

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**05 January 2026**

**YOUNG PEOPLES’ ENGAGEMENT AND JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1. To provide an update in relation to the recent inspection of the Young Peoples’ Engagement and Justice Service and the response to the inspection findings.

**Summary**

- 2. Darlington Young Peoples’ Engagement and Justice Service underwent an Inspection by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prison Services (HMIP) under a new framework introduced in March 2025. Following changes to the Inspection regime and criteria the service was rated 'requires improvement' with gaps in assessment and planning identified, despite strong delivery and victim work.

**Recommendation**

- 3. Members are asked to note the inspection outcome, endorse the attached action plan addressing seven recommendations, and support ongoing monitoring by the Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Board.

**CHRIS BELL**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**

Council Plan	This report is relevant to Children and Young People – supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to inequalities which this report needs to address.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council’s Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	S17 Crime and Disorder

	This report is relevant to Children and Young People – supporting accountability, prevention, and multi-agency collaboration that will further strengthen the overall service.
Wards Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any individual group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers This report is relevant to Children and Young People – specifically supporting children in care and care leavers achieve their potential and further strengthen the overall service.

## MAIN REPORT

4. Darlington Borough Council's Young Peoples' Engagement and Justice Service are a multi-agency service tasked with:
  - a) Working with young people to prevent offending and reoffending whilst also safeguarding them from future harm
  - b) Supporting victims of crime and protecting the public
5. The Service is located within Darlington's People Directorate, it gives a high priority to its statutory duty under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
6. Governance arrangements are the responsibility of the Management Board who hold all statutory partners accountable for meeting requirements within their own areas as well as driving for improved outcomes for young people.
7. Integrated strategic partnership working and clear oversight by the Management Board are critical to the success and effective delivery of Youth Justice Services in Darlington. All HMIP inspection reports and thematic inspections are responded to and escalated to board to ensure any actions are addressed.
8. HMIP, in collaboration with stakeholders from YJ services across the country, along with colleagues from the YJB held several meetings and workstreams to consider and ultimately implement a new inspection framework which began in March 2025.

9. The key components of the change to the framework were to have the child and victims at the forefront, including a stand-alone victim's domain, having a great focus on the service victims, many who are children.
10. HMIP determined that all disposals would be considered, looking at the desistance factors, rather than the order itself ensuring a child centred approach.
11. Darlington Young Peoples Engagement and Justice Service was identified very early on in the programme, with only a handful of inspections taken place at this stage. It involved a week long Inspection including seven Inspectors on site, interviewing case managers, Victim Workers and observing and inspecting two Multi agency meetings alongside a showcase event, showing inspectors the work of the reparation team.
12. The inspection outcome was 'requires improvement', which was a disappointment for all given the previous 'outstanding' judgement at the last Inspection in 2021. It must be highlighted that the change in the inspection framework had a significant impact on the outcome, noting that the service was among the first to be inspected under the new regime. The new methodology, including the introduction of a separate domain for victim work, altered how judgements were reached and made direct comparison with previous inspections challenging.
13. The inspection findings were broken down into key domains: work with children (assessment, planning, implementation, and delivery) and work with victims. The service was rated 'good' for implementation and delivery with children and for victim work, but 'requires improvement' for assessment and planning. Whilst the delivery and outcomes for children were strong, the documentation and analysis underpinning assessment and planning needed strengthening.
14. The inspection also identified gaps in management oversight, particularly due to a period without a team manager, though improvements were already evident by the time of the inspection. This must be taken into consideration given the previous Team Manager had been in post for over twenty years. It was however acknowledged by HMIP that the inspection was a snapshot covering a three month period, and that recent improvements were not fully captured.
15. In response, an action plan has been developed to address the seven inspection recommendations. Three recommendations focused on improving assessment and planning, management oversight, and the out of court disposal process. Four recommendations related to victim work, including developing a victim policy, improving strategic oversight, enhancing victim consent processes, and strengthening the victim offer by including the voice of victims.
16. The action plan has included measures such as ongoing management oversight, communication strategies, awareness training, quarterly reviews, and improvements in data collection and analysis. The Youth Justice Strategic Partnership Board has agreed to monitor progress through regular updates and thematic reporting, with a commitment to transparency and partnership working.
17. HMIP require a copy of the action plan to ensure progress on the recommendations are made. We have received a response from the Lead Inspector indicating.

*“The plan is a thorough and detailed response to the inspection findings and recommendations, and it is good to see the amount of progress that has been made already. I am sure that with the oversight of the management team and the commitment of the board and staff, this will continue”.*