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Assessing young people in police custody: An examination of the operation of Triage schemes

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CONTENTS

Recommendations for policy and practice

This report examines the operation of Triage schemes. Triage schemes are based in police stations and aim to identify the needs of young people as they enter the youth justice system. A key objective of the schemes is to divert young people who have committed less serious crimes away from the formal youth justice system. There are a number of lessons that can be learnt about the design, implementation and delivery of Triage schemes from the experiences of local areas where the researchers carried out case studies.

1. Local coordination of youth justice system initiatives is key to their successful operation. Strategic leadership and agreement between the police and the Youth Offending Service on local policy for diverting young people from the youth justice system is crucial for the effective implementation of schemes like Triage.

2. Areas should assess police training needs in order to promote how Triage will fit into current custody arrangements, its operation and potential benefits. A training strategy for the police should ensure, for example, that diversion and community resolution initiatives do not impede the operation of each other.

3. Police secondment to Triage schemes can assist in raising its profile and credibility with operational officers.

4. Providing the police with regular feedback about the progress of young people engaged with Triage may increase police cooperation. In addition, publicising data, such as low re-offending rates among young people who have been through the Triage schemes, will help police officers to see its value.

5. Developing good links with a range of local supporting services is vital to providing positive and constructive interventions to young people.

6. A clear strategy for monitoring the Triage schemes is required both locally and nationally. This is essential in order to collate standard information about the progress of young people who have engaged with the schemes, the type and length of intervention they receive and whether they re-offend.

7. A number of areas considered that engagement with the Triage schemes should be recorded as a police disposal and not as 'no further action'. This would help the schemes become integrated into custody practice and ensure that they are not overlooked by new custody staff.

Summary

Background to Triage

This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of Triage schemes. The project was set up to assess the impact of Triage schemes on the numbers of young people entering the youth justice system and rates of re-offending, alongside a process evaluation of the operation of the schemes in different areas. However, there were insufficient data available from the areas to establish the effectiveness of Triage schemes. So, this report examines the operation of Triage in different areas, drawing out good practice

Triage schemes were set up to assess young people as they enter the youth justice system, and to ensure that their needs are identified. Triage schemes are based in police stations and a key aim is to divert young people who have committed less serious crimes away from formal sanctions and towards restorative justice interventions and other services. A key worker, usually from the youth offending team, works in partnership with police officers from the custody suite to identify and engage young people who have been arrested. The broad aims of the Triage schemes are as follows.

- To ensure that the needs of young offenders are assessed and identified quickly and that appropriate interventions are put in place to address those needs.
- To extend and improve collaborative decision-making between the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Youth Offending Service. To divert cases of low-level offending away from the formal youth justice system, in order to:
  - avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of young people on the fringes of criminal activity;
  - ensure that formal justice processes are focused on relatively serious offences, and can resolve these cases more quickly and effectively; and
  - increase the use of restorative processes to make young offenders take responsibility for their actions and to promote confidence in justice among victims, witnesses and the wider community.

Triage schemes operate at three levels, dependent on the previous offending of the young arrestee and/or the seriousness of the alleged offence:

- level 1 (the least serious) is likely to result in diversion from the youth justice system;
- level 2 involves a referral to supportive interventions; and
- level 3 involves fast-tracked progression through the system.

The aims of the report

The report presents an examination of a number of aspects of Triage schemes.

- The design, implementation and delivery of Triage schemes including:

  - different models and how they evolved;
  - the extent and nature of partnership working during implementation;
  - links between Triage and other services and schemes;
  - the identification and referral processes; and
  - barriers and factors supporting implementation and delivery.

- The throughput of Triage schemes looking at the number of young people going through the schemes, their characteristics and offending profiles.
- The outcomes for those young people engaging with the schemes and a review of the extent and nature of the data available locally on offending and re-offending.

Methodology

Case studies were conducted in seven areas, selected to ensure that they varied in terms of region, size and population characteristics. They were also selected to include a diverse range of schemes, based on findings from an earlier national online survey. Methods included:

- in-depth interviews with a range of stakeholders;
- analysis of monitoring data on the number of young people engaging with the schemes and their characteristics and offending;
- numbers of first-time entrants to the youth justice system locally; and
- re-offending rates for young people who had entered the schemes.

Case study findings

Design, implementation and delivery

The Triage schemes began operating in 2009 and were mainly based in custody suites. Referrals were made in discussions between Triage workers and police officers. Service hours tended to be in the afternoon and evening, as these were the times when young people were most likely to be arrested. When there was no Triage worker available, young people were bailed to return at a later date. Indirect means of identifying young people who were eligible for Triage included searches of new additions to the police national computer.

Triage level 1, which includes the most minor cases where diversion from the youth justice system is the primary aim, mainly consisted of restorative approaches such as letters of apology. Those young people receiving Triage level 2 were not always diverted from the youth justice system. They had access to a range of supportive interventions, such as for substance misuse, education and training, and anger management. Most areas tried to involve parents and carers in their interventions by inviting them to attend initial meetings. Only two areas provided Triage to level 3 for serious and prolific offenders. These young people were fast-tracked and given support to help them through the youth justice system.

Throughput

The majority of young people in contact with Triage schemes were male, White and around 15 years of age. They were most commonly arrested for theft, violence, criminal damage and public disorder; most often these young people had no previous convictions. The number of young people seen by each of the schemes varied, with a mean number of monthly contacts ranging from 147 in one area to 2 in another. Variation can be explained by factors including:

- level of implementation success;
- whether the Triage worker was based in the custody suite or dependent on police referral; and
- universal versus targeted inclusion criteria.

Barriers and supporting factors

Interviews with stakeholders highlighted a number of barriers and factors that supported the implementation and delivery of the schemes.

Supporting factors included:

- having a local police champion for the intervention;
- promoting potential benefits to police through training and literature;
- pre-existing partnership working between police and the Youth Offending Service and/or local services; and
- Triage workers having a presence in the custody suite.

Barriers included:

- poor communication between custody staff and Triage workers, reducing appropriate referrals to the schemes;
- low police awareness about Triage and its aims;
- high turnover of police custody staff, resulting in the constant re-building of working relationships; and
- the introduction of community resolution acting to reduce the number of young people being referred to the schemes.

