



Article

The changing shape of youth justice: Models of practice

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journals.sagepub.com/home/crj**Roger Smith** 

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Abstract

This article reports on a two-year investigation, which maps out contemporary approaches to the delivery of youth justice in England, in light of substantial recent changes in this area of practice. The findings are derived from a detailed examination of youth offending plans and a series of corroborative semi-structured interviews with managers and practitioners from selected youth offending services. Our inquiry has enabled us to develop a detailed three-fold typology of youth justice agencies' orientations towards practice, represented as 'offender management', 'targeted intervention' and 'children and young people first'; as well as a small number of 'outliers' where priorities are articulated rather differently. Our findings enable us to reflect on this evidence to suggest that there are a number of 'models' of youth justice practice operating in parallel; and that there does not appear at present to be the kind of 'orthodoxy' in place which has sometimes prevailed in this field. We also raise doubts about previous representations of unified models of youth justice presumed to be operative at national or jurisdictional levels. We conclude with a number of further observations about the combined effect of current influences on the organization and realization of youth justice, including the growing emphasis on localized responsibility for delivery and increasingly complex expectations of the service context.

Keywords

Children first, models of youth justice, offender management, targeted intervention

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The Backdrop: Youth Justice Realignment, 'Models' of Intervention and Their Implications

Youth justice in England¹ is changing. Recent developments across the spectrum of law, policy, organization, delivery and outcomes suggest a different picture than when Goldson (2010) was writing despairingly of the 'sleep of criminological reason'. From that viewing point, subsequent changes appear more ambiguous. Within this one national jurisdiction, we have since witnessed a 'rehabilitation revolution'; a legislative challenge to the idea of a strict tariff of disposals; the impact of austerity; significant changes in service structures and responsibilities; substantial revisions of operational guidance and targets; and, of course, a major shift in the pattern of outcomes in youth justice.

With a reduction of over two-thirds in the number of young people in custody from 2008 to 2015 (Ministry of Justice/Youth Justice Board, 2016), and substantially increased use of a range of diversionary options at the 'front end' of the system, a clear trend seems to have been established (Bateman, 2014, 2017). But, before celebrating a new 'age of diversion' we must adopt a note of caution in view of the substantial and persistent over-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic young people in custody (Pitts, 2015: 39), the inadequacy of much of the secure estate, the persistence of dehumanizing custodial conditions and the continuing evidence that young people 'in the system' experience oppression and social exclusion (Cunneen et al., 2017).

In this article, our focus will be on the pivotal role of youth offending services (YOSs) and teams (YOTs) as mediators and moderators, bridging the formal instructions and exhortations of legislators and policy-makers on the one hand; and the demands and opportunities associated with managing resources and engaging directly with young people whose behaviour is seen as problematic, on the other. What are the realities for those in the youth justice field of 'street level bureaucracy' (Lipsky, 2010) and 'relative autonomy' (Poulantzas, 1978), then? What, indeed, is the scope for service level actors to 'subvert' and/or transform the prevailing logic of an overdetermining system (Barnes and Prior, 2009)?

Accounting for practices and outcomes in youth justice has sometimes seemed a straightforward matter of identifying critical events or significant political shifts which provide a more or less comprehensive explanation for what has happened. Substantial change is associated with the welfarist reforms of the 1960s, for instance (Thorpe et al., 1980); or the 'punitive turn' of the early 1990s (Muncie, 2008). We have perhaps been unduly prepared to think in terms of rapid and decisive changes of direction; as ideas, policy and practice appear to coalesce rapidly around a particular mode of intervention, associated with a dominant perspective ('paradigm') on both the causes of and effective responses to youth crime (Case and Haines, 2009). Comprehensive and definitive explanatory mechanisms accounting for young people's delinquent behaviour are incorporated in the articulation of such models, via the policy frameworks and practice methods which supposedly underpin effective service delivery and guarantee positive outcomes.

There is an element of caricature in this portrayal, but certain orthodoxies are represented in the ways in which we approach youth crime and young offenders (Hazel, 2008). Indeed, acceptance of this concretizing tendency has informed previous attempts to articulate coherent 'models' of youth justice policy and practice, usually organized around national or jurisdictional boundaries (Bala et al., 2002; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006;

Hazel, 2008; McAra, 2010; Winterdyk, 1997, for example). These analyses have tended to rely on characterizations of dominant discourses and policy frameworks, conveying a relatively uniform picture of different national 'systems'; although some have observed that these may not be replicated so clearly below that level (Kelly and Armitage, 2015; Muncie, 2002, 2015).

