YJPRs that can then be shared more widely with YOTs. Until now there has been no capacity to do this, but it would be an important part of promoting the value of YJPR. If, as suggested above, host YOTs were expected to provide a written update on actions taken 6 months after a review, these reports – suitably anonymised – could contribute to a bank of evidence.

6. Conclusions

*'we caused all this work for ourselves, but the results outweighed that...
it's a good learning experience for everybody'* (YOT manager)

The findings from this evaluation are broadly similar to those of research in other sectors, namely that the YJPR process is well received and seen to be helpful but there is more to be done to maximise impact and shared learning.

The 'critical friend' concept at the heart of YJPR presents a challenge for all involved i.e. how to achieve an appropriate balance of being rigorous and challenging whilst also being informal and supportive. Feedback from host YOTs suggests that there were some examples of this not always being achieved, in one case because reviewers were suspected of not being challenging enough to other senior managers and in another because it initially felt too heavy-handed and like an inspection. Overall, however, the majority of respondents felt that the balance was generally about right.

The findings described above have highlighted many positive aspects of the process. In drawing all the information together, there are four areas that stand out as being critical to YJPR.

i) The quality of the YJPR teams

There was high praise from YOTs for the expertise of the reviewers. The mix of skills and experience amongst teams, and the matching of reviewers to fit the circumstances of a particular review (wherever feasible) were all highly valued.

ii) The cycle of learning and opportunities for networking

PR facilitates the sharing of good practice between different areas and there was strong evidence of the benefits from a 'networking' perspective at senior manager level. Host YOTs and reviewers both commented frequently on the opportunities for mutual learning. Host YOTs benefited from having input from reviewers from a range of different services and there was a potential multiplier effect of those reviewers then taking examples of good practice back to 4-6 other areas.

iii) The improvement focused, non-shaming approach

Staff commented that the feedback was welcome because, although it pointed out areas for improvement, it was done in a non-judgemental way. The review can be demanding, but still a safe place to explore and air important questions.

iv) The facilitator role is pivotal to the success of YJPR

This was evident across all stages of the process: in the initial stages advising on scope; matching reviewers to appropriate YOTs; able to act as a 'mediator' on site where issues arise; supportive of Peer Review Team as well as receiving YOT; a point of contact to keep in check everyone's understanding of what the process is all about.

Each of the 5 YOTs interviewed could identify specific changes that had occurred as a result of the PR. These covered a range of cultural, organisational, strategic and practice issues, similar to the experiences noted in evaluations in other sectors. There is significant potential for the impact to be weakened or lost, however, due to: i) the current lack of any follow-up after reviews; ii) the limited circulation of final reports which may limit knowledge of what actions should be taken; and iii) the effects of staffing changes, restructures or funding cuts. The challenge is to find a way to add more robustness to this aspect of YJPR without losing the benefits of a flexible, locally owned process.

All of the respondents agreed that they would recommend YJPR to other services, albeit with some suggestions for improvements. As one reviewer commented, however, ‘the process currently relies on the goodwill of a group of people who are committed to the process. But, if this is meant to be a key part of how the sector improves then we can’t ‘cheat’ (e.g. being too informal or not spending enough). This needs to be done properly with more structure and admin support – we need to ‘professionalise.’”

7. Recommendations

In looking at how the process could be developed and ‘future-proofed’, the evaluation highlights the following key areas for consideration by the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership (YJSIP) Programme Board.

7.1 Framework

YJPR is viewed positively by those who have experienced it and it reflects good practice evidenced in similar processes in other sectors. **It should therefore continue to be a sector-led approach, with consideration given to how best to provide the resources required to develop the process further and strengthen its impact.**

7.2 Communication

To consider developing a communications strategy designed to encourage greater engagement with YJPR amongst YOTs across England & Wales.

For example:

- Providing further clarification for YOTs on where YJPR fits within the broader framework of improvement activity
- Building on the enthusiasm evidenced in this evaluation e.g. provide brief case studies and/or short video clips on a web page with YOT staff explaining the impact of a review on their service and/or reviewers articulating the benefits that flow from their involvement in YJPRs
- Ensuring publicity material is as clear as possible about YJPR being a useful tool for any service, not a process only intended for underperforming YOTs

Any communication strategy should be coherent and consistent in its messaging. It should also be multi-faceted to reflect, as far as is feasible, the differences in local arrangements and staffing structures across YOTs. For example, not all YOTs are members of the Association of the YOT Managers (AYM), so any marketing via this channel will need to be complemented with marketing activity designed to target YOTs that sit outside the AYM.

