

Police and Crime Committee – 8 January 2015**Transcript of Item 5 - Youth Reoffending and Resettlement: Part A**

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We will move on to our main item today and this is the start of our investigation into youth reoffending and resettlement in London. This is the first of two sessions that we have, following which we hope to make some recommendations to the Mayor and to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) as to how they can improve this service in London.

I am going to start the questions but, before I do, perhaps I could ask our very distinguished guests today if they could just briefly say their names and which organisation they are representing. Perhaps I can start with you, Dr Bateman?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I am Tim Bateman. I work for the University of Bedfordshire but I am also part of a partnership called Beyond Youth Custody, which is focused on developing evidence, best practice and policy in resettlement for young people.

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): Hello. I am Dr Alex Newbury. I am a Senior Lecturer at the University of Brighton in criminology and criminal law. Until Christmas, I worked at Royal Holloway, University of London. I have a particular interest in young people and undertook empirical research with a group in relation to their attitudes to restorative justice and reoffending after receiving referral orders.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Good morning, colleagues. My name is Graham Robb. I have a background as a head teacher and on the Youth Justice Board (YJB) but now as an independent consultant working with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), schools and police, mainly in London but in other parts of the world, on governance and on the development of programmes.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Good morning. My name is Lisa Harvey-Messina. I work for the YJB. Up until Christmas, I was overseeing the London partnerships and YOTs for the board, but I have now taken over for England as well.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. I am going to start, if I may, with a general question to try to set the scene a little bit. Perhaps I could ask this question primarily to Dr Bateman and Dr Newbury. From your research and evidence, what do you believe have been the most striking developments in youth offending in the past decade? What trends have we seen? Perhaps, Dr Bateman, I could start with you.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): The most obvious one is the reduction in the number of young people coming into the system. That is partly a consequence of changing responses by criminal justice agencies to young people's behaviour. Also, I suspect it is consistent with lower levels of offending by young people, which would be consistent with the fact that crime generally is going down as measured by victimisation agencies both here and internationally. That is by far the biggest headline thing, if you want to put it that way.

That means that for those young people who remain within the criminal justice system, they are a different cohort and the challenges are quite different. I think you said at one point in the background brief that the

Ministry of Justice has pointed out that, all things being equal, given that reduction, you would expect reoffending rates to rise. If they do not, something is going quite well.

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): Yes, I would agree that one of the main changes most recently is the change in the emphasis on the young people who are focused upon to be brought into the system. At the outset, under New Labour, there was a significant net-widening and young people were brought into the system for very minor offending. Many of those are now channelled out right from the outset and so it does mean that those who are left in the system have much more significant problems and therefore need a lot more support and help.

The introduction of restorative justice as an approach under referral orders ten years ago, which has now become very established as a first-level response, is a very good one in the way that it gives young people right from the outset a key core worker and an emphasis on the impact on the victim, an emphasis on consequential thinking and a more broad approach to offending than just trying to prevent reoffending but looking at much more wider issues. That is a real step forward that started about ten years ago or slightly earlier and has really taken root.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you for that. Perhaps I can turn to Graham Robb and Lisa Harvey-Messina. Are those developments similar to the picture in London? Is that the same trend we are seeing?

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Yes, absolutely, they are the same. As Tim [Bateman] was saying, there has been a very significant drop in first-time entrants and a huge drop in the number of youngsters in custody. That has opportunities and major challenges. Nationally, I do not have the immediate figure, but we are probably at about a third of the number of young people in custody that we were eight years ago, which is a remarkable achievement.

The other factor in it is that it is not only changes in the criminal justice agencies' actions. The way in which local authorities' services and partners are responding has changed and developed. Some of the very powerful prevention work that has gone on has contributed a bit of the story of the reduction in first-time entrants.

Then, just to echo Alex's [Newbury] comments, I am a member of the Restorative Justice Council and there is now a major move from the Ministry of Justice and in London from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to support further use of restorative justice when it is victim-determined and it is the right time and the right context. Those trends are wholly to be welcomed.

However, coming back to Tim's [Bateman] comment, I am not confident that we will not see continuing significant problems of youth offending. There are continuing challenges that youngsters are facing these days that they did not ten years ago. Cybercrime and all the rest of it is an obvious one, but all the issues about coming across county lines and all of the drug trading that goes on and various aspects of child sexual exploitation and the links there are there. There are numbers of changing challenges which are going to carry on being a major factor for agencies in the years to come.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We might come to that in a little time as well. Lisa?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Just if we are looking specifically at first-time entrants, I totally agree with the amazingly substantial reductions in first-time entrants. For London, the picture is very similar. It is very pleasing to see that the drops have been on a similar trajectory and that the rates are sitting currently at very similar levels. For example, in 2014, the data that we have so far sees the rate per 100,000 young people for London at around 436, I think. It might be

438. Forgive me. We can provide this for you afterwards. That is for London and it is sitting at 426 nationally. We often see quite a difference in rates for London and normally it tends to be worse and more complex, but actually it has been quite similar for London.

However, what we are starting to see now is most definitely a levelling out. It is a case of how can we really go in terms of those levels. The drastic drops are starting to level out. For some boroughs within London, we are starting to see some increases in first-time entrants, but just for some. We are talking probably maybe five or six across London at the moment. The importance now is to understand how out-of-court disposals are being delivered, the consistency around that, the decision-making around that and whether the reoffending rates are still what would be expected and appropriate for those young people.

Historically, three-quarters of the young people who tended to be dealt with at that end, whatever we would like to call those disposals, did not tend to go on to reoffend. However, we are actually now starting to see some increases within that cohort. The important thing is that we understand that. Is it a borough thing? Is it a MPS thing? Is it how partnerships are working together appropriately or inappropriately? We do not know. Certainly that is something that we need to understand.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Is that something that is particular to London or is that nationwide?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): We are seeing some areas bucking the trend, if you like, but that is not surprising because it has gone so low. What we would not like to see is perhaps the increases in reoffending because, again, that cohort should be having the characteristics of low risk and should be able to be dealt with by partnerships appropriately. If we are starting to see reoffending, it is starting to question the decision-making and the interventions with those young people. That is what we need to understand.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Can I just add something, if I may? While it is true that that trajectory in terms of first-time entrants in London has been similar, there are some important differences in the way that the picture looks for London and in terms of the way that the criminal justice system responds. There may be very good reasons for this. I do not know. However, certainly in terms of the headline data, there are on the surface at least some significant differences.

The first is that rates of custody, as measured by the proportion of court convictions that result in a custodial disposal, are higher in London than in most other areas. It may be that you would expect that given the population, but it is certainly a factor to take into account when you are looking at reoffending rates, it seems to me.