In practice, there are difficulties associated with any kind of monolithic view of the youth justice field. Whatever might be the conventionally accepted (and legitimized) frameworks for intervention in any given context, we should not straightforwardly assume that these are uniformly, unreflexively or uncritically applied in real world settings (Fergusson, 2007; McAlister and Carr, 2014).

Equally challenging, though, is the task of developing some kind of explanatory framework where there does not appear to be an overarching coherence to the delivery system, and change cannot easily be treated as unidirectional. So, even though much has been made of the impact of austerity (Bateman, 2014, 2017), the consequences of the realignment and retrenchment of state agencies have not necessarily been uniform or predictable. Indeed, our aim here is not simply to describe a changing pattern of outcomes, but to develop some insights into the relationship between these trends and other aspects of the broader domain within which youth justice is situated. This necessarily includes the conflicting dynamic between the relative withdrawal of centralized state direction, and the persistent and large-scale reduction in resources available to local agencies responsible for the delivery of youth justice and other relevant services (Youth Justice Board, 2016a).

Alongside dramatic shifts in the operating environment in England we note the contemporaneous revisions in policy and procedures (the introduction of the 'Laspo'² Act in 2012 and the updating of the Asset tool to AssetPlus, for example). No doubt, these developments intertwine; but they are also strongly mediated by active processes of reappraisal and refocusing of the underlying purposes and values of the youth justice system taking place *from within* (Drake et al., 2014). We might thus expect to be able to identify a dynamic relationship between structures and strategies and what actually happens on the ground, with influences, ideas and initiatives flowing in each direction (Muncie, 2006).

Our starting point is precisely to address the mediating role of youth justice services in actively making sense of the resource allocations, policy expectations and performance requirements which frame their work on the one hand; and their active modification or reinterpretation of these drivers in working with young people who come into contact with the youth justice system on the other (Wilson, 2013).

We are interested, therefore, in how youth justice is 'organized' currently by those directly concerned with its delivery. How are they (actively) making sense of and negotiating the dynamic interface between the overarching 'system' and the 'real life' experiences of those young people who are the focus of their interventions?

Our Approach

Our investigation has been informed first by a substantial review of youth offending (youth justice) plans,³ utilizing a form of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Our choice of documents to examine was intended to achieve a geographical and

demographic spread across England, supplemented by a purposive selection of plans from a number of areas which make explicit claims of a distinctive approach, and might thus offer helpful reference points for our analysis. Based on a detailed, systematic reading of each document, we have appraised their structure and presentational style, as well as detailed content. Emphasis, for example, has been inferred both from the placement and frequency with which a particular term has been mentioned. We have thus identified themes and patterns suggesting similarities and differences of approach; and we have drawn on this initial analysis to develop a schematic typology of models of youth justice, each with recognizably distinct characteristics, as represented in this format.

The second phase of our investigation involved a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with practitioners and/or managers in eight of the youth offending services whose plans we had previously examined and categorized. We adopted a purposive 'theoretical sampling' (Charmaz, 2006) strategy, ensuring that we spoke with representatives of at least two services representing each of the distinctive practice philosophies identified, according to their planning documents; and thereby, we aimed to test the robustness and coherence of the typology initially formulated 'on paper'. In total, we interviewed 23 practitioners and managers across eight services, which were widely distributed geographically, as well as representing the three practice models identified in the first phase of our study.

The interview format was not directly derived from the emerging typology, in order to avoid 'putting words into the mouths' of our respondents. Instead, we chose to organize the interviews around a series of key prompts, which we believed would generate responses indicative of interviewees' aspirations and orientation to practice, namely:

- what they viewed as the most important aspects of their role and functions, and how they judged success;
- how they viewed their approach as distinctive in relation to other youth justice services; and
- how they were responding to the many organizational and operational changes they were currently experiencing.

The interview responses were subjected to a 'theoretical thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006), drawing on, but not dictated by, the framework offered by the typology itself. In this way, we intended to seek out either confirmatory or countervailing evidence of the degree of coherence and alignment between the formally stated aspirations and claims of youth offending services and their reports of their everyday goals and practices.

The 'Official' Version: What Can It Tell Us?

Youth offending plans are mandatory and have to be prepared on an annual basis by each local authority, under section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. They are 'political' documents in that they have to be submitted to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and made publicly available, while being subject to local scrutiny and approval: '[s]eeking elected member endorsement is an important factor in maintaining informed dialogue on youth

offending matters with the community through the political process' (Ministry of Justice/ Youth Justice Board, 2013: 9).

