



PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT

28 June 2024

# Reducing serious youth crime

Report 15: 2023–24

As the independent auditor of the Queensland public sector, including local governments, the Queensland Audit Office:

- provides professional audit services, which include our audit opinions on the accuracy and reliability of the financial statements of public sector entities
- provides entities with insights on their financial performance, risk, and internal controls; and on the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of public service delivery
- produces reports to parliament on the results of our audit work, our insights and advice, and recommendations for improvement
- supports our reports with graphics, tables, and other visualisations, which connect our insights to regions and communities
- conducts investigations into claims of financial waste and mismanagement raised by elected members, state and local government employees, and the public
- shares wider learnings and best practice from our work with state and local government entities, our professional networks, industry, and peers.

We conduct all our audits and reports to parliament under the *Auditor-General Act 2009* (the Act). Our work complies with the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards* and the Australian standards relevant to assurance engagements.

- Financial audit reports summarise the results of our audits of over 400 state and local government entities.
- Performance audit reports cover our evaluation of some, or all, of the entities' efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in providing public services.

Learn more about our publications on our website at [www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/fact-sheets](http://www.qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/fact-sheets).

The Honourable C Pitt MP  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

28 June 2024

This report is prepared under Part 3 Division 3 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*.



Brendan Worrall  
Auditor-General



© The State of Queensland (Queensland Audit Office) 2024.

The Queensland Government supports and encourages the dissemination of its information. The copyright in this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) 4.0 International licence.



To view this licence visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Under this licence you are free, without having to seek permission from QAO, to use this publication in accordance with the licence terms. For permissions beyond the scope of this licence contact [copyright@qao.qld.gov.au](mailto:copyright@qao.qld.gov.au)

Content from this work should be attributed as: The State of Queensland (Queensland Audit Office) *Reducing serious youth crime* (Report 15: 2023–24) available under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International.

Cover image is a stock image purchased by QAO.

ISSN 1834-1128

# Contents

---

<b>Auditor-General's foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Report summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Audit conclusions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Youth crime in Queensland</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Managing Queensland's youth justice system</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Investment in youth justice services</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>6. Rehabilitation and community safety</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>36</b>
A. Entity responses	37
B. Audit scope and methods	61
C. Serious repeat offenders by service centre	64
D. Machinery of government changes	65

## Acknowledgement

The Queensland Audit Office acknowledges the Traditional and Cultural Custodians of the lands, waters, and seas across Queensland. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We use the term 'First Nations people' in this report. We respect First Nations people's choice to describe their cultural identity using other terms, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particular peoples, or by using traditional place names.

# Auditor-General's foreword

---

## A personal message

After 7 years and 114 reports to parliament containing 412 recommendations, this is now my last. It has been a great privilege to serve parliament and the Queensland community as your Auditor-General and to lead the Queensland Audit Office (QAO).

The support I have received from QAO and its people – including our audit service providers and contractors, has been outstanding and I thank them all. Together we have worked as *OneQAO* to provide assurance to parliament and to help it in its role to hold public sector entities to account for *better public services*. As concluded by the recent 2023 Strategic review of QAO, the office has served parliament and the Queensland community well, and is well placed to face new challenges.

## Reducing serious youth crime

My last report could not be about a more complex matter that is impacting the lives of many Queenslanders. It raises recurring themes and issues I have seen over the past 7 years, which are hindering entities' effectiveness in reducing serious youth crime.

We continue to see that entities find working within a multi-agency operating model inherently challenging. They typically have their own mandates, objectives, and leadership. But when it comes to operating within a 'system,' entities are not always collaborating effectively, and often, there is no one entity with overall accountability and authority.

Multiple entities are responsible for various parts of the youth justice system, but no one entity is accountable for its success nor empowered to direct how stakeholders' resources are used. To use an analogy, all entities are rowing...but no-one is singly responsible for steering an overall integrated response and for holding stakeholders to account. Some of the entity responses to this report further highlight the need for better collaboration.

Impeding entities' progress in reducing serious youth crime, and many aspects of public service delivery, is the impact of machinery of government changes. While such changes are the prerogative of government, the state has seen too many and it greatly impacts momentum in delivering public services. As detailed in this report, over the last 7 years, responsibility for youth justice has moved between departments 5 times.