The second thing, which is actually a more marked difference with the rest of the country, is that of those young people who come into the system, a much higher proportion in London is prosecuted than elsewhere. If you look at it the other way around, the proportion of children in London who get a pre-court formal disposal - a caution, conditional caution, final warning or reprimand, as they were - the last published figures by the YJB suggest that that was about 13% of children coming into the system. The average across England and Wales is 33%. The rate of prosecution in London for whatever reason is substantially higher than elsewhere. That has an impact on what happens to those young people. It has an impact on the resources available to work with more challenging young people as well because, when you get a conviction, the input of YOTs and other partner agencies is inevitably significantly higher.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): What we are used to doing when we talk about the 'MPS area' is to compare it with most similar forces such as Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. Do you have any data to suggest that those other urban metropolitan areas are different on that latter point that you made?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I have not looked at that. Certainly I understand that there are reasons to be different, but certainly of all the regions, London stands out as being markedly different on that measure in terms of the rate of prosecution. It looks very different from all the other regions.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That then has an effect on disproportionality with regards to ethnicity and --

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): It has all sorts of knock-on effects, really. As I said, one of the things is that it puts greater pressure on agencies to deal with that greater number. You have an equivalent fall in the number of children coming into the system as elsewhere, but it is about how those children who come into the system are dealt with. By comparison with the rest of the country, they are pushed further into the system. They are more likely to be prosecuted and they are more likely to go into custody.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): I do not know whether Graham [Robb] or Lisa has anything.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): It is interesting because there are lots of lines of inquiry at the moment. As I said, in terms of live data, we do not know enough about what is going on.

The other thing to almost muddy the waters in some respects is that we have a lot of young people in London who are being recorded as having no intervention or no support. There is a comprehensive triage system across the MPS. The MPS is unique in terms that it does not follow a community resolution approach across the MPS, whereas across the country it is pursued. That is more a kind of on-the-street resolution where a young person is not processed through the system. However, young people across London receive an assessment or an interview regularly. Often that will be recorded as 'no further input', but actually there is work going on with those young people. Therefore, we have some concerns with the data and what it is telling us because we do not actually know what is going on with those young people in terms of intervention. We do not even know if it is appropriate or not at the moment. It is something we are trying to tackle with the MPS at the moment.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Is that something about the MPS's systems for recording in part?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): It is in a way because, as you were just referring to, you have young people then who are coming into the system who do not appear to have had any intervention. They look like they have entered the system and they are being dealt with quite harshly because they do not have a lot of out-of-court disposals, but actually they have been receiving interventions and they could have been receiving multiple interventions already at the lower levels. We need to unpick that to understand whether that is appropriate or not. It confuses some of the recording, most definitely.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That would be helpful. We might want to look and probe with the MPS and MOPAC about data recording and how that really is happening.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, absolutely.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): You gave some figures earlier on. Do we actually know how many offenders agencies and authorities in London are currently working with, either in custody or out of custody?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes. The data that we have is down to borough level. We know for Camden the cohort of young people they are working with, whether in the community or whether in custody, what type of intervention they are on and the offending rate per level of intervention. We are actually doing a lot of work around exploring the reoffending rates at cohort level at the moment so that we can understand.

A lot of the data you see and that you can see publicly is very dated. The reoffending data is two years old because of the nature of monitoring the cohort, waiting to see if they reoffend, cleaning the data and publishing the data. It is extremely frustrating.

What we are trying to do in the YJB is introduce live tracking so that we can report with MOPAC as well. We have a tracking system where we can say, "This was what Camden was like two years ago and there are still issues of 15-year-old white boys committing burglaries in this area of the borough", for example. Then we can say, "That resonates with the current picture", rather than, "That is not an issue any more". We are trying to move that forward.

It is quite complicated because it is not official data and it has to have a lot of caveats around it. However, yes, we can tell you quite a lot of information down to borough level.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Would you be able to provide us, after the meeting perhaps, with some general data and borough breakdowns for us? Would that be possible, do you think, with those caveats?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, I can do that.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That would be quite helpful for us just to understand. John wants to come in and then Tony [Arbour AM].

John Biggs AM: Yes, thank you. I wanted to ask what I always call a stupid question. On the face of it, this is all very good news with big reductions. Yet, of course, we are politicians and we go to public meetings and people do not tend to come to us unless there are problems. If I were to go to a public meeting and say, "Youth offending is way down in London", they would say, "You must be kidding. You are just being too soft on them". I know we are going to explore this a bit later. "You are being too soft on people. They are just as bad as before. We have epidemics of drug-dealing. My son was beaten up on the way home from school", or whatever.

Are you very clear in a scientific sense that this is a healthy downward trend and that we have not changed the metrics? It would be quite useful for the record for us to be clear about that.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I will have a go. It is very difficult to draw any firm conclusions from official data on crime because those figures are influenced hugely by agency responses. They are influenced hugely by the resources that go into that agency. For example, if you increase resources to the police, you are likely to nick more people. You can have counterintuitive results that are associated with it.

However, our best guess derived from victimisation data, which is not dependent on those things in the same way, shows dramatic reductions across the piece since at least the mid-1990s. Since we know historically and currently that young people are responsible for a significant proportion of crime, if we see substantial reductions in victimisation, then almost certainly part of that is a substantial reduction in youth crime.

In terms of public opinion, what we tend to see is that as things get better, our thresholds for what we find objectionable are influenced as well. There is always something we would like to improve and our confidence goes down. As there is less crime, we become less tolerant about this new form of behaviour. There will always be things that the public will say could be much better. As human beings, we tend to have fairly short-term perspectives that do not necessarily mirror trends.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Can I add to that? One of the things about victimisation surveys - and Tim will put me right - is that I do not think they pick up under-15-year-olds. Is that correct?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): There is now a supplement to the Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Good. That is another reason why historical crime data is quite tricky. One of the trajectories for some young people is that they become involved in crime because they were a victim of crime earlier. If that was not being picked up in initial earlier surveys, it is very difficult to answer your question about the validity of data. It is almost a [Donald] Rumsfeld [former United States Secretary of Defense] question here about the 'known unknowns'.

It is also about reporting systems. How confident are people to report and seek help when they are the victim of harm? I am thinking of young people particularly. Some of the key agencies that have a role in this are schools. Schools do a great deal of work that is in effect crime reduction, crime prevention and dealing with harm through work with police officers, through Safer Schools Partnerships, through restorative justice work and through parenting work. There is a real role in a crime-reduction strategy for what schools should be doing and do around this and we ought to celebrate the extraordinary work of many schools in doing this work.