These planning documents and the processes which inform them seek to frame practice, set priorities and establish the legitimacy of particular approaches to intervention. These then are material representations of wider strategies which can be viewed as seeking to 'organize consent' (Hall et al., 2013) around desired outcomes, and what is deemed reasonable and practicable in terms of service delivery.

Our analytical starting point comprises these 'official' representations of the youth justice 'project'. The reasons for this choice are twofold. First, and pragmatically, these are easily accessible documents which follow a more or less predictable format, and thus lend themselves to systematic analysis; and, second, we are interested in exploring the ways in which such material might perform a number of functions:

- mediating between government and providers;
- accounting for practice;
- accommodating resource expectations;
- articulating assumptions about youth crime and justice;
- developing distinctive rationales for intervention;
- setting the agenda by determining 'what counts'.

We considered 34 youth justice plans, all of which cover one or more of the years 2014, 2015 and 2016.⁴ They are public documents and we recognize that this single characteristic must inform the way in which they are constructed and then read. By adopting a systematic and 'critical' mode of inductive content analysis (Elo and Kyngas, 2008), we hope that we have avoided too literal or simplistic conclusions from this examination. The plans cover one, two or three years; some are described as 'strategic plans', while one, at least, is presented as a 'business plan'; they vary considerably in length (typically between 10 and 45 pages with some even longer than this); and they vary in presentation and style, from routine committee reports to 'glossy' promotional documents. In some areas, plans are kept rigorously up to date, and in other instances there have been lapses in keeping them current, perhaps indicating a variation in the importance attributed to the plans themselves.

However, all these plans share a common acknowledgement of the prevailing Ministry of Justice (MoJ) targets; namely: a reduction in first-time entrants to the justice system; a reduction in reoffending; and a reduction in the use of custody. And, typically, youth offending services are keen to highlight significant achievements against any or all of these indicators. Some plans restrict the focus to these three objectives, while others give an indication of their own priorities by adding to them, sometimes drawing on the Youth Justice Board's strategic objectives, now reframed as 'strategic end benefits' (Youth Justice Board, 2016b), by aspiring to 'safeguard' children, to reintegrate young people excluded from education or employment, to encourage their participation in service planning or to improve accommodation for young people subject to supervision.

Seven core themes emerged from our examination, overlapping with the 'amalgam' of purposes and practices identified previously by Muncie (2002: 157), which he described as revealing 'the fundamental contradictions' of youth justice. Several plans

incorporated explicit *child-oriented welfare* themes which focused on meeting young people's personal and social needs, albeit often in the context of addressing their risk of social exclusion:

Many of the young people involved with the YOT are the most vulnerable children and are at greatest risk of social exclusion. Our multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of young people ensures that we play a significant role in meeting the safeguarding needs of these young people. (Leicestershire Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015: 3)

However the conceptualization of welfare offered here is more nuanced than a simple focus on needs and risk of social exclusion. Discussion of welfare is often tied up with sentiments of being 'child friendly' and 'child centred', particularly as it is generally agreed that while the number of young people entering the youth justice system has been substantially reduced, the needs of those that remain have increased and become more complex. So another East Midland authority states: 'the Youth Justice Service does not lose sight of the child at the centre of what we do and will work with the child and their family to seek the best outcomes for the child or young person' (Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 1).

Welfare objectives are sometimes aligned with the team's involvement in the 'Troubled Families' initiative (Smith, 2015). There appeared to be a grouping of YOSs whose plans were heavily infused with notions of promoting youth well-being through working with the family. The family support element of YOS work is brought out strongly in Nottinghamshire's approach: '[t]he Youth Justice Service works very closely with the local Supporting Families teams under the Troubled Families agenda' (Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 5), supported by a commitment to assume the 'lead professional' role where appropriate.

A 'developmental' focus is a second theme that appears in many youth justice plans, couched in a language of 'achieving positive outcomes' and 'improving life chances'. One service stated its aim to ensure that: 'all children and young people are empowered and supported to develop to their full potential and have the life skills and opportunities to play an active part in society' (Gateshead Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2013–2014: 3). In some cases, though, such aims are linked with developmental concerns about challenging attitudes and behaviour:

The YOT has commissioned a range of agencies to provide constructive, positive activities [...] to motivate and empower young people to make positive life changes [...] and help create a positive outlook on life through developing new ways of thinking, coping and behaving. (Harrow Youth Offending Partnership Youth Justice Plan 2015–2018: 7)

There is another group of youth justice plans which emphasize 'justice' themes and restrict their focus to the Ministry of Justice key targets. The language here is very much about 'holding young people accountable', 'confronting' them with the consequences of their actions, tackling those factors which underlie offending, reinforcing parental responsibilities and punishment proportionate to the level of offending. Harrow's plan for example prioritizes 'effective delivery of youth justice services' and repeatedly stresses its concern with addressing offending behaviour (Harrow Youth Offending Partnership Youth Justice

Plan 2015–2018: 3). Bracknell Forest, too, highlights the MoJ targets in its 2013–2016 ‘Youth Justice Plan’, adopting a narrow view of the remit of the YOS.