7.3 KLOEs

To revisit and refresh the training and guidance, particularly as it relates to formulating Key Lines of Enquiry.

For example:

- Clarification of whether YJPR should focus predominantly on strategic/governance issues or whether all three of the main themes currently listed in the guidance have equal weight
- More support for reviewers in setting more specific KLOEs, perhaps incorporating good practice examples
- Updating guidance on KLOEs to encourage YOTs to consider issues linked to equality and diversity

7.4 Process

To reflect on suggestions for incorporating some minor adjustments to the process as highlighted in this evaluation, particularly those that may ease the time pressure for reviewers.

For example:

- Build in a mechanism via which YOTs who are considering or preparing for YJPR may talk to a team that has already been through the process.
- Consider ways to provide more contextual information for reviewers e.g. a briefing note on the area itself to contextualise the YOT challenges e.g. last inspection, problems with partnerships etc.
- Strengthen the self-assessment stage to i) increase completion rates and ii) enable reviewers to make more use of these to inform their evidence collection
- Consider whether greater consistency in style or length of reports would be beneficial, and if so, design a standard template for completion.
- Consider ways to ease the administrative burden on co-leads

7.5 Impact

To more firmly embed evaluation tools within the process to capture feedback and impact as a matter of course.

For example:

- Amend the Guidance to include more emphasis on completion of feedback forms by both YOTs and reviewers.
- Consider using or adapting the LGA CPC model which involves two questionnaires, one on completion of the review to ascertain initial feedback about the process and peer team, a second 12 months later focused on measures and perceptions of impact.
- Alternatively, explore the feasibility of asking YOTs to provide a short write-up after 6, 9 or 12 months outlining the actions taken following the review.
- Explore options for electronic forms to facilitate ease of completion and support a positive response rate.

7.6 Cycle of learning

To consider ways to promote wider dissemination of the good practice and impact stories encountered as part of the PR process.

For example:

- A workshop involving Peer Review Leads where the discussion lends itself to the development of some form of output that may be fed back to YOTs, e.g. Good Practice Briefings
- Analysis of feedback forms
- Further sharing of good practice/dissemination of anonymised evidence is required from the sector rather than YJB to encourage greater YOT take up of YJPR

Appendix 1: Sector-Led Peer Review: Evidence from Research

Peer Review (PR) is a form of sector-led improvement. At a time when there is now less emphasis on top down performance frameworks (Downe et al, 2014) and more focus on localism, PR has become an important tool for services who need to drive forward ‘their own self-assessment and self-improvement’ (Easton et al: 2). PR has been widely adopted in the local government sector, for example, for its “positive impact on their capacity to take responsibility for their own improvement” (Downe et al, 2014: 3).

The key elements of PR are captured in the following definitions:

- ‘...the structured, managed, and collaborative process whereby reputable others are invited into an organisation to provide feedback and offer guidance on organisational change and improvement’ (Nicolini et al, 2011).
- ‘a review by others of equivalent status or standing, involving one or more elements of an organization being evaluated by someone from outside the organization who understands its operational environment, challenges and opportunities’ (Purcell and Hawtin, 2010: 358)

From these general principles, sectors have developed their own more specific definitions for particular contexts. In Local Government, for example, PR has been described as a process which:

- ‘...involves *engaging with a wide range of people* connected with the Council and bringing to bear highly experienced peers in the relevant services areas, *with the findings delivered immediately*” (Local Government Association (LGA, 2014, 2015: 5) emphasis added).
- ‘...involves a small team of local government officers and councillors spending time at the council as peers to *provide challenge and share learning*’ (LGA, 2018, emphasis added)

There are differences in the implementation of PR between sectors, for example, in terms of who can commission a review, the level of flexibility in determining the key areas of focus and how widely the findings are disseminated. For the purposes of this evaluation, however, we would identify the key principles as follows:

- The activity is voluntary
- The organisation retains full ownership of the process
- The peers are reputed, esteemed and trained
- Both the activity and the feedback are framed in a constructive and supportive way (Nicolini et al, 2011)

It is seen as a process for use by all services, regardless of their perceived level of performance i.e. it is not just for struggling or failing teams but is also useful for high performing services who want to improve further (Downe et al, 2017).