In Professor Coaldrake's 2022 report *Let the sunshine in: Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector*, I paraphrase, but he reflects that machinery of government changes typically occur to agencies servicing more vulnerable community groups. We most recently saw this with the 2023 shifts for youth justice, seniors, and disability services.

As Professor Coaldrake opined, restructuring agencies is not a substitute for strategy, and it does not guarantee improved performance.

Many of my reports underline the disruption caused by machinery of government changes, which map back to the recommendations in my report *State entities 2021* (Report 14: 2021–22). We recommended the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Queensland Treasury advise the incoming/returning government on the risks of restructures and draw on past lessons. We recommended they require departments to report on the community and service delivery benefits, and the cost of changes – and provide guidance on how to do so. These recommendations have not yet been fully implemented.

I acknowledge that addressing the challenge of youth crime is not a simple fix, nor unique to Queensland. It is a multi-faceted matter that spans some of the largest areas of public services such as the health and education systems, housing, and the role of families.

The Auditor-General has a broad mandate, however must not question the merits of government policy objectives. This means we cannot make recommendations on the specific direction or strategies government should take. The findings and conclusions in this report relate to whether entities are implementing the government's policies efficiently, effectively and economically, in line with its policy objectives.

I hope to see the Queensland Government's timely attention to the long-standing, inherent problems I mention here, and entities' action on my findings and recommendations.

Brendan Worrall,  
Auditor-General.





# Report summary

Youth crime is a complex problem that has touched the lives of many Queenslanders. The underlying causes of youth crime are multi-faceted. Many young offenders have poor health, including mental health issues and behavioural disorders; many are disengaged from education and employment. A whole-of-system approach is needed to address this complex problem.

Most young offenders only commit a small number of offences and are diverted away from Queensland's youth justice system (the system). However, a small proportion reoffend and commit serious offences.

In this report, we focus on these serious repeat offenders, who are a threat to the safety of our communities.

**Figure A**  
**Statistics on serious repeat offenders**



Note: The number of serious repeat offenders is based on the Department of Youth Justice's serious repeat offender index.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

## System leadership has improved, but needs to be more effective

Leadership has improved in recent years, but further work is required to make it more effective. Constant government restructures (5 over the past 7 years), legislative changes, and instability in leadership positions within entities have hindered efforts to reduce crime by serious repeat offenders.

The government has improved oversight and coordination by establishing system-wide governance committees, including the Community Safety Cabinet Committee, the Youth Justice Taskforce Senior Officers Reference Group (the taskforce), and multi-agency collaborative panels. The taskforce and panels have been a positive step, providing an effective platform for entities to coordinate and prioritise their responses. However, their effectiveness is diminished by a high proxy attendance and, at times, a lack of action to address key challenges across the system, some of which are long standing. These challenges include the lack of capacity in detention centres and the over-representation of First Nations youth in the system. While these committees provide oversight and coordination, there is a need to define who has overall responsibility and accountability for the youth justice system. The Department of Youth Justice (the department) leads the government's response to youth justice, but as a stand-alone entity it does not have authority to make decisions across the system.

## Better system-wide analysis is required to inform investment

The government has invested heavily in a range of rehabilitation, support, and community-based programs to address crime by young offenders. This investment would be strengthened by implementing stronger planning and analysis at both the system and entity levels. Entities need to work together at a system level to ensure there is adequate investment in services that protect children from those factors that put children at risk of offending. These services may include community, health, housing, education, and others. Similarly, the department needs to strengthen its analysis to ensure it is investing in the right programs, at the right locations.

The department, who is responsible for funding entities that deliver programs that rehabilitate young offenders, could not demonstrate that it was regularly testing the market. This increases the risk that its investments do not achieve value for money or meet the needs of young offenders. Contract management practices also need to be strengthened to support better outcomes for young offenders.

## Entities need to better implement their new youth justice strategy

The government had a comprehensive state strategy, *Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–2023*, which expired at the end of 2023. However, it did not implement it effectively. This included only developing and implementing an action plan for part of the strategy, not for the full period. The department has drafted its new youth justice strategy and needs to address these gaps when implementing its new strategy. The Queensland Police Service (QPS) needs to finalise its own youth justice strategy and ensure it aligns with the state’s strategy.

Greater system-wide evaluation is needed to determine if the government’s actions are reducing crime by serious repeat offenders and improving community safety. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet’s new system evaluation responsibilities aim to address this gap.