Some plans reflect a more hybridized view of the role and functions of youth justice services. Stockport’s 2014–2015 plan, while ostensibly prioritizing MoJ indicators in the same way as Bracknell Forest and Harrow, also highlights early intervention, triage and other services focusing on need and vulnerability (Stockport Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 8). Ambiguous understandings of ‘criminogenic need’ clearly underpin Northamptonshire’s Youth Justice Plan for 2014–2015 which seeks to integrate a commitment to meeting children’s needs with its behaviour management objectives, so that plans to achieve suitable accommodation for young people on court orders sit alongside a commitment to reduce levels of violent crime committed by young people, and an active policy of ensuring compliance and enforcement in cases where orders are breached.

While these themes have an established place in youth justice policy and practice, three further themes are more recent. While ‘restorative justice’ references now appear in most youth justice plans, some teams give a strong emphasis to this approach. Darlington, for example, has made a great deal of its commitment to restorative justice, which culminated in a national award in 2013: ‘[t]he focus [...] is to deliver a consistent restorative approach involving young people [...] the use of Restorative Justice is being increased significantly across all disposals’ (Darlington Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015: 22). However, while definitions of restorative justice vary, there is a fairly constant emphasis on the ‘responsibilizing’ rather than the ‘restorative’ aspect of this form of intervention (see Gray, 2005): ‘[t]he YOS oversees young people’s engagement in making good their behaviour by means of apology (direct/indirect) to the victim/s or by actively undertaking active reparative activity’ (Stockport Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 6).

A commitment to the importance of young people’s ‘participation’ in orienting services around their priorities as in article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is acknowledged by many teams. Gateshead has identified one of its key principles as that of ‘involving, respecting and hearing the voice of young people’ (Gateshead Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2013–2014: 4). The Norfolk Youth Justice Plan (2014–2015) goes so far as to describe young people as ‘customers’ and stresses the importance of ‘giving them a voice’.

‘Participatory’ approaches have begun to feature more strongly in wider service goals in working with children, but this has only relatively recently been apparent to any significant extent in youth justice. Considering Leeds’ Youth Justice Plan for 2015–2016 alongside its immediate predecessor, there is a significant departure in its strong commitment to put: ‘children and young people’s voices at the heart of our work [which] is integral to everything we want to achieve’ (Leeds Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016: 23).

‘Diversionary’ themes are highlighted, too. This is undoubtedly linked to the MoJ target to reduce first-time entrants and which has resulted in substantial reductions in recent years. However, the concept of diversion underlying this theme is sometimes rather different to the ‘minimalist’ diversionary programmes of the 1980s (Smith, 2014a) in that it supports robust ‘out of court’ welfare interventions (Kelly and Armitage, 2015) rather than minimal contact with the youth justice system. Northamptonshire, for

example, links the 'active' pursuit of pre-court disposals to the supplementary offer of assessment and intervention. The intention is to provide: 'access to education and training, support to the families and parents of these children, and to ensure access to mainstream services for them' (Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 8).

In an era when the audit culture remains strongly in play despite attempts to 'roll back' the state, 'managerialist' themes continue to influence youth justice plans. Whether they are predominantly guided by 'welfare', 'justice', 'developmental' or 'participatory' themes, plans are infused by the language of targets, performance indicators, strategies, monitoring and inspection: '[h]igh quality and effective Youth Justice provision is the primary objective of the YOS partnership and performance reporting/accountability and quality assurance frameworks are essential to achieving this aim' (Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2017: 6).

Towards a Typology?

This review of formal planning documents offers some clues as to how youth justice is currently thought of in the arena in which strategic principles and policy frameworks are converted into specific statements of intent, operational guidance and evaluations of practice (the 'mezzo' level). We believe that it demonstrates the value of a typology of 'models' for organizing the delivery of youth justice; and further, to establish the basis for exploring wider questions of governance and the day-to-day negotiation of the terrain of social control of young people and their families. The proposed typology is intended to offer an 'ideal type' (Weber, 1957) analytical framework, which acts as a basis for further critical inquiry. We are not suggesting that any of the models set out here in their pure form are likely to be realized as such in the complex and changing circumstances in which youth justice is delivered.