Indicators of outcome

Local monitoring data focusing on follow-up and potential indicators of outcome on re-offending for those young people engaged with the schemes were scant and generally of poor quality, and a considerable amount of data were missing. The combination of poor data and no matched control group meant the impact of Triage could not be established. Other interventions were operating in some of the same areas, which meant that changes in the number of young people entering the youth justice system or rates of re-offending could not be solely attributed to Triage (see Mackie *et al.*, 2011 for an evaluation of Challenge and Support; Haines *et al.*, 2012 for an evaluation of the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion pilot scheme).

Conclusions

Triage came in a variety of shapes and sizes, having been implemented to meet local needs. However, most commonly schemes were focused on the diversion of first-time offenders from the youth justice system. The schemes were highly valued

by many of those working in youth justice. Stakeholders believed that the schemes worked best where there was a strong existing partnership between the police and the Youth Offending Service; and when there was a shared strategic goal to divert young people committing low-level offences away from the youth justice system and to support vulnerable young people. Custody officers' support is crucial. Training custody staff about the importance of Triage, and giving feedback about the young people they referred was important in keeping custody staff engaged with the schemes.

There is a clear need to collect data on the progress of young people who go through the Triage schemes. Once the impact of the schemes can be assessed and proven, a cost-benefit analysis is required to establish the future role of the Triage schemes as a means of reducing re-offending and diverting young people from the youth justice system.

1.   Introduction

Background to the study

This study was designed to provide an assessment of the aims of the Triage schemes. These were an initiative set up to provide early intervention and support for young people who had been arrested. Key workers, in partnership with the police, sought to:

- provide a swift response to youth offending;
- divert young people committing low-level offences away from the youth justice system wherever possible;
- help prevent further involvement in crime and reduce levels of re-offending; and
- identify young people who are vulnerable and refer them to appropriate services.
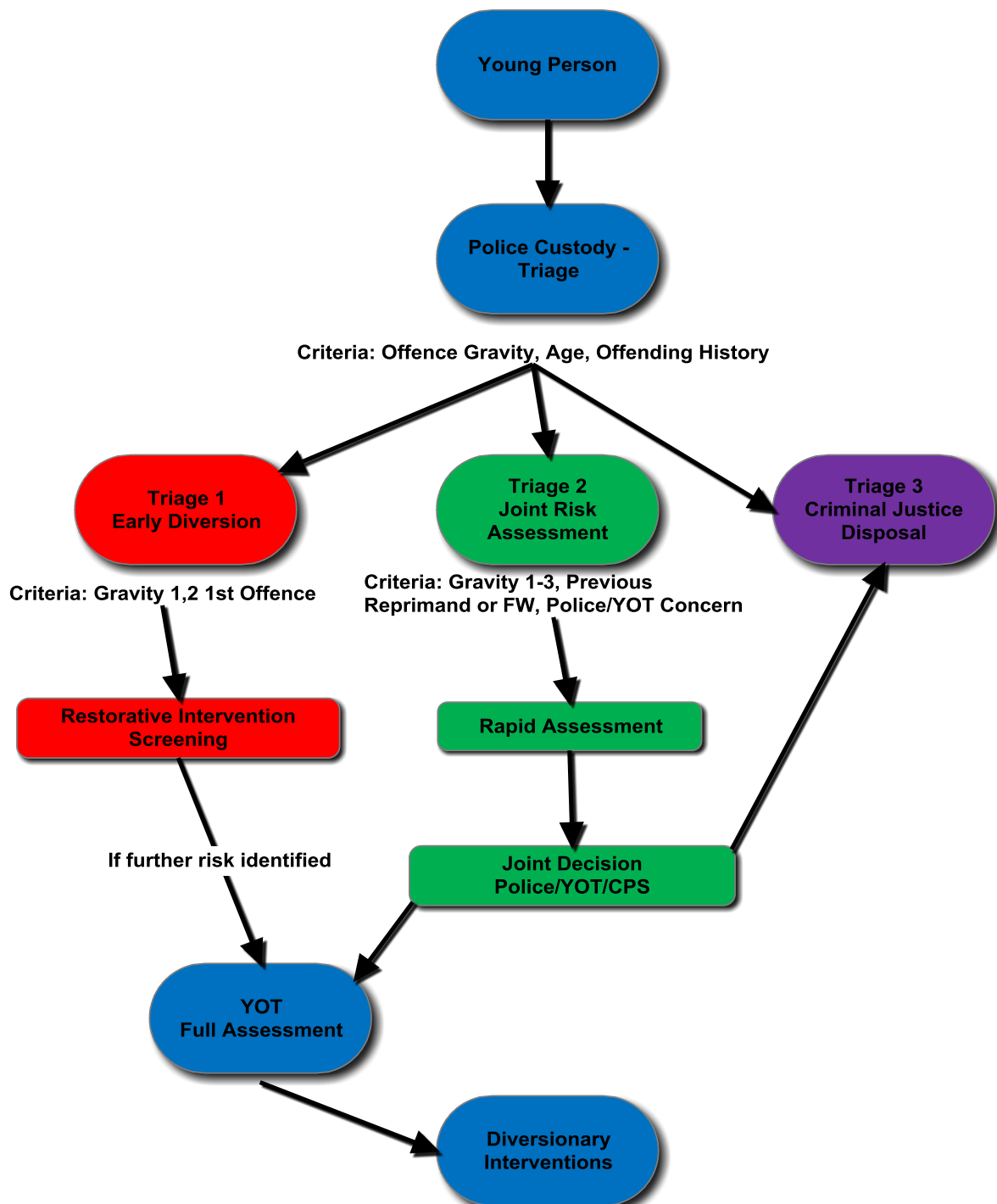
What is Triage?

Triage has become a mainstream practice in emergency medicine. Its primary purpose is to make rapid assessments of the severity and risk of injuries and to prioritise patients for whom immediate care is likely to produce a positive outcome. In the last decade the term Triage has been introduced in the UK for initial mental health and substance misuse assessments, again with the purpose of prioritising new contacts and matching them as swiftly as possible to appropriate services. The London Criminal Justice Board piloted a Triage scheme for young offenders in two London boroughs in 2008.