## More can be done to monitor and rehabilitate serious repeat offenders

Entities undertake a range of activities to address youth crime in high-risk areas and provide better support to communities. This includes the Queensland Government’s youth co-responder teams, which fill an important gap in services and ensure 24/7 support to young people across the state. While QPS is increasing its police presence in communities where there are high rates of youth crime, it can strengthen its processes for checking that young offenders comply with their bail conditions.

QPS and the department do not have a consistent way of identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending. These different approaches are resulting in entities identifying different cohorts. This increases the risk that some high-risk offenders may miss out on getting the rehabilitation or case management they need to address their offending behaviour.

The department has designed a suite of programs to rehabilitate young offenders, including serious repeat offenders. These are based on, or informed by, evidence and better practice. However, it is difficult to determine their effectiveness due to poor data capture and a lack of independent evaluation and monitoring against outcomes.

The young offenders who are in detention are not always getting the rehabilitation or education they need to address their offending behaviour.

This is partly due to Queensland’s youth detention centres often being locked down because of staff shortages, safety incidents, and other factors. Cleveland Youth Detention Centre had the highest staff shortages when compared to the other centres. The department has implemented a range of strategies to address these staff shortages at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, including using a greater variety of platforms to attract applicants. While it has increased staffing levels, additional staff are still required for the centre to operate effectively and avoid lockdowns.

**18% (9)** of the 50 serious repeat offender files we sampled had no records of any rehabilitation programs being delivered to them to stop their re-offending.

## The department needs to better manage a young offender’s transition from detention to the community

More can be done to support young offenders leaving detention. Leaving detention is a particularly susceptible time for serious repeat offenders. While the department provides case management support to young offenders before and after they leave detention, its primary approach to managing their transition from detention back into the community is its 72-hour plans. These plans are not based on evidence and the department could not explain the rationale for only planning for the first 72 hours after a young offender’s release. We found 72 hours may not be sufficient, and a transition plan covering a longer period is needed. The department did not always prepare a 72-hour plan for serious repeat offenders leaving detention, and the quality and consistency of them varied significantly.

### Our audit scope

Our audit focused on the work entities are doing to address crime by high-risk and serious repeat offenders, given the impact they have on our communities. We assessed whether youth justice strategies and programs are effective in reducing crime by serious repeat offenders and improving community safety. We acknowledge the significant work entities do to identify at-risk young people and intervene early in their lives. This work, in areas such as education, health, and housing, is critical to deter young people from entering the system. This report does not assess or conclude specifically on these areas.

# 1. Audit conclusions

---

While the government has acted to address youth crime in Queensland, more needs to be done to reduce crime by serious repeat offenders. Since 2015, the government has undertaken significant reform, including changing laws, implementing a comprehensive state strategy, and increasing investment in youth justice services. However, strategies to date could be more effective in addressing this complex problem. Contributing to this is a need for more consistent leadership across the youth justice system (the system). The number of serious repeat offenders continues to increase, First Nations young offenders continue to be over-represented, and community confidence has diminished.

Addressing serious youth crime is a complex challenge, particularly given the drivers of youth crime are multi-faceted. A more comprehensive systems approach is necessary to ensure entities work together to address these drivers. The government must continue to build stronger collaboration, leadership, and accountability across the system.

## Managing Queensland's youth justice system

---

While progress was made under the previous strategy, it was not as effective as it could be due to inadequate planning to support its implementation. A lack of key performance indicators and system-wide monitoring and evaluation made it difficult to conclude whether the strategy was effective.

The Department of Youth Justice (the department) has drafted a new strategy and intends to publish it in the second half of 2024. It needs to better implement the strategy and address gaps in monitoring and reporting. Key to its success will be improving leadership, coordination, and accountability across the system.

The government has established appropriate (in design) governance committees to provide system oversight and coordination. However, their effectiveness has been hindered by a high proxy attendance, inconsistent approaches, and, in some cases, a lack of action. Constant government restructures (referred to as machinery of government changes) and instability in leadership positions within entities have also been counter-productive. Within these governance committees there is no clear decision-maker who can be held accountable for the committee's performance. Government needs to clarify who has the authority to make decisions across the system.