We suggest that the plans analysed represent three distinctive positions which can effectively be categorized as: 'offender management'; 'targeted intervention'; and 'children and young people first'.

'Offender management'

'Offender management' plans place the emphasis on dealing with offending behaviour and its consequences, on managing risk, on reducing reoffending and on managing offenders through statutory supervision of court ordered disposals. Leicestershire's Youth Justice Strategic Plan (2016–2019: 3) prioritizes:

Imbedding the use of the national reoffending toolkit within YOS practice. The toolkit provides live data in relation to young people being case managed by the YOS. Regularly tracking the data has enabled the YOS to identify trends related to young people who go on to offend, and where appropriate escalate the level and nature of interventions.

'Offender management' strategies tend to conflate addressing welfare needs with managing risk, since the principal focus is on managing interventions rather than understanding the origins of young people's offending. However, 'offender management' teams are not

necessarily one-dimensional or completely routinized in their approach to practice, and some have developed innovative intervention programmes. They may highlight their streamlined delivery arrangements as significant achievements:

The success of the early intervention work undertaken through Triage means that the Youth Offending Team is working closely with a cohort of young offenders who are amongst the most 'prolific' and 'high risk' offenders requiring more intense and costly interventions. (Harrow Youth Offending Partnership Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015: 11)

Although there is acknowledgement of the place of restorative justice and diversion as intervention strategies, these are principally adopted as instrumental means to achieve the Ministry of Justice targets.

'Targeted intervention'

Unlike those concerned narrowly with offender management, 'targeted intervention' forms part of a broader array of specialized youth support provision. Services provided according to this model are aimed only at young people who offend, but they aim to be proactive in intervening to address aspects of young people's criminogenic vulnerabilities (e.g. homelessness, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, educational underachievement). Oldham Youth Justice Service appears as a typical example of such a team, which is 'managed in an integrated way alongside other services to support children, young people and families within a Targeted Services Directorate' (Oldham Youth Justice Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015: 5).

Often 'targeted intervention' teams have emerged following cuts in public spending which have forced local authorities to restructure services for children and youth, particularly in light of the dramatic decline in the number of young people coming into contact with the youth justice system. In some areas, these services have been outsourced and are delivered by independent charitable trusts or by what are described in the Taylor review (Taylor, 2016: 7) as 'community interest companies'.

'Children and young people first'

Here, there is a clear emphasis in prioritizing the well-being of children, irrespective of their involvement in criminal behaviour. These services make the commitment to meeting the needs of all children clear, and thus, in a sense, give precedence to the status of young people as children, de-emphasizing concerns about their offending behaviour. In this sense, they share a great deal in common with the 'children first' and 'positive youth justice' arguments articulated by Haines and Case (2015), associated with the approach to youth justice adopted in Swansea (Haines et al., 2013) and Surrey (Byrne and Case, 2016). Unlike the teams described in the previous section who specifically target young people who offend, 'children first' teams provide a totally generic, holistic and integrated youth support service for all vulnerable children and young people. As the Surrey Youth Justice⁵ Plan (2015–2020: 5) states: 'a belief that young people who offend are first and foremost young people, and they often present with multiple needs which are not best

met through a discrete service for “young offenders”. Nevertheless, implicit even in principled strategies of this kind is the assumption that effective interventions to meet needs and tackle inequalities will also result in lower levels of offending behaviour and involvement with the justice system, in line with the emergent emphasis on ‘desistance’ and the facilitative role of youth justice services in support of this (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2016).

Thematic variations: ‘The outliers’?

Earlier it was pointed out that the thematic analysis of youth justice plans threw up seven core themes and that there was considerable variation in the level to which teams embraced these themes. Therefore, although the threefold typology set out above does effectively accommodate the great majority of youth justice plans, it was also evident that in some teams certain themes were so dominant that they provided the guiding framework for all aspects of their work. So, for example, Darlington made restorative justice their starting point and tended to see all of their youth justice interventions through this particular lens. Medway also claims to make ‘restorative practices’ the principal focus of its youth justice service (Medway Youth Offending Service Strategic Plan 2014–2016: 24). Others, acknowledging Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), place the importance of engaging with, listening to and promoting the participation of children and young people at the forefront of the design and delivery of all their services. As we observed earlier, Leeds, for example, has relatively recently adopted a ‘welfare + rights’ (Smith, 2014b) approach, with a focus on promoting young people’s participation, moving towards an out and out commitment ‘to give young people a voice and creating opportunities for them to shape service delivery’ (Leeds Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016: 22).