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): Sorry, can I come in on that? I would really like to second that. When the referral orders and therefore that new system came in under New Labour, there was an enormous amount of net-widening and much of the work that is now done in schools was actually done through the referral orders. A young person who had maybe had a fight in the school playground would then end up on a referral order under an assault, whereas prior to that it would have been dealt with within the school setting. Now that has been brought back into the fold of the school setting and so that has impacted upon the figures.

There is also now a significant amount of hidden crime on the internet in relation to cyberbullying, financial fraud and sexual-type crime which now is quite hidden and yet is more prevalent and does cause a lot of media concern and therefore public concern. Those are quite live issues, too.

Tony Arbour AM: Given that the number of young offenders who receive custodial sentences is falling, what effect do you think that has on young offenders believing that they will not receive a custodial sentence? That applies to all of you, really.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): I would say that within the Board and amongst partners, we would celebrate the fact that we have just literally gone under 1,000 young people across England and Wales, which is the first time that we can recall that it has dropped to such a low point.

I guess on your point in terms of deterrent, it is a difficult one. I do not think that it is a statistic that is particularly bandied around amongst young people in terms that they would see a softer approach being taken to themselves. The important thing is around the robustness of the alternatives to custody and getting a balance of reducing risk and being proactive with the interventions, working with young people's risks and needs to move them forward and that not being seen as 'soft', if you like. It is a really difficult combination.

However, custody has reduced for very positive reasons. The rate of reoffending for young people that come out of custody is still extremely high and still too high, but your point around deterrent is an important one. It is one we are reflecting on at the moment because we have seen the reoffending rates of those in the community starting to creep up and actually go above at some points, certainly in London, those who are coming out of custody. Again, it is understanding and not affirming too many strong opinions from that on what is happening and whether we have the balance of enforcement and supervision correct with that cohort of young people, rather than, "Is it working or is it not working?" We know very well that a period in Feltham has very little impact in any positive way for the majority of young people. For those young people who are going to commit serious and violent crimes, in itself it has not acted as a deterrent.

It is a difficult balance because a member of the public, as you were referring to earlier, would say, "What do you mean the custody rates are going down? That is ridiculous", whereas you have people like us who are saying, "It is fantastic that the custody rates are going down because we can work with young people more proactively". The important thing now is that we do not see those reoffending rates in the community start to go up because that is where public confidence will totally be lost and also amongst partners, including within police as well.

Tony Arbour AM: It is a fact, is it not - which relates back to John Biggs' question - that if someone is in custody, they are not committing crime? Is that right?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): For a few weeks.

Tony Arbour AM: It must be so.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): They probably are, but not on the streets.

Tony Arbour AM: That must be so because they are not in the community. They are in there. You have already alluded to the fact that the reoffending rate for people who have been in custody is not declining at all. In fact, I think you said it is creeping up. Under those circumstances, would it not be better if there were more custodial sentences?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): The reoffending rate of those young people coming out of custody has crept down to a point. We were over 70% and at nearly 75% at one point. It has now started to creep down almost below - for London, anyway - 70%. We have seen some movement on that.

There were previous points we were making about that. Those young people who now go into - let us say - Feltham are those young people who are the most damaged, the most violent, the most disenfranchised from

society. They are most definitely the ones who are going to be at most risk of reoffending. It is always going to be very difficult to influence those young people or those 200, say, across London at any one time - London boys, predominantly - who are in custody because they have the most entrenched and complex behaviours and we have to respond to those.

If we extend that cohort and if we open up the gates to more young people, we are just going to see those young people more damaged by going into custody. On Feltham itself, one of my colleagues said it is like taking an educational Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and making it go to ten times for the young people in there in terms of their needs and the damage they experience with the gangs and the segregation. We are in the process of looking at potentially having police officers working in Feltham at the moment to try to bring some of the levels of serious youth violence in there down. They are not offending on the streets; they are offending in custody against each other. You might not see that in terms of rates. It is about taking the most damaged cohort and putting them in a condensed area. It does not work.

Tony Arbour AM: I am not advocating that people should go to a place like Feltham where all these terrible things happen. I am merely making the point that if people are in custody, they are not committing crimes against the public.

Can I perhaps extend the question a little on that? It is a fact, is it not, that before a - I am afraid I still think of them as 'juveniles' - youth offender is committed to custody, the chances are that he - and I say 'he' but of course I mean 'he or she' - will have had very many contacts with the criminal justice system and getting non-custodial sentences of one kind or another, probably into double figures, before they actually are in custody? That goes back to the previous point I made in my first question. The reason that custody rates are falling is because people are being given more opportunities to have non-custodial sentences and therefore the ones who do get custodial sentences clearly are the recidivists.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): I am not so sure that it is that straightforward. You are suggesting a shift in the cohort. The overall pot, if you like, or the number of young people has reduced. It is about the proportion of those young people whom we do see going through the system going into custody. I would say that we should be hopeful that those young people who go into custody are those who pose the most risk of reoffending or risk of serious harm to others and that is the appropriate place for them to be for a period of time based on the seriousness of their offending.

What we need to do is question why they are still coming out and reoffending in the way that they do. Is it about the individual's behaviour? Is it to do with their education? Is it to do with their accommodation? Is it to do with their family? Across London, as partners, we need to work together to understand where those gaps are and how we can do better. It is coming down, but we do need to work in a better way.

Equally, on your point about recidivism, now we need to not just focus on those young people who are coming out of custody because we are talking about roughly 200, which is a very small proportion. They are the ones who hit all the headlines but it is a small proportion. We need to look at the thousands of young people who are in the community and whether they are getting appropriate intervention as well so that we then do not get them triggering and filtering into custody and, as you say, receiving multiple orders.

The actual career criminal is rare. We do not get a lot of young people who are prolific offenders. They tend to make up a small number of any borough's cohort at any one time. Depending on whether we are talking about Croydon or Kingston, 3% to 5% of their cohorts are going to be the ones who are reoffending the most, a handful of children and young people at one time. Again, unfortunately, it is those who hit the headlines who create the images.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I would like to ask about reoffending, although asking any sort of data question now seems completely pointless after what you have told us. Tim, you said something about how - and I am paraphrasing - we are harder on our children here in London. Actually --

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I was saying the data suggests the response is different. It may be indicative of that, yes.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): You also said that it actually puts more stress on the system.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): The more we punish people, actually, the more effort it is for us and the more it costs.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes. What we have seen in tandem with the fall in children coming into the criminal justice system, as you might expect given other developments, is a substantial reduction in resources that have gone to YOTs and their partners. That has inevitably put some stress and strain on the system. In fact, certainly if the YJB data is correct, actually, the decline in resources is less than the decline in numbers of staffing. The decline in the number of staff working in YOTs over the past five or six years has been in the region of 50%. That is a big fall in the number of people available to work with young people both in custody and in the community.