## Rehabilitation and community safety

---

Both QPS and the department have a clear focus on increasing community safety through their strategies and programs. This includes increasing police presence in high-risk areas and establishing new detention and remand facilities. While this may provide short-term relief, entities need to complement this work with longer-term solutions, such as the delivery of rehabilitation and other support programs.

It is unclear whether entities are investing in the right programs in the right locations to reduce reoffending. The governance committees responsible for leading the system do not undertake system-wide investment analysis to inform funding decisions, nor does the department. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet intends to do this investment analysis as part of its new system evaluation responsibilities. For those investments made, entities need to strengthen procurement and contract management practices to ensure the services represent value for money and address the needs of young offenders.

The department has a suite of programs it delivers to rehabilitate young offenders, including serious repeat offenders, that are based on, or informed by, evidence and better practice. However, poor data capture hinders the department in determining their effectiveness. The department has taken positive steps to improve its data collection and implement a framework to better measure the outcomes of its actions. It now needs to begin monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its programs against the outcomes framework.

Serious repeat offenders in detention are not always getting the rehabilitation and education they need. This is because some of the department's youth detention centres are often locked down due to staff shortages, safety incidents, and other factors, such as medical emergencies. In addition to this, young offenders leaving detention in Queensland need better support. While the department plans for the first 72 hours and provides case management support during and after this period, it can better plan and support young offenders during this transition.

## 2. Recommendations

### Managing Queensland’s youth justice system

We recommend that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet continues to work with key system stakeholders to:

1. ensure more effective coordination, integration, and delivery of youth justice-related initiatives, including facilitating whole-of-government investment and implementation where appropriate.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders:

2. strengthen their leadership and governance of the youth justice system (the system). This should include
  - ensuring relevant leadership committees, including the youth justice taskforce, are attended by appropriate entity delegates with appropriate decision-making authority
  - identifying and prioritising key challenges across the system and implementing appropriate strategies and actions
  - improving cross-entity collaboration to ensure entities share relevant information in a timely manner, including making the multi-agency collaborative panel data dashboard available to relevant entities.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders:

3. reviews, updates, and implements its new youth justice strategy. The strategy should
  - include indicators of success to measure performance across the system
  - include clear system-wide actions aimed at reducing the over-representation of First Nations young offenders in the system
  - clearly define roles and responsibilities across the system to inform entity-level strategies and plans.

We recommend that the Queensland Police Service:

4. finalises its youth justice strategy, ensuring it includes measurable objectives and aligns to the state strategy.

We recommend that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, in collaboration with the Department of Youth Justice:

5. finalises its system-wide monitoring and evaluation framework and commences evaluation of 2023 youth justice reforms. This should include
  - developing a plan for ongoing evaluation across the system
  - reporting outcomes of monitoring and evaluation regularly and transparently to the Department of Youth Justice, the Queensland Police Service and other relevant entities, and to the public, as required, to help inform whether the Queensland Government’s actions are reducing youth crime.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:

6. formalises and executes a plan for measuring the effectiveness of programs using its outcomes framework.

### Investment in youth justice services

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:

7. strengthens its investment and procurement practices to ensure that all investment decisions are based on sound market analysis, with the rationale for decisions clearly documented in line with evidence. This should include
  - regularly mapping its investment against youth crime trends across Queensland
  - ensuring its contracts contain sufficient performance measures and targets that assess outputs and outcomes
  - developing a framework to build capability in the sector.

### Rehabilitation and community safety

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and governance committees:

8. agree on a uniform, evidence-based approach to identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending and ensure this information is shared with relevant stakeholders across the system.

We recommend that the Queensland Police Service:

9. monitors bail checks for serious repeat offenders to ensure timely and appropriate action.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:

10. improves and standardises its processes and systems for collecting and recording data about its core rehabilitation programs and support services. This should include providing appropriate training and guidance to staff to ensure data is collected as required.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:

11. continues to implement plans to address staff shortages at detention centres, including considering alternative methods to rehabilitate young offenders while centres are in lockdown.

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:

12. ensures there is effective and sustained support to young offenders transitioning from detention into the community. This should include

- evaluating the length of time a young offender requires support
- implementing a more structured process for planning a young offender's release
- communicating in a timely way with relevant stakeholders about the young offender's risk, needs, and transition plan
- providing appropriate support to meet the young offender's social and cultural needs.