Despite this, our analysis offers a sufficiently robust framework to relate these distinctive approaches to the proposed typology – Darlington’s 2015–2016 plan, for instance, incorporates elements of both ‘targeted’ and ‘offender management’ approaches, whereas Medway can be identified as driven partly by the language and practices associated with an ‘offender management’ approach. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Leeds’ plan also has a flavour of ‘children and young people first’ about its commitment to reintegration and partnerships with families.

The position adopted by each youth offending service also appears to shape its approach to substantive aspects of service delivery – restorative justice, for example, is represented in quite different ways according to the contrasting perspectives reflected in particular planning documents, as in the case of Surrey (‘children and young people first’) and Bath and North East Somerset (‘offender management’).

Applying the Typology: Talking to Practitioners and Managers

At this point, we wanted to test our observations, and the tentative typology derived therefrom. Were the different positions we had postulated clearly echoed in the thinking and orientation of practitioners and managers? Did they draw on their apparently distinctive

ideas and approaches in coherent ways to inform their own intervention strategies? Did their practices differ as a result? Or were the plans we had evaluated more properly seen simply as essentially political documents, devised to satisfy particular audiences and formal expectations of compliance (Barnes and Prior, 2009)?

As outlined earlier, the second phase of our inquiry involved a series of theoretically informed (Charmaz, 2006) interviews with youth justice practitioners and managers; this in turn informed a 'thematic theoretical analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which enabled us to map our interviewees' responses against the emergent typology.

Important features of the service/success criteria

Here, we uncovered aspects of what we would describe as the 'everyday ontologies' of the teams we visited, certainly from the perspective of those interviewed. By this we mean their implicit and sometimes explicit beliefs about the causes of crime, the nature of childhood, the relationship between risk and need, and their ideas about appropriate and effective intervention strategies.

The Manager of Service D (*offender management*), for example, spoke of everyone following 'the same policies and procedures' and emphasized the importance of 'consistency' of practice across a fairly large and diverse geographical area: '[w]e're obviously trying to deliver on our three performance areas' [the MOJ targets]. The Manager of Service F, also informed by an *offender management* model, described his team's approach as being that of 'child-centred offender management'. By this he meant that addressing the child's welfare was a vital component of reducing their risk of reoffending. Like the Manager of Service D, he stressed that this was to be achieved by a 'rigorous' and 'consistent' style of case management and intervention.

In one of the other services, priorities were defined instead in terms of addressing complex needs, and working with 'high risk' young people (Service C). Here the objectives were framed in terms of 'identifying young people with the highest needs/highest risks' as early as possible and then developing beneficial preventive interventions with them (*targeted intervention*).

By contrast, the talk at Service E was very much about adopting a comprehensive problem-solving approach towards young people's complex welfare problems and providing a totally generic, integrated youth support service or 'one stop shop' to address them. The most significant feature of this approach was seen to be the avoidance of 'silencing' young people who offend and recognizing them as 'children first'. As the Manager of Service B commented 'our main role is [...] to support young people, they are not born criminal [...] most of them it's because of the hand that they've been dealt [...] it could be neglect' (*children and young people first*).

Distinctiveness

The distinctive feature of Service H (*targeted intervention*) was the way the YOT was said to be nested in an integrated youth support service; while it retained an element of specialist work with young people who had offended it prioritized preventative work and interventions to support a range of other vulnerable young people who had complex

needs. According to the Service Manager, the service structure and priorities were forced to change in response to the dramatic drop in first-time entrants and low statutory case-loads. When asked to explain the difference between a 'targeted' and 'children first' team, this manager said that the former could not ignore the risk of harm to the community posed by the young person's offending and therefore provided a mixture of surveillance and therapeutic interventions.

By contrast the latter focused exclusively on the vulnerabilities of the young person as a child with complex needs. The starting point for Service B was the wider 'holistic' circumstances of the child and family; 'we work with the whole family, every young person that comes through the YOT', using the Troubled Families intervention criteria to identify continuing support needs: 'You can work longer with these families' (*children and young people first*).

For Service D, process was particularly important, and the manager described a fairly rigorous process of case oversight and review. Monitoring of practitioner assessments was one area receiving close attention, for example, as was the issue of compliance and its relationship to the use of custody. One priority was 'managing that compliance process', accompanied by a rigorous programme of 'improving our PSR [pre-sentence report] writing' and engaging more directly with magistrates as part of a wider custody reduction strategy (*offender management*).