Through collaboration between a dedicated Triage worker and the police a decision is made:

- whether to divert young people who have committed minor offences and are assessed as low risk for re-offending out of the youth justice system;
- which young people require further assessment and interventions; and
- when to fast-track those committing more serious offences through the youth justice system.

The Triage process is illustrated in the flowchart below:

Flowchart of the Triage Process

Young Person

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Police Custody - Triage

Criteria: Offence Gravity, Age, Offending History

Triage 1 Early Diversion

Triage 2 Joint Risk Assessment

Triage 3 Criminal Justice Disposal

Criteria: Gravity 1,2 1st Offence

Criteria: Gravity 1-3, Previous Reprimand or FW, Police/YOT Concern

Restorative Intervention Screening

Rapid Assessment

If further risk identified

Joint Decision Police/YOT/CPS

YOT Full Assessment

Diversionary Interventions

According to the Department for Education, there were 55 Triage schemes in operation throughout England in January 2011.

Aims of Triage

The overarching aim of the Triage schemes is to reduce re-offending by young people. More specific aims and objectives associated with Triage schemes include the following.[1]

- To divert cases of low-level offending away from the formal youth justice system, in order to:
  - avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of young people on the fringes of criminal activity;
  - ensure that formal justice processes are focused on relatively serious offences, and can thus resolve these cases more quickly and effectively; and
  - increase the use of restorative processes to make young offenders take responsibility for their actions and to promote confidence in justice among victims, witnesses and the wider community.
- To ensure that the needs of young offenders are assessed and identified quickly and that appropriate interventions are put in place to address those needs.
- To extend and improve collaborative decision-making between the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Youth Offending Service.

Restorative justice

Restorative justice is central to Triage as it is the minimum intervention (Triage 1) that all young people will undergo as part of the process (see Section 3). Alongside an increasing focus on more effectively addressing the needs of victims of crime, restorative justice interventions have become a common component of youth justice disposals. They are promoted as a means of addressing anti-social behaviour and low-level offending[2] in the community (Home Office, 2011; Crawford and Newburn, 2002). Their routine inclusion in Triage level 1 is intended to allow resolution without recourse to the formal youth justice system.

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[1] Youth Task Force (2009) *YOT workers in custody suites – Frequently Asked Questions.*
[2] http://www.justice.gov.uk/guidance/youth-justice/working-with-victims/restorative-justice/index.htm

The Youth Justice Board outlined four principles of restorative justice.[3]

- Putting things right and healing relationships, thereby giving high satisfaction to victims and reducing re-offending.
- Ensuring that those directly affected by crime are involved in the process and that their wishes are given careful consideration.
- Making positive outcomes for victim and community valid objectives, alongside changes in the behaviour and attitude of the young person.
- Addressing and being sensitive to particular cultural and special needs based on anti-discriminatory practice, with an understanding and respect for the diversity of different communities.

There is some consensus about the benefits of restorative interventions in encouraging offenders to think about the consequences of their behaviour and 'make amends', as well as giving victims and communities an active role in the process (Cunneen, 2006; Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Anti-social Behaviour, 2010).

Interventions can take various forms, including:
- letters of apology;
- mediation between the victim and offender or a wider group of family and Youth Offending Panels, where volunteers and the youth offending team work together to talk to the young person and agree how they might make amends; and
- reparation to the victim or to the community.

Newburn *et al.* (2002) evaluated Referral Orders and Youth Offending Panels in the early 2000s. This approach advocated the role of reparation to combat low-level offending by young people. Although this approach was deemed a success there were a number of problems within the pilot areas. These included:
- difficulties in getting representative groups of members of the public to participate in panels;

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[3] Youth Justice Board (2008) *Key Elements of Effective Practice: Restorative Justice.* London: Youth Justice Board.

- limited range of reparative activities; and
- the reluctance of victims to participate in panels.

There was no information available on the impact of Referral Orders in the medium or longer term.

Evaluating Triage

Aims and objectives

The original remit for this evaluation was to provide an assessment of the process and impact of Triage schemes.

- To examine the design, implementation and delivery of Triage schemes:
  - the different models and how they were evolving;
  - the extent and nature of partnership work in implementing the schemes;
  - other local services and interventions, and their links with Triage;
  - the processes used to identify and refer young people to the schemes; and
  - barriers and factors supporting implementation and delivery.
- To examine throughput of the Triage schemes:
  - characteristics and offending profile of young people at the different levels; and
  - the interventions to which young people could be referred.
- To examine outcomes for those young people engaged with the schemes:
  - review the extent and nature of data available locally on re-offending, and other potential indicators of outcome.

Methodology

A case study approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the implementation and delivery of Triage schemes in a number of locations. These varied in terms of region, size and population characteristics (see below). This approach aimed to take account of the specificities of differing models and the interplay between Triage schemes and related initiatives, while also drawing some general conclusions about the impact of Triage.

At the time this study was undertaken there were no comprehensive records of the number or type of Triage schemes running. The sampling frame was created via

findings from an online survey, which investigated the implementation of Triage interventions and statistics on the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system.[4] The area selection was intended to encompass the following elements:

- geographic spread, including at least one rural area;
- at least one scheme run by a third sector service;
- at least two areas where implementation of the Triage schemes had proved difficult;
- areas where there had been a larger than average reduction in first-time entrants to the youth justice system; and
- areas where there was a limited reduction, or an increase in numbers of first-time entrants to the youth justice system.

Five areas were selected (A, B, C, D and E) in which, according to initial indications, the Triage schemes were well-established and working effectively (these included two inner city areas and one relatively rural area). However, important lessons can also be learnt from areas where the schemes were reported to be less successful. Area F had struggled to implement Triage and the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system was rising. Area G also had problems implementing the Triage scheme, although it reported substantial reductions in number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system.

In conducting the case studies, a range of data sources were assessed.
- Strategic and operational documentation on Triage in the youth justice context.
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from agencies, including the police and youth offending teams (71 individual interviews).
- Observation of Triage workers in custody suites (15 hours).
- Monitoring data (for example, including victim satisfaction surveys).
- Quantitative data held by the police, youth offending teams and the courts, including data from before and after implementation on:
  - re-offending rates among young offenders;

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[4] Ministry of Justice (2010) 'Young people aged 10–17 receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction', Table 3 http://www.justice.gov.uk/10-17-first-reprimand-warning-convinction.htm.