## Reference to comments

In accordance with s. 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, we provided a copy of this report to relevant entities. In reaching our conclusions, we considered their views and represented them to the extent we deemed relevant and warranted. Any formal responses from the entities are at [Appendix A](#).



### 3. Youth crime in Queensland

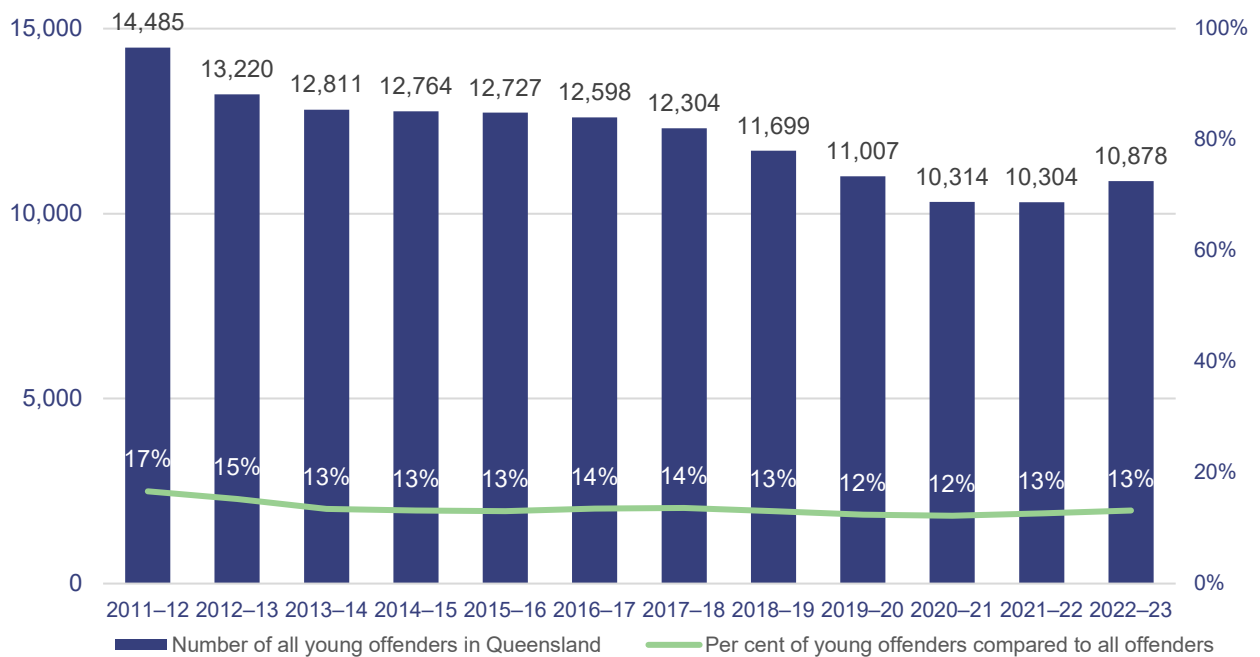
Offending by 10–17 year olds (the legislated age for criminal offences by young people) has been an increasing community concern in Queensland in recent years. Youth crime, as with all forms of crime, has significant impacts, both for the victims of the crime and for the broader community. These impacts can be physical, emotional, psychological, and economical.

The number of young people charged with an offence in Queensland has steadily decreased since 2011 – from 14,485 in 2011–12 to 10,304 in 2021–22. However, in 2022–23, the number of young offenders charged increased by 6 per cent, to 10,878. This increase was at a greater rate than population growth, which also increased over this time. There are many factors that can influence crime trends, including changes in policing strategies, new youth justice laws, and societal pressures. As such, trends may not be solely attributable to the behaviour of young offenders.

Youth crime accounts for only a small percentage of overall crime in Queensland. The percentage has decreased from 17 per cent of overall crime in 2011–12 to 13 per cent in 2022–23.

Figure 3A shows the number of young people charged with an offence or cautioned from 2011–12 to 2022–23. It also shows the percentage of young people charged with an offence compared to all offenders charged during this period. The graph below does not reflect trends in the severity of crimes.

**Figure 3A**  
**Number and percentage of young offenders charged with an offence or cautioned in Queensland from 2011–12 to 2022–23**



Note: This graph shows the number of young offenders that the Queensland Police Service has charged for an offence and those it has cautioned.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.