If you have a higher proportion of children coming into the system who have court orders, which require higher levels of intervention, then you put greater strain on that system. Without being able to look in detail at the nature of the backgrounds of those children and the offences they commit, whether it is appropriate that they are sent to court and prosecuted by comparison with other areas I am not in a position to say. However, were all things equal and you had in London a rate of prosecution equivalent to elsewhere, then workloads for YOTs and the amount of capacity that YOTs would have to work with those young people committing more serious and more persistent offences would be greater.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. Graham, you wanted to come in?

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): I have a couple of reflections on the discussion so far. Tim is quite right about the change in YOTs, but it is partly because jobs are being done with a 'youth offending' label by other members of local authority teams now. They are called different things. They are not called 'YOTs'. I am sorry about this, but it is really hard to get a handle on the data about YOTs now. Who are they? Some of them are generic social workers. Some of them are probation officers in different forms. The model has changed and developed.

Can I go back also to the point that Mr Arbour was raising? For the 200 young people, you look at that number, but we have to segment it. Within that - and you will put me right on this, Lisa - there are probably about 20 to 30 young people who are on very long-term sentences. They are going to be in prison for numbers of years, starting in juvenile and going to adult. Clearly, one of the purposes of the justice system is public protection. It is not just the punishment function. Therefore, just to pick up on the point you were making, what the independent judiciary would say in the discussions I have had - particularly at Highbury Corner - is that when there is a public protection issue, they are absolutely clear that a custodial sentence is the right one that they will use.

That is partly an answer to your question, Ms Jones, about the system pressures. This is not just about the criminal justice system. Some of those youngsters on the long-term placements actually need serious mental health interventions. There are still significant system disconnects between the justice system and the mental health system, let alone other bits of the patchwork. I see some really interesting mental health work going on. There is an organisation called MAC-UK, for example, doing on-street mental health interventions that actually are stopping youngsters needing to be involved in the criminal justice system. It is a really complex story and I am sorry that I am making it muddier for you.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): No, I think most of us around this table think that prevention is better than punishment and that is where we would like to see more resources going.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Can I just finesse that? There is a huge overlap between what we might describe as 'prevention' and 'reducing reoffending'.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I was just going to come on to reoffending, actually. I would like to ask about some figures because data from the Ministry of Justice suggests that youth reoffending in London is reducing, which I think you said earlier, Lisa.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Is that the same as the national picture?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, it is. Sorry, my laptop is about to die on me.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Is somebody feeding you messages to --

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): No. I wish. We do not get that good IT to work with. I do not even have a plug that fits! It is not that good and so I will tell you quickly.

We measure reoffending in terms of a rate. Let me just quickly explain that to you. There is a binary rate and a frequency rate. The binary rate measures the proportion of young people who reoffend and that is over a 12-month period. We follow a cohort or a sector of young people and that is how we measure it. The frequency rate is how many times those young people reoffend within that cohort. Across the different levels of intervention, we are seeing different changes in the rates. In order for us to understand why that might be happening, we have to delve down to a local and an individual young person level, really, to understand. Is every YOT partnership doing the best that it can be doing with that young person?

However, for London, as I was saying, in terms of high-level rates, first-time entrants are reducing on a par if not slightly better, but one could argue that the rates to start with were higher. You have to be careful what you take from those figures.

For custody, I was quite surprised myself, actually. Overseeing London YOTs, I am used to being told, "You are the worst in the country", to be honest with you. However, we are seeing for resettlement and those young people coming out that we are slightly better in London than the rest of the country.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Perhaps they leave and go and offend elsewhere.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Perhaps they do. We do export some young people. My colleagues in the southeast like to tell me that we export young people.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): This is the problem with humans. It is incredibly difficult because all the interactions and so on are so --

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes. The problem we have, as I said, is with those who are on community orders. The rates for London are higher. They are stubborn. It is common across England and Wales, but for London it is slightly higher. It suggests that we need to keep our eye on those young people and not just look at those young people who are coming out of custody but look at those who are in the community.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I wanted to ask Alex [Newbury] and Tim, actually. MOPAC suggests that some community disposal groups are actually showing higher reoffending rates than those in custody. I am just curious about what your reaction to that is. Is that trend new?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes, it is new.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I would have expected the opposite.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes, traditionally and elsewhere, that is what you find. The figures as currently presented appear to show something that is quite anomalous in terms of trends over time and it is different from what we see elsewhere.

How then to explain that is a big question, I guess, but I doubt that it has very much to do with what happens in London because most young people who go into custody from London go outside of London to serve their sentence. My guess will be that you will see those figures changing. That would be my guess about that.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, a lot of them did go outside of London but because we have decommissioned so many institutions, actually, the majority of young London boys go to Cookham Wood or Feltham. For the majority, it is Feltham. They were going out further to Hindley, etc..

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Alex, do you have a reaction to that?

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): It is a slightly lateral reaction, but I do wonder whether reoffending rates are the best measure of success anyway. I do not know if that is something you want to come on to but, as we have obviously been discussing, the statistics are very difficult to pin down. To some extent, reoffending as a measure is quite difficult because monitoring it fails to take into account things such as the nuances around reduced frequency or severity of offending. It is difficult to draw an analogy to some extent with health, but just bear with me. It is a bit like, if you have a health intervention, measuring whether it is successful or not by asking whether that individual is ever ill again. If they are ever ill again, you will say, "It has not worked". I am just not sure that that is the most helpful way of addressing it.

What I would propose as a better measure is the young person's continued engagement with whatever intervention. In the community, their continued engagement with their YOT worker or other caseworker shows that they actually feel that it is working for them. One of the single key things that is so important for these young people that they have often missed out on in their past history - and is why a lot of them are where they are - is that they do not have close family relationships and they feel at school quite excluded. They often

struggle with literacy and numeracy skills and that means that they feel very excluded at school and they often end up actually physically being excluded or truanting.

However, if you can get one individual caseworker to work with those people and that relationship works, to me that is the key. That is the thing that you need to really be focusing upon. To some extent with the Daedalus Project and the resettlement brokers, that was what that was trying to achieve and it showed some success in that. Therefore, I wonder whether judging success by that level of engagement is a better way of judging success.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): We can open up a whole can of worms about early intervention and education.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I am supporting Alex's [Newbury] plea, I suppose. One of the problems about reoffending rates per se is that the research is fairly clear that giving up crime for young people is a process. It is not, for most of them, a once-and-for-all thing. It is about a shift in identity, which takes some time. If all you do is measure whether they have broken the law and been caught for it on one occasion within a 12-month period, you are not really doing justice to that process.