Peer review is therefore clearly different from other performance improvement processes such as inspections, compliance reviews or high performing teams being sent in to improve failing areas. Evidence suggests that it is important for services to understand why PR is distinctive, but also to see where it fits as one element within a broader coherent framework for practice improvement. For example, in relation to other regulatory tools, it has been suggested that ‘peer review should add value to these tools by providing protected space in which those being reviewed can discuss and improve their performance’ (Butterfield et al, 2012: 17).

Research in other sectors had identified a range of reasons why organisations undertake a peer review. These include: a means of capacity building; a form of governance scrutiny; a self-evaluation tool; to think about strengths and areas for improvement and the opportunities and barriers to making progress; to help prepare for future inspections; to help prioritise improvement activity; raise levels of self-awareness; enable benchmarking; as a means of securing performance improvement and enhanced management (Purcell and Hawtin, 2010). Awareness of the different motivations for PR is important as it will affect people's expectations of, and commitment to, the process.

One of the key benefits of a sector-led or peer-led approach is the 'greater legitimacy' they offer compared to programmes run by external organisations. Those offering suggestions for improvement are perceived as having a grounding in the sector and, in turn, credibility. This facilitates the open sharing of experiences and increases the potential for guidance and challenge that resonates with those under review (Institute for Government, 2016).

Evaluations of Peer Reviews in other sectors have also highlighted the benefits of such programmes for the Peer Reviewers themselves. Humphries (2011: 91), for example, reporting on findings from a pilot programme of peer reviews of adult safeguarding arrangements, noted the 'extensive learning' peers received from 'their engagement in the process'. Other strengths of the process identified in previous research include flexibility and responsiveness to local issues, the commitment to identifying strengths, and the focus on problem-solving / suggesting areas for improvement (Easton et al). In a study of Peer Challenge in the education sector, White et al (2015) noted additional benefits including the value of staff networking with colleagues in other areas and 'the opportunity for staff to undertake a self-assessment exercise and to then take the feedback and work it into their wider improvement journey'.

Weaknesses of the PR process highlighted in the literature include a concern that 'peer review teams are not always particularly critical, making judgments based on what they are told (as they spend a limited time with "selected discussants", and seeing relatively little'. Reviewers may sometimes be 'fearful of being too critical' (Purcell and Hawtin, 2010), the process can look 'too cosy' (Easton et al 2012:15) or there may be a danger of collusion (Nicolini et al, 2011). A study in the health sector revealed some concerns that 'internal governance processes would not be strong enough to drive change without the reinforcement of "transparency"' (Butterfield et al, 2012), i.e. that without the pressure and accountability that comes from publishing findings, the impact of the review will be diminished. Butterfield et al also referred to 'a concern that where poor practice is identified there is insufficient post-review corrective action'. In their study of peer review in Local Government, Easton et al noted a concern that 'while learning from within the sector is useful...also need to be open to, and aware of, lessons that could be learned from other sectors or organisations.'

Nicolini et al (2011) note that in any form of review or improvement programme, organisational energy can either be directed towards learning and development or towards counter-productive activity such as resistance to data collection and hiding information. Factors which make it more likely that energy will be used constructively include the extent to which people are directly involved in data collection, how they perceive the accuracy and relevance of the data, and their expectations of how the data will be used. A PR process in which staff feel appropriately involved and where there is confidence that the findings will be taken seriously by senior management has the potential therefore to help direct organisational energy and resources towards further improvement.

The experience and integrity of the Reviewers is regularly noted in the literature as being critical. For example, it is suggested that 'peers should be similar enough in understanding, context and experience that they can understand each other, yet dissimilar enough so that their experiences and ideas are unique, giving potential for novel exchange' (Wren, 2004 cited in Purcell and Hawkins, 2010).