## Serious repeat offenders

Most young people who are charged by police with offences do not go on to commit further offences. However, a small number continue to offend and commit serious crimes. In this report, we refer to these young offenders as serious repeat offenders.

### DEFINITION

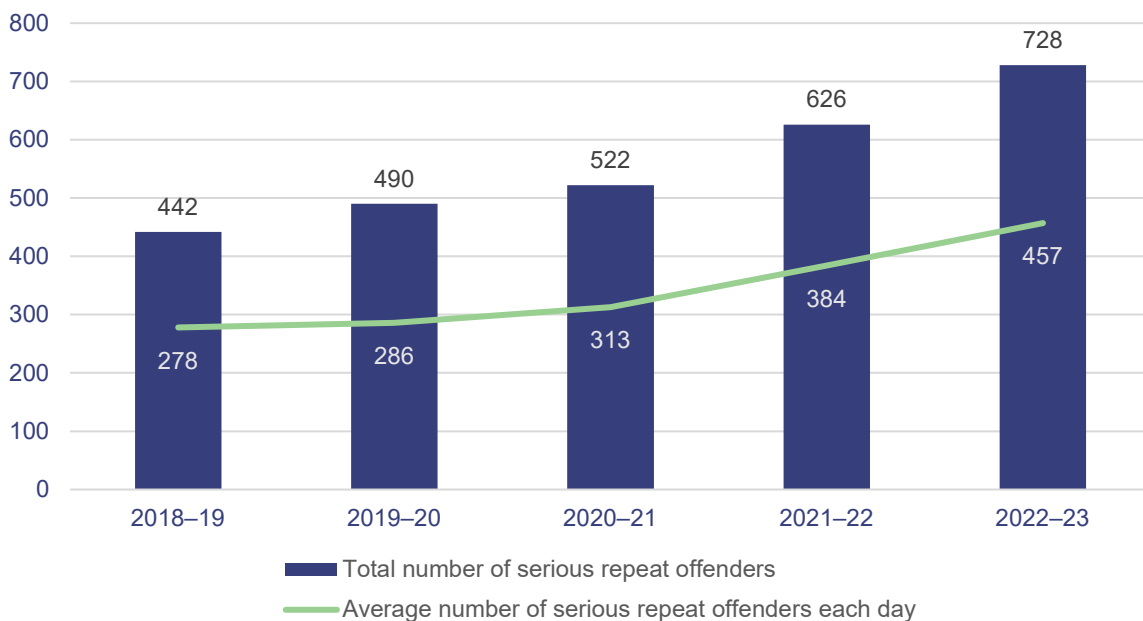
The Department of Youth Justice (the department) defines a young offender as a **serious repeat offender** if they commit a disproportionately large number of serious offences, including offences such as assault, attempted robbery, or unauthorised use of a motor vehicle.

It uses an index to identify serious repeat offenders. The Serious Repeat Offender Index (SROI) identifies serious repeat offenders based on a range of factors, including number of charges over the last 2 years, severity of offences, time spent in custody, and the young offender's age. Most serious repeat offenders have been charged with more than 70 offences.

These serious repeat offenders are responsible for most youth crime and pose a risk to the community. In 2022–23, serious repeat offenders committed 55 per cent of all proven youth crime.

Since 2018–19, the number of serious repeat offenders reported by the Department of Youth Justice has increased by 65 per cent from 442 in 2018–19 to 728 in 2022–23. Figure 3B shows the number of serious repeat offenders between 2018–19 and 2022–23, including the total and average daily number by financial year.

**Figure 3B**  
**Total number and average daily number of serious repeat offenders between 2018–19 and 2022–23**



Notes: This graph is based on the number of offenders that the Department of Youth Justice identifies as serious repeat offenders. It uses the Serious Repeat Offender Index to identify serious repeat offenders based on their prior offending over the last 2 years, severity of offences, time spent in custody, and the young offender's age.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using data provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

Young people in Queensland were most commonly charged with theft, break and enter, drug offences, and use of stolen vehicles between 2018–19 to 2022–23.

First Nations youth make up the majority of serious repeat offenders in Queensland, accounting for 69 per cent of all serious repeat young offenders.