- size and make-up (in terms of offence gravity, see Appendix 2) of caseloads from the youth offending teams;
- court workloads relating to young people;
- numbers and breakdowns of formal youth justice disposals;
- average times from arrest to disposal;
- numbers of custodial remands of young people; and
- numbers of referrals of arrestees to non-youth justice agencies.

Structure of the report

In Section 2 the findings of the national online survey are discussed, followed by the limitations to the evaluation. In Section 3 key findings are summarised with regards to the implementation, delivery and throughput of Triage schemes in each case study area and Section 4 presents conclusions. Appendix 1 outlines youth justice interventions and Appendix 2 details the gravity scores of offences.

2.   Background to the evaluation

An online survey was conducted in March–April 2010 with staff and partners from areas taking part in an evaluation of the Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP), an initiative of the previous administration. Information was collected about progress in implementation, the range of agencies involved, and any problems and challenges encountered by the Triage schemes. The vast majority of areas (83%) provided a response to the survey: 126 questionnaires from 57 of 69 YCAP areas were returned. Of those, ten were partially completed and excluded from the analysis.

Online survey

Results from the online survey with staff and partners of YCAP areas indicated the following.

- Triage schemes were often noted as a particular success:

    "*Triage is proving to be beneficial in terms of improved collaboration and decision-making between the youth offending team and police, resulting in better outcomes for young people.*" (Team Leader for Prevention and Youth Offending Service).

- Others considered that Triage was working well but that there were aspects that had proved challenging along the way:

    "*Youth offending team-led Triage in custody appears to be working well and is having a positive impact. It took a while for this to be arranged and there are some technical issues which don't work well, but it is positive.*" (Public Reassurance Inspector, Police)

- The working relationship between the youth offending team and the police was particularly important:

    "*Youth offending team workers in custody suites has been the biggest headache. Trying to put policy protocols in place with local police….*" (Prevention Manager, Youth Offending Team)

    "*Youth offending team Triage lacked clear legal guidance and so police were reluctant to involve themselves with it. There was no clear mandate*

centrally from ACPO, which made it harder to implement. (Early Intervention Manager, Youth Offending Team)

The emerging evidence in academic literature suggested that diverting first-time entrants to the youth justice system, and young offenders in general away from formal sentencing, was an important step towards preventing the development of an offending career (McAra and McVie, 2010; Petrosino *et al.*, 2010). The positive views about the value of Triage schemes, the challenges faced in setting them up and the knowledge that had been developed in tackling these, informed the focus on Triage in the subsequent evaluation.

Limitations of the evaluation: Indicators of outcome

This evaluation was not able to achieve one of its primary aims; establishing the impact of Triage on levels of offending by young people. The review of local monitoring data on follow-up and potential outcomes for young people receiving Triage found the data to be scant, generally of poor quality, and with considerable missing data. It did not prove possible to create a control group or to compare matched groups before and after the introduction of Triage.

A number of other initiatives attempting to divert young people from the youth justice system were operating at the same time. This meant that it would not be possible to attribute any changes in the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system or in re-offending rates to Triage alone.

The focus of the evaluation was limited to the process of setting up and running the schemes and the number and characteristics of young people engaging. Despite the limitations of these data in drawing conclusions about the impact of Triage, trends in numbers of first-time entrants to the youth justice system are considered.

3.   The case studies

The tables below provide an overview of the key features of the Triage scheme in each case study area and the evidence collected on throughput of cases. Findings from interviews with stakeholders about which local factors were thought to aid success in implementing and operating Triage, as well as the difficulties experienced, are discussed.

Demographics of case study areas

The case study areas comprised a range of Local Authority Classifications, levels of deprivation and crime rates. In the majority of areas 10 per cent of the population were aged 10–19 years. Levels of deprivation varied. Offending rates ranged from 50 offences per 1,000 of the population in the rural area, to 110–120 offences per 1,000 of the population in the more urban inner city areas.

Table 3.1: Area demographics

Area	Local Authority Classification[5]	% Population aged 10–19 years[6]	% Population White British[7]	Indices of Deprivation (top most deprived %)[8]	No. of offences per 1,000 population[9]
A	Urban centre	10	90	5	120
B	Inner London	10	60	10	110
C	Other urban	15	75	10	90
D	Rural	10	90	20	50
E	Large urban centre	10	90	30	80
F	Urban	10	80	30	120
G	Large urban centre	10	80	5	90

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[5] Source: Office for National Statistics: Rural/Urban Local Authority Classification.
[6] Office for National Statistics mid–year population estimates, 2009.
[7] Office for National Statistics, population estimates by ethnic group, mid 2007.
[8] Indices of Deprivation 2010: Local authority summaries.
[9] Home Office InstantAtlas™ Report http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218135832/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/ia/atlas.html.

Implementation and operation of Triage

Most Triage schemes began operating in 2009 and were based in police custody suites. Referrals were usually made via discussion between Triage workers and police officers. Indirect means of identifying young people who were eligible for Triage included regular searches of the police national computer. For example, in Area G youth crime officers identified young people who were being considered for reprimands and final warnings via daily searches of the police computer.

Service hours tended to be in the afternoon and evening as this is the time that young people are most likely to be arrested. Only Area D operated during traditional office hours (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.), although a local crime audit had found arrests of young people in Area D were most likely between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. However, in Area C Triage workers, who also acted as appropriate adults, were 'on call' between 9 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. There were sufficient Triage workers to attend the custody suites whenever necessary in this area. In other areas when a Triage worker was not available young people were bailed to return at a later date.

The Youth Offending Service commonly managed Triage and most workers had a youth work background. Police officers were seconded to Triage schemes in Areas D, E and G. Four schemes financed Triage solely through Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) monies, with two combining YCAP and other funding. Area E reported no additional funds for Triage but had redirected existing resources from the Youth Offending Service. In all areas a range of other interventions targeting young offenders were in operation and there was some cross-over with Triage schemes. For example, Area A combined the Triage scheme with Challenge and Support to create a local 'diversion scheme' and in Area C Triage was added to an Appropriate Adult scheme. The Department of Health was also piloting the Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion programme in two areas, which had a number of aims in common with Triage (see Appendix 1).