We know that the vast majority of young people stop offending as they mature and get older. For interventions with young people, if they are to maximise the impact that they have, it is about finding out what it is about that process that leads to young people giving up offending in most cases and trying to promote it, hasten it, facilitate it and encourage it. There is a risk that giving a target which is metric-based focuses energies in the wrong area.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Tim, could I just clarify something you said earlier? I was talking about community disposal actually having a slightly higher rate of reoffending and you said that they mostly get sent out of London. That is only for custodial sentences?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes, it is.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Are you saying it is not anything to do with London in particular?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I do not know. One of the possibilities - and this is speculation and I am not in a position to have data that would allow me to say this with any degree of confidence - is that there are substantially higher rates of prosecution in London than elsewhere. We know from international research that prosecution actually can increase the risk of reoffending for young people who were at low risk of reoffending. If you increase the rate of prosecution - and it appears that London does have an enhanced rate of prosecution - actually, simply by that fact of giving a child a criminal conviction, you may be increasing the risk of reconviction.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): It is harder to get a job, they have more contact with criminals and so on?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes. There is the thing about, as I was saying, desistance being about a shift in identity. What you do not want is to start a process where there is a shift towards a more criminogenic identity for young children who have done something relatively minor.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. That is something we have seen before, actually. Graham, did you want to come in?

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): It was about this issue of the judgement of effectiveness, but do you want to pick that up later on or shall I carry on now?

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Yes, it is coming up later on. Thank you.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): There was just a point on the measures, really. I just want to totally echo what has been said already. Within the Board, we have only three indicators now and we used to have a plethora of them. They are first-time entrants, reoffending and the use of custody. We then would look at all the YOTs in all boroughs for London on their performance and movement across those indicators.

However, that is very much just a starting point for us. Within my team, we work with each partnership. We look at the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) findings. We look at resources. We look at the numbers of young people. For some YOTs, the numbers have reduced significantly but the seriousness of offending has gone up. It is very much about understanding what is relevant for that borough at that time, really, before we leap to any judgements. We often look at the headline figures and say, "Actually, it is not like that". It is really important that we understand what is underneath those often old figures.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): I was going to come to that as well because you mentioned earlier that these figures are very old. You also mentioned live data. I assume your live data is not these figures and that what you are talking about is the tracking sort of stuff that you mentioned?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Ideally, we want to build live data locally, working with colleagues like MOPAC, for example, to understand who our areas of priority are and whether we are supporting them in the best way possible. We would get partners such as health, education and probation around the table. We have a new reducing youth offending strategic group, where we basically look at Camden, for example, and say, "What are we doing in Camden collectively? Is it the right thing? Is it relevant for now or is it just based on historical data?"

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): You are sharing the data with colleagues so that everybody is aware of what is going on?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Presumably, it does have an impact on support for those young people.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, and also seeing strategic priorities for partners across London. They need to understand where the hotspot areas are. If we do not work together, we are not going to target in the right ways. It is no good having a blanket approach, particularly in London, because there is so much difference, obviously, across the piece.

Jenny Jones AM (Deputy Chair): Everybody agrees with that. It is obvious, is it not, really? The more up-to-date your information is, the more accurate your reaction can be. Thank you.

Len Duvall AM: In terms of chasing support performance - and my question is to Lisa but others may wish to contribute - who in London holds the ring? Given the Mayor's influencing role with no responsibility, is it you who chairs a London-wide meeting with the partners?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes.

Len Duvall AM: In the sense of that, can you give us an idea about the performance, then? We have hotspots, but what would be an underperforming YOT, then, in a London borough? What would be the critical signs that, if I were sitting in one of your meetings, I should be looking at?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): In terms of structure, part of our role is monitoring performance and supporting improvement work. We also allocate budgets to local authorities, not just to the YOT but to the local authority where the YOT would sit. That is very much part of our role. You have different inspectorates, etc., outside of that system that enhance it and feed into it but are quite separate. Yes, very much so, we do have a role.

In terms of influence, if we would see a YOT underperforming and if we see persistent, pervasive underperformance quarter-on-quarter, quarterly we meet together. As I said before, we look at the high-level indicators. We all prepare reports and we visit the YOTs to understand that whole picture. It is not just based on those trends.

A current example would be Islington, which is well known to have had a very poor outcome in terms of its inspection. The difficulty we have is that its indicators - and I am going to use red, amber, green (RAG) as an example - are green, because it had quite a poor baseline. It had the highest reoffending rates. It had some of the highest custody rates. However, once it then improves, it ends up going green against itself. Therefore, we have to be careful that we do not just look at those that are on the surface doing extremely well. If you then couple that with an HMIP inspection, which looks at cases and does not just look at trends, and it finds that practice is poor and partnership responses are poor, we would disregard the green and we go with red. It would then become a priority based on the other intelligence that comes together.

It takes a lot of engagement and on-the-ground understanding. A YOT manager could leave and that could leave a service floundering. An Assistant Director (AD) could leave.

Len Duvall AM: There is also partnership working.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): For London, very much partnership working, funding, resources --

Len Duvall AM: It might not be the team itself.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): That is right.

Len Duvall AM: It might well be one of the partners that is not contributing.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, police officers being poor or whatever.

Len Duvall AM: If I ever come across one of those reports or if I picked up, let us say, the Islington report, would there be a narrative that says, “The data says this but actually the reality is this”? Is it as stark as that or is it a bit more complicated?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): It is measuring different things. It would say, “Interestingly, the data says this but, when you look at the reality of the delivery, they are struggling. They are improving because they have come from a poor baseline, but actually on the ground they are struggling with resources or with keeping constant staff, which is a common issue across London, working with partners around high-risk offenders”, etc.. They look in more detail, whereas the trend is the dated data.

Len Duvall AM: If it is a partner that fails and not the YOT, what happens then? Usually, the inspecting is about the youth justice team or is it about the partnership issue?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes, it is about the partnership. There are different types of inspections, but if you had a full joint inspection - which is what Islington had and what Lambeth had just recently published and it had poor outcomes again - all partners are interviewed and their roles are interrogated and assessed. If there is inappropriate policing, health or education input or lack of ownership of that partnership and leadership, it is definitely highlighted. That local authority partnership is responsible for an improvement plan that we then monitor and support in terms of delivery.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): To be very explicit on the partnership issues, though, that is very clearly set out in the HMIP reports. They are very critical if certain partners are not in the partnership. Just to be clear, the inspection is of the local management of youth justice services, not just of the YOT. That is a really important distinction. In other parts of the country where I have been doing some of this sort of development work, they have been very critical when there has been no engagement with housing because that is a key partner in resettlement work, very critical if education is not involved and particularly critical around things like children’s social care involvement. The inspection report gives some very blunt comments if the partners are not playing their roles.