## Identifying and addressing the causes of youth crime

Research indicates that many young offenders experience complex issues within their family, including neglect, domestic and family violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Many have poor health, including mental health issues and behavioural disorders; many are disengaged from education and employment. Most, if not all, of these issues are relevant to First Nations youth. Some, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and housing, are disproportionately experienced by First Nations families and young people. The over-representation of First Nations youth is not unique to Queensland; it is present throughout Australia and documented as a symptom of social and economic disadvantage.

Anecdotal evidence suggests social media can also be a driver of youth crime, where young people seek notoriety by posting or livestreaming their crimes on various platforms.

Addressing the drivers of offending behaviour is critical. It requires evidence-based strategies and programs that target the specific needs of the young offender and their individual risks.

Strategies and programs need to be delivered at the right intensity and frequency. These strategies and programs need to continue if the young person spends time in detention and when they transition back into the community.

## Who is responsible for addressing youth crime?

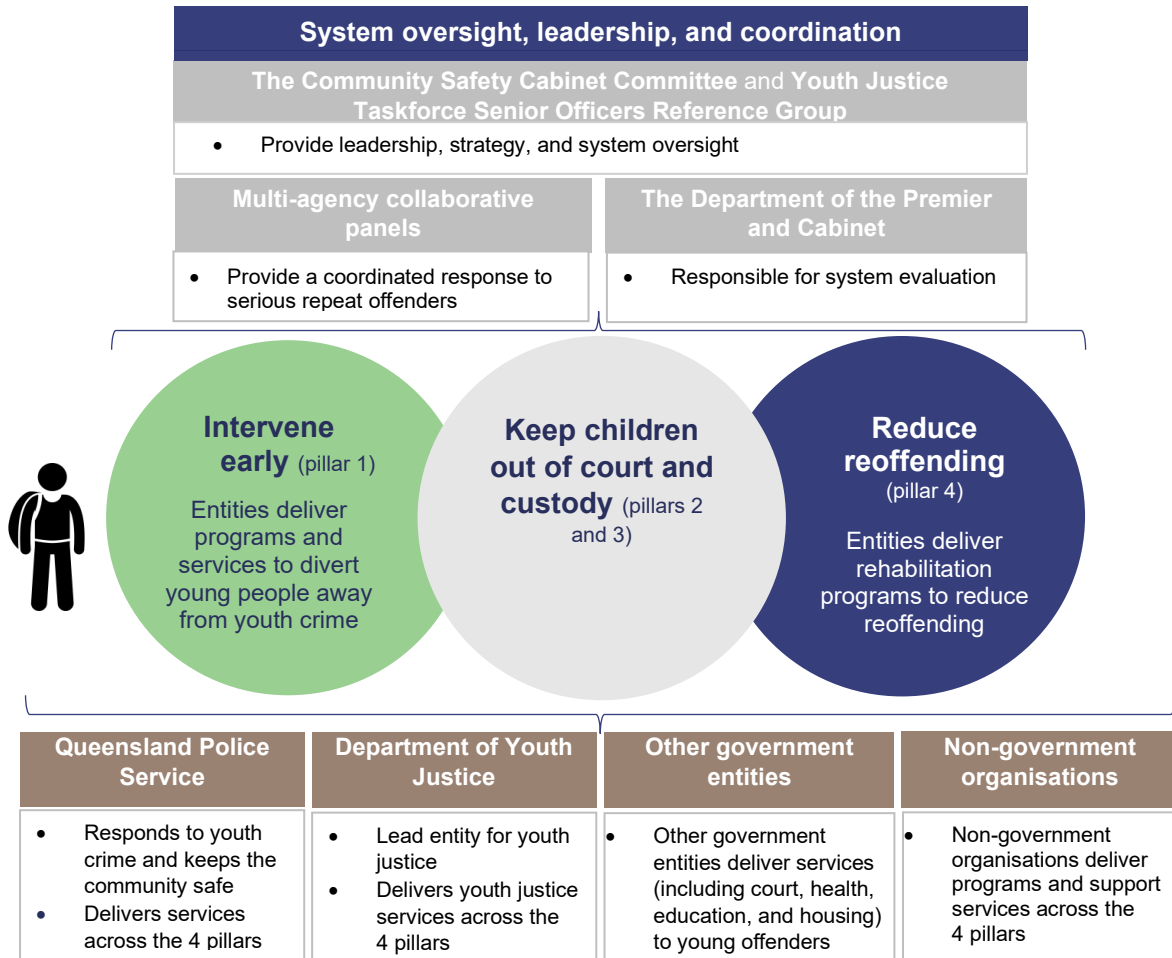
---

Queensland's youth justice system (the system) involves many stakeholders, including government, non-government organisations, and communities. Some organisations focus on early intervention for young people at risk of offending, while other organisations deliver programs designed to keep children out of court and custody, and reduce reoffending.