Table3.2: Implementation and operation

Area	Start date	Run by	No. of staff	Based in police custody	Hours of operation	Cost	Source of funding	Other schemes
A	July 2009	Youth offending team, police	3 Triage workers, 1 line manager, 5 Challenge and Support workers, 2 police officers	Yes	8 a.m. – 10 p.m. daily	£125,895 (plus £133,434 for Challenge and Support)	Mainly YCAP and some Area A City Centre Partnership Funding	Appropriate Adult and Challenge and Support
B	June 2008	Youth offending team, police	2 Triage workers solely to deliver restorative justice interventions[10]	Yes	1 p.m. – 9 p.m. daily	£120,000 (in the year 2011/12)	London Criminal Justice Board, YCAP and funds from prevention	Appropriate Adult, Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion Scheme
C	July 2009	Youth offending team, police, voluntary agency	18 at the voluntary agency,[11] police staff (as part of the custody sergeant role) across 3 custody suites	No	9 a.m. – midnight daily	£30,000 a year over a two-year period	YCAP only	Appropriate Adult, other YCAP initiatives, Community Resolutions /police restorative justice
D	November 2009	Youth offending team, police	2 Triage workers across 2 custody suites, 1 line manager and the Youth Offending Service pre-court team leader	Yes	10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Tuesday–Saturday	Unknown	YCAP only	Pre-remand disposal and other YCAP initiatives
E	April 2009	Youth offending team, police	4 Triage workers, 1 police officer, 1 victim care worker for restorative justice interventions	Yes	3 p.m. – 9 p.m. Monday–Friday	Unknown	Funding redirected within Youth Offending Service	Challenge and Support, other YCAP initiatives, Community Resolutions /police restorative justice
F	Triage never established	Youth offending team, police	3 youth offending team workers appointed for the combined custody service[12]	N/A	N/A	'A few hundred pounds'	YCAP only	Appropriate Adult, Youth Justice Liaison Diversion, Community Resolutions/ police restorative justice
G	August 2009	Youth offending team, police	Youth offending team and 2 police officers	No	N/A	£34,953 (Aug 09-July 10)	YCAP only	Community Resolutions /police restorative justice

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[10] Due to loss of several sources of funding; during pilot stage when more funds were available the YPS employed six Triage workers.

[11] This will include Appropriate Adults as the two schemes are run together.

[12] Area F wanted to combine Triage, Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion and Appropriate Adults schemes to develop a custody service. However, the Triage component failed to get off the ground. Area F is excluded from the remaining tables in the report.

Identification and referral to Triage

There are three levels of Triage. Triage level 1 attempted to engage with young people who had committed low-level, less serious and often first-time offences, where diversion from the youth justice system is the primary aim. It mainly comprises restorative work. Those young people receiving Triage 2 are not always diverted from the youth justice system, but have access to a range of supportive interventions following a needs assessment. All areas, with the exception of Area D, operated level 1 Triage, see Table 3.3. Areas B, D and G also provided Triage level 2, while Areas A and E offered Triage at all levels. Area B originally applied only Triage level 1 but workers reported receiving referrals for level 2 in cases where police officers felt that the young person had some underlying problem or family issue that exacerbated offending. Area D focused on level 2 as their existing pre-reprimand disposal covered Triage level 1 offences. In Area G, police targeted young people arrested for violent and alcohol/drug related offences.

A range of interventions were available via the Triage schemes. As noted, all areas providing Triage 1 offered some form of restorative intervention, including:

- letters of apology (Areas C, E);
- restorative conversations focusing on what happened, why it happened and what could be done to put it right (Areas B, E);
- attendance at a Restorative Justice Panel[13] (Area E); and
- reparation activity[14] (Area C).

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[13] This is attended by a police officer, victim worker, young person, parent/carer and the victim (if applicable).
[14] For example, working on an allotment or cleaning up an area of the community.

In addition, Triage schemes could refer to various local interventions including:

- drug services and anger management (Area A);
- parenting interventions (Areas A, B, D, G);[15]
- counselling (Areas A);
- offending behaviour interventions[16] (Areas A, D); and
- Connexions (Areas E, G).

The length of contact young people had with the Triage teams varied by area:

- Area A – the young person saw the Triage worker once a month for three months;
- Area B – one session only;
- Area G – two sessions;
- Area C – average contact of seven hours;
- Area E – level of contact was dependent on Triage level. Standard contact (level 1) was once a week throughout the 28-day bail period.

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[15] As a minimum this involved inviting parents to an initial interview to discuss Triage and subsequent intervention sessions. Parental involvement was also a key part of the restorative justice component linked to Triage 1.

[16] One example is 'Prison me no-way', which is a charity set up by prison officers aimed at turning young people away from crime.

Table3.3: Identifying young people and referring to Triage

Area	Types of Triage	Eligibility	How referrals are made by the police	Bail used
A	Levels 1,2 and 3	Triage 1/Challenge and Support: First offence, low gravity score (see Appendix 2), restorative justice intervention. Triage 2/enhanced *Challenge and Support*: Low gravity score, more intensive, multiple interventions. Triage 3: High gravity score and aggravating factors – criminal justice intervention. Interventions carried out by *Challenge and Support* workers. Triage workers aimed to see all arrested young people.	Discussion between police, use of a computer link within the police station.	No
B	Level 1 only but with some referrals by police officers for level 2 when need was obvious	Previous good character, offence gravity score of 1 and admit offence. Young person must be interviewed with an appropriate adult.	Discussion between police and Triage worker.	Yes
C	Mainly level 1, some level 2	Triage 1: First offence and low gravity score. Triage 2: As level 1, plus already known to the youth offending team or has a previous court order.	Discussion between police and Triage worker.	Rarely
D	Level 2 (level 1 operates through the pre-existing PRD scheme[17])	Triage 2: Low gravity score, may have received a pre-reprimand disposal/reprimand/final warning/court order.	Discussion between police and Triage worker.	Yes
E	Triage 1, 2 and 3	Triage 1: First offence, low gravity score. Triage 2: As level 1, plus previous reprimand/final warning.	Discussion between police and Triage worker.	Yes
G	Level 1 and 2	Young person who has been bailed under Section 34(5) of PACE; targeting of young people arrested for violent/drugs/alcohol offences; young people who have received community resolutions are invited on a voluntary basis for restorative justice work.	Daily search of police computer system for arrests by the youth crime officer (YCO); after database search the YCO contacts young person and family.	Yes

Offender profile

Young people engaging with Triage were most likely to be male, White[18] and around 15 years of age, see Table 3.4. The offences most commonly committed were: theft; violence; criminal damage; and public disorder. The majority of young people had no

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[17] Pre-reprimand disposal (PRD) is offered to 10–17-year-olds who have received no previous disposals, have admitted the offence and the offence has a low gravity score (see Appendix 2). The young person carries out a restorative justice intervention, which includes apologising to the victim, learning about victim awareness and anger management.