If I could just finesse that a little bit further, some of the interesting work that is going on now is where partnerships are saying, “Here are the young people in the youth justice system. What is the gap between their experience of education, housing, looked-after children status, etc., with the rest of the cohort in our borough and what do we need to do to reduce that gap?” That is a big motivator because it comes down to things like medical registrations and access to basic healthcare as well as some of the more nuanced issues.

Len Duvall AM: Can I just ask one last question? I suppose, ultimately, to get on the at-risk register and to get to that stage, there must have been signs and early-warning indicators that people were getting into a state where an inspection was likely to find out about those issues. In terms of prevention where there is a poor service, wherever that may be, what is the role of the different agencies in doing that?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Yes and no. Sometimes we are caught by surprise by how bad something might be assessed to be, but often you can see it coming. The resources have gone down, they are struggling with staff, etc.. It is important that we have that relationship, as I said, and that we monitor and try to intervene and support that.

As the YJB, our job a lot of the time is to try to engender support from those partners and broker that for the YOT manager often or the AD, “You are statutory provider. You cannot just pull your police officer out or your health worker out. You have a responsibility”, and try to promote ownership of their own quality assurance.

That has been a big task across London to get youth offending partnerships to scrutinise themselves on a regular basis, to not wait to be inspected or wait to go red, if you like, but to keep that quality there and that level of professionalism.

As I said before, we cannot underestimate the transience of the workforce in London and the real struggle to get qualified, professional, trained individuals in London. I have worked across the country and it is a feature in London about that kind of flux and the use of agency staff. There is lots of money being spent on those who are not necessarily the most qualified and they are often dealing with the most troubled and difficult young people. It is not a healthy mix, unfortunately.

It is a big part of our role keeping people on top of what is good and what is correct and what is the efficacy of the programmes they are delivering. That is something that we really need to not lose sight of. What actually is working? How can we do better in that respect? It often gets sent to the bottom of the pile and it needs to come back to the top.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you. Victoria?

Victoria Borwick AM: That neatly segues on to our next question, which is about vocabulary and terminology. We all very much welcome the multidisciplinary approach that you touched on earlier. You have talked about how now you measure three things: the first-time, the reoffending and the custody.

Could you just run through how helpful terms such as 'resettlement' and 'rehabilitation' are or should we be using other terms? How do we make it easier? You answered Len's [Duvall AM] question in quite a complex way and so obviously it is quite important here. It is turning into a sort of marathon trying to understand actually through this soup because figures we thought were one thing were another and vice versa. How, therefore, has your relationship with MOPAC changed? You said you now have different targets to those you had before. I do not really want a treatise; I just want a bit of a summary.

You also touched earlier on the Heron Unit at Feltham that had some success in reducing reoffending.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We are doing this in the second part of the --

Victoria Borwick AM: I know we are going to come on to that and Daedalus later. I do not want to get muddled with all of that because I know we are coming back to that one. I know that is one of the other questions and so I just want to avoid that when we are talking about the terminology.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): I am happy to say something about terminology. I guess it is an obvious point, but how useful expressions are and terminology is depends upon how it is understood. Interestingly, 'resettlement' is a relatively recent term within criminal justice circles and it replaced what used to be 'after care' and 'through care'. My take on it is that at the time there was a shift in terminology, the idea of caring for offenders was not very high on policy agendas. There is a sense in which we lost the notion of support and care in reference to a term which gives it a mechanistic type of flavour.

Having said that, there are some merits to the term 'resettlement' in comparison to what they use internationally where they talk about 're-entry' largely and people 're-entering the community'. One of the benefits of 'resettlement' is that it can be understood as a process. I was saying earlier that the evidence is quite strong that desistance is a process. Resettlement, it seems to me, if properly handled, is a process that starts when the child first goes into custody and finishes at some point, perhaps after there is a statutory

requirement still to be involved. It links, it seems to me, with the process of trying to shift a young person's identity.

Therefore, we lost some things when we moved to 'resettlement', but it does emphasis - at least potentially - that resettlement should be a process rather than a thing that happens at the point of release.

Victoria Borwick AM: Thank you. Any other comments on either the new targets or the new phrases and your new relationship with MOPAC?

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Just to reinforce that, the resettlement starts very early on, not just at leaving the gate. That is fundamental and that was one of the lessons from the Daedalus Project. I happened to chair the programme board on that and so I was quite close to it. I thought that was a very strong message: get support in right from the day the child starts in custody.

Victoria Borwick AM: I happen to know that that is going to be covered.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): Yes, absolutely. There is a sense in which the language has to open up the debate rather than close it down, which is why I agree with Tim that 're-entry' is not helpful. 'Resettlement' also needs to mean the partners who support that resettlement and it is too easy for people to say that resettlement is something that is done by the criminal justice services and not the others. That is the only point I would make on that.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): In terms of the relationship with MOPAC, we have seen massive and positive changes over the last couple of years. We have quite a lot of processes and structures now that mean we work very closely together. For example, we are very heavily involved in the gang strategy. We sit on the key boards. We help deliver some of the aspirations. We work very closely with the Ending Gang and Youth Violence programme with the Home Office. There are lots of crossovers in our work.

What we identified was that we did not want to have duplication a few miles down the road from each other. We have the same aspirations but we need to be very clear on our roles. Sometimes some of the boundaries around that and what we can achieve certainly within the YJBs is sometimes is frustrating to others in terms of our monitoring and encouraging role, rather than making, a lot of the time.

For example, one of the structures we have in place is this reoffending strategic group, which MOPAC co-chairs with us, where we pull together all key players from across London. We have collectively worked on a youth offending dashboard, which is extracting the data that we have but making it just for London, making it very interactive. It is going to be available ultimately to the public for them to interrogate. It is a complex area and so we have to be careful about how it is handled or misunderstood.

However, it is not just about products; it is about them having meaningful engagement in our strategies, in our policies and in our spending in terms of our priorities. We have a joint post for a Resettlement Manager for London, which we have both jointly funded, and we have some real, obvious moves in that direction. We have a Turn Around to Work employers' consortium. There are only two in the country and one is in London. It has just started. We have only maybe four referrals going through at the moment, but we have companies such as B&Q, Sainsbury's and Microsoft, where again there is a focus on resettlement and getting real opportunities for London boys, predominantly, as they come out of custody. It is a real, tangible example there as well, and jointly working on youth ambitions together, tying up our approaches and trying to avoid duplication.

MOPAC has particularly benefited from getting the points across about whether we are getting the best deal for London. Is it appropriate for London? Can we have influence and steer in terms of policy development and direction? They played the part to us getting two consortia for London in terms of the resettlement consortia. Again, that is more than the other areas in the country. We have two out of the five. For the resources we have worked quite well together to get the best deal. That is something that perhaps was more fragmented before; it was not as coherent. We were perhaps duplicating with each other.