Research highlights a range of other contributory factors for the success of PR including:

- Pre-visit dialogue and communication
- Having clearly defined goals, a focused level of enquiry and clear intended outcomes
- Effective preparation – from the hosts and reviewers
- Recommendations which are specific enough to be put into practice, enable the host service to prioritise actions, and are clearly addressed to a specific person or group with responsibility for implementation

In terms of impact, evidence from research on the Corporate Peer Challenge process in local government suggests that it can make a difference in five main areas (Downe et al 2017).

- Providing reassurance
- Improving external reputation
- Behaviour change
- Organisational change
- Service transformation and financial sustainability

White et al (2015) concluded that the Peer Challenge Programme in education contributed to 'improvement journeys' in two key areas:

- Informing strategic changes
- Restructuring or redesigning elements of the systems or services provided to children and young people

Appendix 2: Youth Justice Peer Review

The Youth Justice Peer Review (YJPR) programme was developed in partnership between the sector² and the YJB as part of the new approach to youth justice oversight and developing accountability to local authorities.

The purpose of YJPR is to help a Youth Offending Team (YOT), and its partners, identify their strengths and highlight areas for potential improvement. It is intended as a 'supportive yet challenging process'. Guidance for YOTs on makes it very clear that YJPR is not an inspection. The review is undertaken at the request of the YOT partnership and the outcomes are for the partnership to act on as they see fit.

A team of Peer Reviewers (PRs) comprising senior staff from other Youth Offending Services carry out the YJPRs. All reviewers complete training in advance. Each Peer Review Team (PRT) is headed by a Team Leader (or Co-leads) and, as far as is feasible, the members of each PRT are selected to provide an appropriate mix of skills and experience to match the focus of the review in question. There are five stages to the process:

Stage 1: Pre-review

Prior to a YOT making a request for Peer Review, they will need to seek the agreement and support of the YOT Manager and Management Board. Initial discussions need to clarify what the YOT wants to find out from the review and what the main areas of focus will be.

The YJPR is built around a set of hypotheses or theories to be tested, known as the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs). YJPR Guidance for PRTs and YOTs offers some suggested KLOEs. These are grouped into three main themes with modules within each:

1) *Outcomes and Performance*

- Impact Indicators
- Direction of travel
- Local targets and initiative

2) *Governance, Partnerships and Resource Themes*

- Vision, priority and strategy
- Leadership and YOT Management Board
- Partnerships and working together
- Workforce management and development
- Service efficiency
- Resource management and value for money
- Performance management and reporting

3) *Operational Effectiveness and Good Practice*

- Assessment, planning interventions and supervision
- Access to universal and specialist services
- Reductions in first time entrants to the youth justice system
- Reducing re-offending
- Custody

² This was initially through the Sector-Led Governance Group (SLIGG). Currently, the process is overseen by the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership Programme Board which reports to the executive board of the Association of YOT Managers (AYM).

- Risk of serious harm
- Safeguarding
- Victim and public confidence
- Working with gangs
- Working with girls and young women

The YJPR guidance is clear that this list is not prescriptive. They merely represent areas that YOTs may wish to consider - it is for a YOT to identify the areas to be reviewed that best suit their local conditions. The Guidance states that there may be other KLOEs that YOTs will identify locally.

Stage 2: Scoping for Review

The Lead Reviewers will liaise with the YOT requesting the review to arrange a scoping meeting. This will include the YJPR Facilitator, the PRT Lead, the YOT Review Sponsor and appropriate partners the YOT may wish to involve. The Chair of the Management Board may also be present if the YOT so wishes. The purpose of the meeting is to establish the appropriateness of the review, its particular focus (i.e. the KLOE), dates, practical arrangements and any necessary background information.

The specific roles and responsibilities of the YOT, the PRT and the YJPR Facilitator are set out in the Guidance framework.

Stage 3: Pre-meet

This is an opportunity for the PRT to discuss the scope of the YJPR and the Key Lines of Enquiry. It includes an initial review of the documentation and timetable, with the co-leads then following up any requests for additional information or interview with the YOT Manager. It will also provide a time for the PRT to discuss practicalities and how they will work together.