[18] Except for Area B, which had a high number of young people from ethnic minorities that, to some extent, reflected the local community.

previous convictions, as would be expected for those being targeted for Triage level 1. Young people in Area D had a higher proportion of previous offences than other areas because this area focused on Triage level 2. Only Area A provided information about the proportion of young people arrested who were referred to the Triage scheme; they saw 95 per cent of all arrested young people.

Table 3.4: Throughput, demographic and offending profile

Area	No. of young people seen	Time period	Mean no. entering Triage per month	Types of crime committed	Median age	Gender (% male)	Ethnicity (% White)	% Young people with previous convictions[19]
A	2,643	July 2009– Dec 2010	147	Theft and handling (24%), violence (20%), criminal damage (13%) public order (10%)	15	81	98	19
B	670	June 2008– Feb 2011	20	Theft (35%), drugs (19%), criminal damage (13%), public order (11%)	15	67	42	13
C	97	July 2009– Dec 2010	5	Violence (28%), theft (18%)	15	77	84	Unknown
D	134	Nov 2009– Feb 2011	8	Theft, (26%), public order (21%), violence (20%)	16	77	98	63[20]
E	417	April 2009– Feb 2011	18	Theft (35%), violence (32%), criminal damage (19%)	14	67	91	Unknown
G	30[21]	Aug 2009– Dec 2010	2	Unknown[22]	17	73	69	Unknown

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[19] Pre-court and post-court convictions prior to the current offence.

[20] These were all pre-court convictions. This proportion is high because Triage 2 only operates in Area D. The pre-reprimand disposal acts in place of Triage level 1.

[21] There was concern that Triage was being undercounted as it was not identified as a separate category/disposal by the youth offending team's systems or the police.

[22] Data from area in general show that the most common offences for all first-time entrants to the youth justice system during August 2009–August 2010 were: violence (28%), theft and handling (21%) and public order (9%).

There was a wide variation in the number of young people seen by the Triage schemes, with a mean number of monthly contacts ranging from 147 in Area A to only 2 in Area G. Some of this variation might be explained by factors such as on-site Triage workers (Areas A, B, E) versus dependence on police referral (Areas C, G). As noted, Area D focused on Triage 2 only, operating a pre-reprimand disposal for low-level offences. Area A reported adopting a blanket approach, trying to see all young people who were arrested.

Outcome indicators

As noted in Section 2, the limitations of data and study methodology do not allow the impact of the Triage schemes to be ascertained. Ministry of Justice[23] data on the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system in areas where Triage schemes were operating showed a 28.5 per cent reduction in first-time entrants rates between 2008/09 (pre-Triage) and 2009/10, compared with a national average reduction of 23.0 per cent. However, the national trend was decreasing prior to the introduction of Triage schemes; no firm conclusions can be drawn using these figures.

Re-offending rates for young people in Areas A, B and E, where sufficient data were available to examine the rate of post-Triage convictions, were lower than the national average, 21.3 per cent for first-time entrants to the youth justice system in 2008[24]. Post-Triage re-offending rates for these three areas ranged from 5 to 7 per cent.[25]

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[23] Source: Ministry of Justice (2010) *Young people aged 10–17 receiving first reprimand, warning or caution.* London: Ministry of Justice.
[24] Source: Ministry of Justice (2010) *Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis.* London: Ministry of Justice.
[25] Only 38 per cent, 68 per cent and 52 per cent (Areas A, B and E respectively) of young people who had entered the Triage schemes were eligible for these analyses.

Barriers and factors supporting the implementation and operation of Triage

Support from senior police officers

The issue most commonly raised as a barrier to implementing Triage was resistance from police. At a senior level this was linked to concerns about the negative impact that Triage schemes might have on sanction detection rates – a key performance target for police at that time (Areas A, C, E and F). The primacy of sanction detection rates was deemed an important reason for the failure of the Triage scheme in Area F. That was maintained despite a high-level multi-agency meeting hosted by the local authority to try to resolve the deadlock. However, in the other areas this was resolved by promoting the benefits of the schemes; for example, the head of the Youth Offending Service in Area E described her perseverance in promoting the potential that Triage had to reduce first-time entrants to the youth justice system and re-offending rates in order to gain police support:

> "*I really do believe this, every prolific offender was once a first-time offender, and if you have a system that you can identify them, then that is the only way you are ever going to truly drive down custody rates, drive down re-offending rates, and make a difference to the community you live in. So it was along those lines really, and yes, persevering, persevering, persevering, and not giving up.*" (Head of Youth Offending Service, Area E)

Support from custody staff

The cooperation of custody staff was also vital to ensure that there were appropriate referrals to the Triage team. There were concerns in some areas that police awareness of the schemes was poor. Factors that supported police cooperation included having a local police champion for the schemes; and promoting its benefits through training and literature.

In Area D Triage workers had spent time with all custody staff explaining the aims of the scheme prior to its going live. In Area E police probationers received training about Triage. There was some evidence of better understanding and appreciation of what Triage could achieve, as noted by a police officer in Area D:

'*Triage was a conduit to improve information sharing and build on the relationships we had. Previously we [the police] were just happy to get rid of young people as soon as possible; that is the conveyer belt culture we've had. There's [now] a bit more humanitarian feeling around an offender, what are the offender's needs. In that respect I think it's [Triage] been very successful and we've culturally moved a long way.*" (Police officer)

Some police officers mentioned their desire for regular feedback about the progress made with young people. An existing working relationship between the police and the agency running the Triage scheme (Area B) or previous experience of operating pre-reprimand disposals (Area D) made a more willing environment for the introduction of Triage.