The trick now is looking at the areas where we do not have such a good grip, which is around prevention, as I said before; out-of-court disposals about funding; the benefits of that funding; whether it is being spent in the best way possible; and narrowing and targeting our resources in a more coherent way.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Is that done with the boroughs or with MOPAC?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): It is part of that. It is part of the strategic groups and we have borough representation. MOPAC comes along to our heads of service meetings where we have 32 YOTs represented there. There are lots of opportunities for cross-working. It is not so separate and there is a better sense of not just being done to. That is unusual in other areas of the country, most definitely.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): That is very helpful.

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): A few points on the terminology question. First of all, 'resettlement' as a term is an interesting choice because it is making an implication that the people were initially settled and I am not sure that is factually correct. Maybe 'reintegration' or just 'return to community' are simpler and are perhaps more factually what is happening to the young people. They are just returning to the community and they may well not have felt particularly settled before.

Also, having interviewed many young people about their understanding of these terms, they are often quite baffled by the terms, particularly in relation to restorative justice referral orders. Reparation: you ask them, "You have been asked to do reparation. What does that mean?" They do not know. They are being given terms that they do not understand and they will come back with, "I think it is doing community service". They are going back to an old, much more punitive-type term, but to them it makes more sense. Therefore, although there obviously is a need for the more jargon-laden terms and the more complex terms, there also needs to be quite a lot of thought around another set of terms that are readily accessible for young people so that they are not being given these quite complex terms and just expected to understand them.

Roger Evans AM: Just a couple more questions about resettlement. Lisa, first of all, on the back of the answer to the question you gave earlier, what are the particular challenges that face the resettlement process in London?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Quite simply, our top two are appropriate accommodation and access to education and employment. These unfortunately have not changed in terms of their stubbornness and their complexity to get what is appropriate for that set of young people. In fact, it has probably become even more complicated because, as we said before, those young people are often those who are not engaged in school and they have been moved around London, sometimes now moved out of London and might have gang affiliations, etc.. It is, I suppose, understanding the resources that are available and getting access to those resources and then, particularly in London, boroughs working together to get the best outcome for those young people. We see quite a lot of shunting. It is understandable. You have a high-risk young person who is perhaps not engaging with an order, for example in

Enfield, "I do not want them in Islington, thank you very much." It is overcoming some of those barriers but working for the best interests, across London, to reduce the risks for that young people.

We are trying to do that through the consortia. We have 12 YOTs, local authorities, engaged in two separate consortia, broadly northwest and south, and that is certainly helping because we would see commonly young people using the same courts or using across neighbouring areas. Therefore, we are breaking those boundaries down. We are also then able to lobby wider partners to say, "Let us collectively look at accommodation provisioning, pre-booking beds or hostels", or those kinds of things. We see that as a really good opportunity.

It is becoming more common in London but it is essential that we do break down those barriers. That and ongoing issues for the young people. It is about family breakdown and about getting the most appropriate intervention for them. We have talked about healthcare; they have complex needs.

Roger Evans AM: A lot of that is something which would apply across the rest of the country.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Absolutely.

Roger Evans AM: I can see why accommodation is a problem because that is a challenge for everyone in London, but surely something like education and employment, even though these are people whose opportunities are massively limited compared to the rest of the population, there should be more opportunities in a place like London to solve those problems than there would be in other parts of the country.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Exactly, which is why we now have things like Turn Around to Work. We need to know that every single young person in custody has been screened, assessed and offered an opportunity to get some form of education. You are right; it is not right that that young person should not be being assessed in that way in terms of their preparation for release because the numbers are so small. I would say for London there is often a lot of gang violence and gang issues in terms of movement and accommodation which are different to other areas of the country. There are similarities with the Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham areas, but they are much more acute in London.

Roger Evans AM: Is it actually a problem of putting people back into communities they came from? In some cases might the influences on them in that community be worse than moving them elsewhere?

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): Often it is, yes, which is tricky, because you often have 16, 17 or 18-year-old children and young people. You move them out of their local community and they are at risk of reoffending because they are like fish out of water. They do not know what is around them. Therefore, it is an acute problem in London, which is why there are schemes now set up for moving gang members, etc., specifically for London because of this issue. Again, there might not be many young people but they are the ones who are causing a lot of the problems and hitting the headlines.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): The point about accommodation is the key one because, although there may be greater opportunities in London in terms of potential employment and education, young people will not be very interested in following those opportunities unless they have somewhere stable to live. If you do not have that basic thing in place, then those other things which are going to be necessary if young people are going to move towards a less criminogenic lifestyle are very unlikely to happen.

Certainly our interviews with staff in various forms of custodial provision say that they have noticed a marked shift across the country in difficulties of getting accommodation for young people coming out of custody.

Frequently they report that they do not know and the young people do not know where they will be living until a couple of days before they leave. If you do not have that in place, you obviously cannot have education and employment in place for the point at which they are released.

One of the things that we found in our research is that the actual period around the release -- although resettlement is a process that starts at the outset of a custodial sentence, there is something very significant about the period around release, because it represents a window of opportunity. Kids do not want to go back, basically. They all express good intentions in the couple of days before they are released about not coming back, and if stuff is there, that is the point at which they are most likely to engage with it. However, if they do not have somewhere to live, if they do not have education lined up at exactly that right point, then the risk is that they will drift back into their previous lifestyles very quickly.

Roger Evans AM: That is an interesting point. Do you think that young people within the resettlement process buy into that process and have an understanding and a stake in it? I am thinking of some of the things that Alex [Newbury] said earlier on, that young people understand the concept of punishment but they do not seem to understand the concept behind restorative justice. That suggests that they are seeing it very much from their point of view rather than the impact on society of what they are doing and how they can improve things for themselves, which might give you a better chance if they understood what the aim of the process was.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): That is right, but one of the things we need to remember about adolescence - and this is not just the kinds of kids in the criminal justice system - is that adolescence is a period when you are fairly focused on yourself. I may never have changed in that respect, but certainly I remember being a teenager and it was all about me. I have an 18-year-old and it is all about him. In a way, we are expecting too much of young people in the criminal justice system if we focus too much on remorse and the impact on the victim. We need to get things right for them before they are in a position to be able to take those things on board.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): On that latter point about that window of opportunity and if it is right things go well, do you have any evidence where that is going well? Is there any best practice that we could look to and say, "This place has it right and we need to replicate it"?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): One of the difficulties with resettlement is that young people are dispersed so far from the place that they are going back to, frequently. Therefore, I am not sure there are necessarily places where it is going very well across the board. Some things seem to go well for some young people, but it does depend upon quite extraordinary levels of commitments from individual members of staff as well. One of the things, for example, that young people regard as very significant are things that, from a professional perspective, when you are juggling lots of priorities, will not seem necessarily very important.