Stage 4: On Site

The Guidance emphasises that it is vital for the credibility of the review that the PRT establishes a climate of trust in which people feel they can be open and honest. It also highlights the need to ensure that all the information gleaned is absolutely non-attributable to individuals. Interviews should be conducted in an informal manner and with open questions (and the PRT should avoid giving opinions or judgements during the interviews). In the case of statements made by individuals it is important that the interviewers request details of examples and evidence to illustrate the points made – this provides vital evidence for the PRT. The PRT should not at any time act on ‘hearsay’ or unsubstantiated information. All evidence should be triangulated and robust.

A key motivation for peers is the opportunity to learn from others. Peers are encouraged to return to their own YOT/local authority at the end of the process and talk about their experiences. However, in doing so, peers should respect the fact that some of the information the PRT comes across may be sensitive in nature and this must not be used in any way that could undermine the YOT or the integrity of the YJPR process.

Stage 5: Feedback Report

The final phase of the on-site peer review is the feedback presentation. It is the YOT’s choice who to invite to the final presentation meeting, but this would usually include members of the YOT Management Board. It could also include the YOT Management Team and key partners. The report will contain the findings outlined in the presentation with slightly more detail. There will be no new findings in the report that have not been covered in the presentation. The report will then be the property of the YOT and it will be the YOT’s decision as to how they share and utilise this.

Youth Justice Peer Review was first developed in 2011. It is based on the Local Government Association (LGA) model and the two processes share many common features, although there are also some significant differences. Eighteen Peer Reviewers were initially trained in 2011. The first Youth Justice Peer Reviews were conducted in 2012. Since then:

- 118 Peer Reviewers and 31 Peer Review Leaders have been trained.
- 34 Peer Views have been completed.³
- This represents just over one-fifth (22%) of the sector.
- At least one Peer Review has been conducted in each region.
- The Yorkshire and Humber region has the highest rate of YJPRs (over half of all YOTs in this region have received a Peer Review) followed by the South East (42% YOTs reviewed) and North East (27% YOTs have been Peer Reviewed).
- To date, only 7% of YOTs in London have received a Peer Review – representing the lowest rate of Peer Reviews across all regions in England and Wales.

Table 1: Distribution of Youth Justice Peer Reviews across Regions

| YOT Region | No of YOTs | No of Peer Reviews | % of YOTs Reviewed |
|--------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| London | 30 | 2 | 7% |
| East Midlands | 8 | 1 | 13% |
| East | 10 | 2 | 20% |
| West Midlands | 11 | 1 | 9% |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 15 | 9* | 60% |
| North West | 20 | 4 | 20% |
| North East | 11 | 3 | 27% |
| South East | 19 | 8 | 42% |
| South West | 14 | 1 | 7% |
| Wales | 15 | 2 | 13% |
| Total | 153 | 34 | 22% |

* Note: One YOT in this region has been reviewed on two separate occasions, once in 2013, and again in 2018.

³ As at 8th August 2018

Appendix 3: Methods

The Youth Justice Sector Improvement Board (YJSIB) commissioned this evaluation to look at the following four key areas:

1. A critical assessment of the peer-review process
2. A measurement of the impact of the peer-review process
3. A comparison of the process (with other organisational sector led programmes)
4. Recommendations to improve and 'future-proof' the process.

The evaluation adopted a realist approach, that is, it explored the *mechanism* of YJPR (the process) and the *context* (situational factors affecting both the host YOT and the PRT) in order to understand the *outcomes*.

The main data collection methods were as follows:

Literature review

We have looked at studies on approaches to peer review in related sectors such as Local Government, Health, Education, Adult Social Care and third sector organisations.

Documentation review

This includes i) documentation from completed reviews such as application forms, scoping documents, reports and action plans, ii) SLIGG and YJSIP papers and minutes and iii) YJB documentation

Online survey

A short web-based survey was sent to YOTs and Peer Reviewers who had participated in a review since 2015. (This date was selected on the basis that in YOTs where reviews had been completed before 2015, there was likely to have been significant staff turnover and people would less detailed recall of the process.) The survey consisted mostly of closed questions but with a few open questions also to allow for more narrative detail.

A total of 30 responses were received, with 18 of these being from reviewers. The response from YOT staff was disappointing in that only 12 completed the survey.

Interviews

More in-depth interviews were carried out with 10 members of PRTs and with 14 staff from YOTs. A small number of these were face-to-face, but the majority were telephone interviews.

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