However, even where good working relationships had been established, these could be disrupted by a change in custody staff. This was reported as a problem for Area F, where the custody inspector was changed regularly, and for Area G, where there was no permanent custody team and an inspector who had been supportive of the Triage scheme was transferred.

Presence in the custody suite

Triage workers having a presence in the custody suite was considered to be important to establishing the schemes with police, and increasing numbers of young people deemed as eligible for the schemes. For example, in Area E one worker illustrated the importance of this:

"*I think it helped us being there, and then they knew who we were, and we'd get a lot of them coming up and sort of like, I'm not sure what I'm meant to be doing, and so we could help them, and because they do know who we are, we got quite a lot of questions in the beginning. And we were in and out of custody as well, so they know us … So it really helped to kind of get our faces known I think.*" (Worker, Area E)

In contrast, in Area C, where the Triage scheme protocol involved referral via the Appropriate Adult service, young people who did not require an appropriate adult

could be missed. In other areas the service could only be provided to some custody suites so there was an element of postcode lottery with regard to access.

Working relationships with other services

Two areas (A and E) highlighted good working relationships with local service providers as an important factor for the successful operation of the schemes. For example, in Area A, the presence of a dedicated community 'hub' through the Challenge and Support team facilitated continuity of service for young people referred to the Triage schemes. In contrast, Areas B, C and D noted local limitations of choice and availability of services that hindered the type of service they were able to provide.

Funding

There were continuing concerns about gaining the necessary funding to continue providing Triage services. For example, funding cuts were already affecting service delivery in Area B, where there were no longer any Triage workers in the custody suite. Police officers were relied on to make referrals. Police interviewees in that area had noted an increase in the time taken for the Triage team to respond to referrals. In Area D, short-term funding was seen as an impediment to thorough service development:

> "*Funny money just sort of comes and goes. You can't do any long-term planning. As soon as your member of staff is appointed, they are leaving … Then in June or July the funding is reconfirmed for a further year. So you advertise, and [then] it is Christmas … [which] is why two years would be good. Because then you could do an 18-month contract.*" (Triage team worker)

Pre-arrest diversion

In two areas (E and G) the introduction of neighbourhood or community resolution was seen as likely to reduce the number of young people being referred to the Triage scheme, since they were essentially being diverted from the youth justice system pre-arrest. The resolutions encourage police not to arrest perpetrators of minor offences but instead, attempt to get them to make restoration by apologising to

the victim or making reparation in other ways. These are victim-led and can be applied to offenders who have previous convictions. For example, in Area E Triage numbers declined by about 20 per cent since the introduction of neighbourhood resolution, although the police officer in charge in that area conducted brief checks of those receiving neighbourhood resolutions to assess whether Triage would have been more suitable.

4.   Conclusions

Triage came in a variety of shapes and sizes, having been implemented locally to meet the particular needs and circumstances of each area visited. However, most commonly Triage schemes were focused on the diversion of first-time entrants from the youth justice system. In some areas Triage schemes operated as a stand-alone process. In others it was part of a raft of interventions targeting young people at risk of offending or young people coming into contact with the police in custody.

Triage was highly valued for its early intervention and diversionary approach by many of the stakeholders interviewed. There is some published evidence for the efficacy of diversion (Godson, 2010; McAra and McVie, 2010). Schemes that attempt to divert young people from the formal youth justice system can reduce the potential detrimental impact of a criminal record. Triage is only offered if the young people involved admit the offence and show remorse. The restorative justice element gives victims a voice during the justice process creating a balance between the victim's need for reparation and the needs of often vulnerable young people. Young people who had been through a Triage scheme in Liverpool (Wood *et al.*, 2011) were given the opportunity to give their views. Although not many completed the feedback questionnaire one young person stated that:

> "*Triage is a really good opportunity as I did not receive a criminal record. Talking things through helped me to understand rather than being punished and not knowing why.*" (Young person)

What lessons can be shared from this evaluation about the effective implementation of Triage schemes? There were some key differences across the case study areas in terms of the number of young people being seen by Triage workers; in some areas these were in the thousands while in other areas there was only a handful. Irrespective of numbers of staff or availability of service, Triage appears to work best in areas where there is an existing working relationship between police and the Youth Offending Service. It also appears that the key stakeholders need to share the strategic goal of diverting young people away from the youth justice system and be

willing to develop ways of resolving low-level offending using restorative justice approaches.

The support of the custody officers was crucial, as has been found with other custody-based diversion initiatives. Without their full cooperation, in terms of selecting and referring young people to the schemes, Triage will not work. Some areas noted strategies to engage the police and 'keep them on-board'. This included training both existing custody staff and police probationers about Triage and its rationale, and giving prompt and detailed feedback to police officers about the young people referred. Similar conclusions were found in an evaluation of Triage in the Liverpool area (Wood *et al.*, 2011). The authors propose, "*sharing outcomes of the Triage programme with police officers may help to gain greater trust in the programme and greater adherence to Triage procedures*" (p 70). In addition having Triage workers based in the custody suite was noted as an advantage for building good working relations.

Policing priorities at the time, particularly the pre-eminence of sanction detection rates as a policing target, had caused difficulties. Interviewees noted the need for Triage schemes to be properly recorded and valued as a police disposal, rather than as "*no further action*". In some areas there was concern that police-led community resolution could have a negative impact on Triage schemes by resolving problems away from the custody suite. The worry was that this could reduce the numbers of young people being seen and assessed by Triage workers. This would mean that vulnerable young people with specific needs could slip through the net. Triage schemes are not intrinsically incompatible with community resolution and can fit well. However, there needs to be strategic leadership across the police and the Youth Offending Service and a clear definition of how the different interventions interact. A good practice example in one area involved having someone regularly check the details of all those who had received a community resolution as way of reviewing where the Triage schemes may have been more appropriate.

Another critical part of Triage is the quality and range of services and support that are available for young people who engage with the schemes. Again, this is a common theme that emerges from other evaluations of interventions that have a

signposting or referral function. Concerns were highlighted in interviews about how key local services will be maintained and available to Triage schemes following service cuts across the youth justice, health and social care sectors. Currently, Triage interventions are delivered by the Youth Offending Service, seconded police officers and third sector workers. However, as a result of funding issues in one of the case study areas, consideration was being given to devolving the task to trained volunteers.