One of the things that has come across as being significant, for example, in one of the pieces of research that we have done, is that young people really like handwritten letters. It demonstrates that the workers care for them and are not just banging it out on a word processor; that they come and see them not just when they have review meetings, which the youth offending team workers ought to come to, but they see them outside that; that they have an interest in them as human beings which is not just about them getting paid. That is a very, very big thing that young people say. "I want a worker who cares about me and does not just do it because they want to get paid." They recognise, of course, they would not do it if they did not get paid, but they want something over and above that. Therefore, frequently it is down to workers who are able to and are supported to, but also have the motivation and commitment, give that little bit extra and show that they care.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): It sounds like substitute parenting, almost.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Yes. In a way that is no surprise because what we know about these young people is they do not have those forms of adult support that many of our young people in London and beyond can expect and do expect. And they expect it for an increasingly long time. The average age of leaving home now is something like 28 or 29, but for young people in the criminal justice system we frequently expect them to be independent at 16.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Can I just ask a follow-up point? Are there any examples internationally of best practice where they have it right?

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): Everybody talks about Scandinavia doing it better and certainly they have a big focus on communities and public sector bodies taking responsibility for all young people. That responsibility does extend to a higher age than we tend to do. Although the legislation, the Children Act, talks about young people being a child up until the age of 18, children's services make a distinction at 16. It is quite hard to get children's services to put in very much input beyond that.

Roger Evans AM: A question to Graham about resettlement brokers. How effective have resettlement brokers been in London and what particular challenges do they face?

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): This is the Daedalus Project and so I will just give some headlines of it because I am not in here later on. The Daedalus Project was focusing on kids who are ready to engage with the project workers. It was a selected group. The key messages for the workers were exactly what Tim [Bateman] has outlined: somebody who wanted to build the personal relationship and would go the extra mile, and those relationships on the evaluation were key in accessing education, housing and all the services you would expect. The problems became - when you were managing across 32 boroughs and you had a caseload of five young people - you were spending an enormous amount of time travelling around London to support that one young person.

The other message was how those resettlement brokers worked with the staff in the custody unit and with the youth offending teams. When those relationships were positive, as they nearly always were, you had a really good, seamless workload going on, but there were times when that relationship broke down.

The fundamental issue here, as people have said, is the approach that the worker is taking to working with the young person and with their family. If that is right, then you can make progress.

Lisa Harvey-Messina (Head of London Business Area, Youth Justice Board): I will just add on that, and on the back of some of those successes or positive outcomes, that the current models - the current resettlement consortia that have been only up and running over the last three months - are really pushing those kinds of relationships and that high level of focus on those young people, and putting those partners around the table to question why provision is not forthright.

We also have in London the European Social Fund (ESF). They are like brokers and mentors. Working Links currently runs the provision. They also work within Feltham and Cookham and meet the young people inside and start to broker that relationship and then sometimes take them out on temporary release to interviews, etc., and then carry that on during the supervision period in the community. While that provision is ending, there is a new commitment from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to keep that going.

Therefore, there are lots of positives happening across London to try to build on the good findings of consistency with young people, but it is keeping that focus. As you were saying earlier, it is the ownership by local authorities and communities of that young person. It is not just a YOT worker; it is not just probation side. That is the key.

Dr Alex Newbury (Senior Lecturer, Brighton Business School): I would just emphasise the key important of the YOT work as well. One of the young persons, a 15-year-old, a female offender I spoke to, I asked about her attitude towards getting the court order and having to go to the YOT. She said it was brilliant because before that point she always felt she was banging her head against a brick wall and that she had now found somebody who really listened to her and who really understood. For her, that YOT worker was such an important person and somebody, yes, who was like a parent for her that she had not had before and that she had not felt at school or in any other level of support. She had really quite intractable difficulties with housing and education, and the YOT worker was able to engage with those other services on her behalf and help her back into school and with housing. Therefore, it is incredibly key to the whole picture.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): I will just add in there that there is some new ESF funding also for work with young person in pupil referral units. As a prevention mechanism, that is really welcome because it is providing the same sort of support mechanism and these are the youngsters who are going to be at most risk of anybody in the school system.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We will be exploring that later in our next session as well. John, you wanted to come in.

John Biggs AM: I wanted to ask a quick question which troubles me a lot, not just in the context of youth offending, but that is what we are talking about today. It is what I call the cliff edge, where you have a dysfunctional young person for whatever reason and you know that when they get to 18 they are going to fall off, and yet it is pretty likely, unless there is some sort of divine intervention, that they are going to continue to have troubling behaviour. There is obviously a public policy case for continuing to intervene to support people in that position, and I wondered whether, given that we have no time to answer this question, you could in no time answer it, at least superficially.

Graham Robb (Youth Justice and Education Consultant): My personal view is that the cliff face exists. There is an irreproachable argument that we ought to be looking for the same sort of range of services for young people up to age 24 or 25 because that is what looked-after children get and so why should we not apply the same to them? On the YJB side, it was desperately sad seeing youngsters transferring from the under-18 provision to the over-18 provision and seeing the drop-off in services that they got.

Dr Tim Bateman (Reader in Youth Justice, University of Bedfordshire): This is a personal view again. You are quite right to characterise it as a cliff edge and that strategies need to develop to ameliorate that transition. Whether current proposals to extend the youth justice system do that in the most effective way, I have some reservations. Firstly, the partners that are the most relevant for different age groups start to shift. Education will see themselves as less involved with 18- to 24-year-olds. If you have a system which amalgamates 10- to 24-year-olds, what you will see in terms of numbers is that most of them are in that higher age range. You may attenuate the commitment of some of the important partners if you do that in that way.

You should have a distinct approach for young adults and indeed in London we used to. Probation used to have young adult teams who had smaller caseloads, were better resourced and had extensive partnerships with other service providers. Those teams were disbanded for financial reasons. I do not think there is anything in principle that stops that kind of approach being developed again.

John Biggs AM: I am very grateful for that, and I was as much wanting to signal that we could put something in our report about this because it needs further consideration.

Victoria Borwick AM: I appreciate we are changing our guests, but if there is anything particular you wanted to say about that, then --

Len Duvall AM: I think in terms of time, Chair, we might want to put this in writing to our panels. I am quite happy to move on.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): We have finished our formal questions, then. We would like to write to you and ask you for your views on what the Mayor's role should be or what extra the Mayor should be doing in the future, but is there anything that you think we have not touched on today that we should have done? If not, you can always write to us later.

Victoria Borwick AM: If there are comments about the better Heron or better Daedalus, we welcome those as part of feeding that back. I appreciate that we are covering that in the second part but I do not want to exclude your input into those topics.

Joanne McCartney AM (Chair): Thank you for your attendance.