Responding to change

It seemed to us, too, that the varying perspectives on intervention represented by these Youth Offending Services were also reflected in the ways in which they approached apparently common areas of practice development, such as initiatives in diversion, preventive work or restorative justice. Thus, in the context of diversionary work, Service B emphasized the importance of following up initial decisions not to pursue formal proceedings with a continuing informal offer of 'early help' (*children and young people first*). On the other hand, however, staff reductions due to spending cuts had meant that very few practitioners were available to contribute to the 'Triage' process or act on its findings in Service D. The intervention on offer at this point was therefore fairly restricted – minimum intervention by default, perhaps, where austerity had a direct influence on both the chosen strategic approach and its realization (*offender management*). Although this outcome is undoubtedly resource driven, we argue that it is not merely a knee jerk reaction to harsh reality but it is also aligned with the specific practice orientation consciously adopted by the service (see also Hughes, 2009: 168, for a discussion of this kind of adaptive strategy).

The way in which restorative justice was interpreted in operational terms by different services is informative. In service F (*offender management*) restorative justice was understood as part of a menu of responsabilizing and routinized interventions, such as apologies and community payback, that could be drawn upon to 'manage' young people's risk of reoffending. However in Service E (*children and young people first*) restorative justice practices were more than an intervention strategy, they represented a philosophical vision that guided the orientation of the whole team towards conflict resolution, repairing harm and making amends in their work with young people, victims and

the community. In ‘targeted intervention’ teams, on the other hand, restorative justice was typically part of a repertoire of therapeutic interventions that could be flexibly deployed but in this case directed at high risk/need targets, rather than as an end in itself.

Some Reflections: Typologies, Practices and Governance

We do not claim to have found pure versions of the specified models of intervention played out straightforwardly in practice; or that we have precisely delineated the extent to which stated intentions are reflected in the reality of youth justice practices – this is a distinct, but related question (see, for example, McAlister and Carr, 2014; Phoenix and Kelly, 2015). We do suggest, however, that there is evidence here of the dynamic and mediated connections between the domains of policy and practice, albeit multi-dimensional and multi-directional. After all, practice is only realized on the basis of what practitioners believe to be legitimate, credible, achievable, effective and right in any given context. However, these perceptions derive from a broader range of principles and understandings, which also inform the formal statements of intent incorporated in policy documents, for example. We should expect to find a relationship between the strategic planning documents we have examined, the contextual backdrop against which they are framed and the accounts of those who inhabit the practice setting(s) in which they are realized; even if this relationship is not linear or predictable.

So, what have we found? The typology proposed here indicates the shape of current developments; there are distinct signs of reworking and realignment of services in response to (and in anticipation of) substantive contextual changes. Thus, we find evidence of more child welfare oriented services making attempts to incorporate ‘Troubled Families’ work into their strategic planning; and in the process, realigning assumptions about the scope and purposes of preventive services. At the same time, the language of ‘risk’ is still alive and well in plans organized around principles of ‘targeting’ interventions, based on assessments of the future likelihood of offending by identified young people. Similarly, the procedural targets and objectives determined ‘from above’ by the Ministry of Justice and the Youth Justice Board play a substantial part in establishing the framework within which local ideas and objectives are formulated.

But these are not ultimately determining factors, and they may be interpreted as permissive, constructing a range of possibilities for practice from among which those directly involved in delivery are able to exercise a degree of choice and critical agency (see also, Muncie, 2002, 2015). Thus, relatively recent developments, such as the emergence of restorative discourses, have enabled youth justice ‘activists’, to begin to articulate distinctive and progressive objectives and operating principles. Whether or not this leads to radically different or transformational forms of practice is an important question; but what is clear is that space is created for the re-definition of the youth justice ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1980), and its reframing in the form of specific plans, objectives and delivery mechanisms. A similar case can be made, too, for the relatively less developed but still apparent engagement with ideas of participation, rights and universalized services, which have begun to inform some planning documents, and by extension the criteria by which successful interventions and outcomes might come to be judged.

Concluding Thoughts: The Direction of Travel and Further Inquiry

Emerging from contradictions, material disruption, retrenchment through austerity and the collapse of previous certainties (McAra, 2017), what we can expect to see, and maybe are beginning to detect here, are two parallel and to some extent opposing trends: the one, shifting us towards new or at least re-conceptualized approaches to delivering youth justice based on distinctive and original (re)alignments of ideas, alliances and resources; and the other, seeking to achieve reassurance and certainty by shoring up the historic assumptions and embedded policies and practices which appear to have been remarkably resilient and have clearly served an ‘organizing’ function (Gramsci, 1971) – the reworking of the machinery of risk assessment/risk management in the revised Asset documentation, for example.

These complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics have, according to our analysis, offered a palette, from which youth offending services have selected according to the variable range of influences and choices available to them. This, in turn, has generated a range of practice ‘models’, which we have proposed here, in the form of a (somewhat idealized) typology; and this itself offers the basis for further inquiry, in order to explore the likely consequences of anticipated (and unanticipated) shifts in the unstable ‘field’ (Bourdieu, 1980) which constitutes ‘youth justice’.

Several key points remain, in order to relate our developing insights to the changing context of youth justice.

1. Contemporary youth justice in England is complex and contested

We have drawn attention to evidence of increasing diversity in the organization and underpinning principles for the delivery of youth justice. There is less evidence than perhaps previously of a prevailing ‘orthodoxy’; and competing discourses are clearly evident in both formal and situated accounts of youth justice organization and practice. While this is not entirely a new phenomenon (Muncie, 2002), it does indicate that youth justice as a site of intervention still offers scope for engaged and committed practitioners (and their managers) to assert their own priorities and objectives in seeking to deliver effective services.

2. Towards a nuanced understanding?

There are grounds for doubting the conventional portrayal of uniform ‘models’ of practice at the national level, too. The very disparity of approaches across England alone suggests that over-simplistic (Hazel, 2008), or unilinear typologies defined at the jurisdictional level (McAra, 2010; Winterdyk, 1997) may not be sufficiently nuanced to capture the kind of variations we have identified here.

3. Localism has helped to shape service delivery

Increasing diversity is associated with a greater sense of liberalization and less central direction in setting practice goals and operational priorities. Creativity is therefore encouraged, although devolution of responsibility (‘responsibilization’) has clearly not been matched in resource terms. Thus, for each of the models outlined, we are able to identify critical and transformative

principles underlying key agency objectives; and that there are discernible attempts on the part of many local services to translate these into practice (e.g. minimum intervention; child advocacy; or inclusive services – see also, Muncie, 2015: 383).

4. The filtering of ideas and assumptions shapes practice

Different models of youth justice act as ‘filters’, substantially determining the ways in which particular constructs such as ‘restorative justice’ are realized. Here, competing ‘drivers’ may be expected to modify the pure forms of the models we have outlined above. Hybridization is almost certain to be observable in the context of contingent and pragmatic decision making in the practice domain (as in the case of Service A, where restorative practices were aligned to ‘targeted’ measures aimed at securing behavioural change).

5. In 2018, austerity cannot be ignored

Despite the emergence of varying practice models, the context of austerity, neo-liberalism and commodification of public services should not be overlooked, or underestimated as a conditioning factor, exercising its own constraints and distorting influences.

These observations act as a stepping off point for the next stage in the reappraisal of youth justice and its contexts; which is to elaborate the implications of contemporary changes in youth justice for youth governance more generally. How is the broader project of negotiating (and resisting) social control unfolding in the current era?

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Notes

1. One of the changes appears to be the increasing divergence of youth justice in England from its near neighbours, including Wales which nominally operates under a shared legislative framework.
2. Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
3. The plans reviewed are detailed in the Appendix to this article.
4. We have adopted this approach because the planning documents themselves adopt a range of timescales, so in order to ensure some degree of consistency, we have ensured that they all cover one or other or a combination of the years specified.
5. Surrey has since incorporated its youth offending team under the generic Surrey Family Services.

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Appendix I: Youth Justice Plans Reviewed

Bath and North East Somerset Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016
Bournemouth and Poole Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Bracknell Forest Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2013–2016
Bury and Rochdale Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016
Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2017
County Durham Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2015–2017
Cumbria Youth Offending Service Strategic Plan 2014–2015
Darlington Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015
Darlington Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2015–2016
Dorset Youth Offending Team Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015
Gateshead Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2013–2014
Gateshead Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2015–2016
Gloucestershire Youth Support Team Youth Justice Plan 2015–2017
Harrow Youth Offending Partnership Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Harrow Youth Offending Partnership Youth Justice Plan 2015–2018
Hillingdon Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2015–2016
Leeds Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Leeds Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016
Leicestershire Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015
Leicestershire Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2016–2019
Manchester Youth Offending Service Business Plan 2013–2014
Medway Youth Offending Service Strategic Plan 2014–2016
Norfolk Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Nottinghamshire Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Oldham Youth Justice Service Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2015
Plymouth City Council Youth Justice Partnership Plan 2014–2015
Reading Youth Justice Plan 2015–2016
South Gloucestershire Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2016
Southampton Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2014–2017
Stockport Youth Justice Plan 2014–2015
Sunderland Youth Offending Service Youth Justice Plan 2013/2014–2015/2016
Surrey Youth Justice Partnership Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2015–2020
Torbay Annual Youth Justice Plan 2016–2017