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Appendix 1: Youth justice interventions

Pre-offence prevention

Operation Staysafe

Staysafe aimed to protect vulnerable children and young people whose behaviour or whereabouts place them at risk of significant harm. Behaviour could include being out on the streets at night at a particularly vulnerable age or being involved in anti-social behaviour, for example, possessing fireworks, alcohol or being drunk. It also included being in the company of adults involved in crime or anti-social behaviour. The initiative used existing child protection legislation under Section 46 of the Children's Act 1989 to take these young people into police protection until they were reunited with their parents/guardians.

Street-based teams

Street-based teams aimed to tackle youth offending and anti-social behaviour by engaging disaffected young people on the streets. They set out to target those who had rejected previous offers of support. They aimed to achieve their goals by:

- engaging young people in positive activities;
- being a credible source of advice and guidance; and
- emphasising that tough sanctions will be enforced if young people refuse to engage and continue to be involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

After school police patrols

After school police patrols were designed to tackle anti-social behaviour, disorder and more serious offending (including knife crime) at school closing time on problematic school bus routes and at transport interchanges. The visibility of the patrols were designed to reassure young people, local schools and communities in areas where crime and disturbances occur, while helping to prevent problems and enforce laws as required.

Family Intervention Projects

Family Intervention Projects provide intensive support to vulnerable families. They initially focused on families involved in persistent anti-social behaviour who were at risk of losing their homes and have been expanded to wider groups of families at risk. Through assertive working methods and the threat of sanctions, projects help families to improve behaviour and address underlying problems. Accredited parenting programmes are delivered and additional services, such as health, are brought in and coordinated around the family.

Think Family reforms

The Think Family approach was developed to improve the support offered to vulnerable children and adults within the same family. Funding was provided to enable local authorities to deliver a range of support for families with different levels of needs, from universal services to more intensive support for high-need families. Underpinning this were changes in attitudes, culture and behaviour at local level and on the front line identifying the families and intervening early.

Pre-arrest

Youth Restorative Disposal

The youth restorative disposal offers a quick and proportionate response to young people's low-level offending and allows victims to have a voice in how the offence is resolved. It gives specially trained police officers and police community support officers on-the-spot discretion to hold to account young people who have committed certain minor offences. It is only possible to use a Youth Restorative Disposal for a first offence, and both the victim and offender must agree to participate.

Community resolutions

Community resolutions are very similar to youth restorative disposals, but are not restricted to young people.

Diversion at the custody suite

Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion

The Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion (YJLD) pilot project aimed to introduce a system of identification and rapid response support and diversion for under 18-year-olds with mental health, learning or communication difficulties or other vulnerabilities at the earliest possible opportunity in the youth justice system. This is achieved through putting a YJLD worker in place to:

- coordinate the identification of vulnerabilities;
- inform and influence decisions proactively;
- map local services;
- liaise with key stakeholders;
- develop protocols; and
- follow up referrals by supporting young people into appropriate services.

Alcohol Arrest Referral Schemes (discontinued)

A national pilot aimed to provide arrest referral interventions to young people. Young people committing substance misuse-related offences were screened and offered brief interventions and signposted to a range of supportive agencies.

Appropriate Adults

Appropriate Adults ensure that young people's interests are represented and their rights are protected during police interviews when no parent or carer is present. In some youth offending team areas, the role of Appropriate Adults was enhanced to provide a Triage service.

Restorative work and support

Challenge and Support

Challenge and Support, funded by the Department for Education, provides support to young people who have already received either a criminal justice disposal, such as an Anti-Social Behaviour Order, or an acceptable behaviour contract.

Increased reparation activity

The Youth Crime Action Plan included commitments to improve the use of reparation and highlights reparation during leisure time, including on Friday and Saturday nights. Reparation activities should ensure that young offenders are engaged constructively in making up for their offences and putting something positive back into their neighbourhoods. Reparation can be attached to a Youth Rehabilitation Order.

Appendix 2: Gravity scores

The table below provides some examples of offences that may result in young people having contact with the criminal justice system, and the gravity scores of those offences. Gravity scores are related to the seriousness of an offence on an eight-point scale. Offences that score between one and three would normally receive a first-tier response (for example, a reprimand or final warning) or community disposal. The information in the table is drawn from the code developed by the Youth Justice Board. An alternative system was developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers with the Crown Prosecution Service and this uses a four-point scale, but the two scales complement each other.

OFFENCE	GRAVITY SCORE
Drunk and disorderly	1
Drunk and incapable	1
Threat to destroy property of another	2
Possession of articles with intent to commit criminal damage	2
Class 'B' or 'C' drug possession	2
Threatening abusive or insulting words/behaviour intended to cause fear of violence/provoke violence (Section 4)	2
Intentionally causing harassment, alarm or distress through threatening abusive or insulting words, behaviour or display (Section 4A)	2
Threatening abusive or insulting words or behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress (Section 5)	2
Criminal damage under £2,000	2
Criminal damage over £2,000	3
Possession of an offensive weapon	3
Possession of a sharp pointed blade	3
Affray (Section 3)	3
Common assault	3
Class 'A' drug possession	3
Theft	3
Going equipped to steal	3
Handling stolen property	3
Permit use of premises for smoking cannabis/resin	3
Making a false document (Section 1 Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981)	3
Using a false document (Section 3 Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981)	3
Possessing a false document with intent (Section 5 Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981)	3
Forgery of documents, etc. (Road Traffic Act 1988)	3
Actual bodily harm (Section 47 Offences Against the Person Act 1861)	4
Burglary (non-dwelling)	4
Taking vehicle without consent	4
Breach of Anti-Social Behaviour Order	4
Supply or possession with intent to supply Class 'B/C' drug	4
Violent disorder (Section 2)	5

OFFENCE	GRAVITY SCORE
Arson (where life not endangered)	**5**
Robbery/assault with intent to rob	**6**
Burglary with intent to steal/criminal damage	**6**
Burglary (dwelling)	**6**
Supply or possession with intent to supply Class 'A' drug	**6**
Aggravated burglary	**7**