Since 2015, the Queensland Government has undertaken significant reform to change the way entities respond to youth crime and make communities safer. This includes implementing the *Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–2023* (the strategy), which provides a framework to address youth crime in Queensland. The strategy is underpinned by a goal of community safety and confidence and includes 4 key pillars: intervene early (pillar 1), keep children out of court (pillar 2) and custody (pillar 3), and reduce reoffending (pillar 4). Figure 3C shows the stakeholders involved in the system and where they deliver services across the 4 pillars.



**Figure 3C**  
**Stakeholders involved in Queensland’s youth justice system**



Note: Other government entities include Department of Education; Queensland Health; Queensland Corrective Services; Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works; Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services; Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts; Department of Justice and Attorney-General, responsible for administering the Childrens Court of Queensland; Queensland Family and Child Commission; Queensland Ombudsman.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

### Youth Justice Act 1992

The *Youth Justice Act 1992* is the key piece of legislation governing youth crime in Queensland. It sets out the youth justice principles, which include:

- ensuring the community is protected from offences and, in particular, from serious repeat offenders
- upholding the rights of children, keeping them safe, and promoting their physical and mental wellbeing.

### Who we audited

We audited those entities that primarily deliver or fund programs and services for serious repeat offenders under pillar 4. They include the Department of Youth Justice, the Queensland Police Service, and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

We also audited the Department of the Premier and Cabinet because a recent initiative has made it responsible for system-wide evaluation.



The Department of Youth Justice is the lead entity responsible for youth justice in Queensland. It is responsible for a range of youth justice services, including:

- assessing the needs and risks of young offenders and providing case management support
- delivering rehabilitation programs and other support services
- leading the state strategy and prioritising funding in youth justice service providers
- detaining high-risk offenders and managing Queensland's youth detention centres.

The Queensland Police Service is responsible for keeping communities safe and preventing and responding to youth crime. Its responsibilities include issuing cautions to deter young people from entering the system and charging young offenders who have committed an offence. It also delivers a range of youth crime programs and checks on young offenders who have been granted bail. A young person may be granted bail (released from custody but needing to return to court at a set date) while they are waiting for their charges to be dealt with.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General is responsible for the administration of Queensland courts. This includes the Childrens Court (Magistrates Court) and the Childrens Court of Queensland (District Court). In this report, we refer to these collectively as the Childrens Court. It is also responsible for justice policy and reform.

Other entities, including government and non-government organisations, play a critical role in delivering services to young offenders and their families.

## What we audited

---

In this audit, we assessed whether youth justice strategies and programs are effective in reducing crime by serious repeat offenders and improving community safety.

We examined the design and implementation of the in-scope entities' strategies and programs, and assessed how they measure and report on their effectiveness. We also assessed the leadership, strategy, coordination, and funding across the youth justice system. In many cases, these are interconnected.



# 4. Managing Queensland’s youth justice system

Effective leadership and a clear strategy are vital to manage Queensland’s youth justice system (the system). Having the right programs available in the right locations is paramount.

To be effective, entities need to work together, and programs must address the underlying causes of youth crime. Entities need to monitor and measure the outcomes of their activities to determine what is working, and what they can improve.

This chapter examines whether entities have effective strategies and leadership to manage the system and reduce crime by serious repeat offenders. It also examines how entities coordinate their activities and measure their effectiveness.

## Is leadership and coordination effective?

More effective and stable leadership is needed to address key challenges across the system.

In recent years, the Queensland Government’s leadership of youth justice has lacked stability. Over the past 7 years, responsibility for youth justice has moved between departments 5 times. This constant change over an extended period is disruptive, and can cause inconsistent messaging, direction, and uncertainty. In our recent report *Implementing machinery of government changes* (Report 17: 2022–23), we highlighted that government restructures take considerable time and effort and divert the focus of public servants to the restructure.

In addition, there has been instability in leadership positions within entities. For example, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) has had 3 different assistant commissioners responsible for youth justice over 3 years.

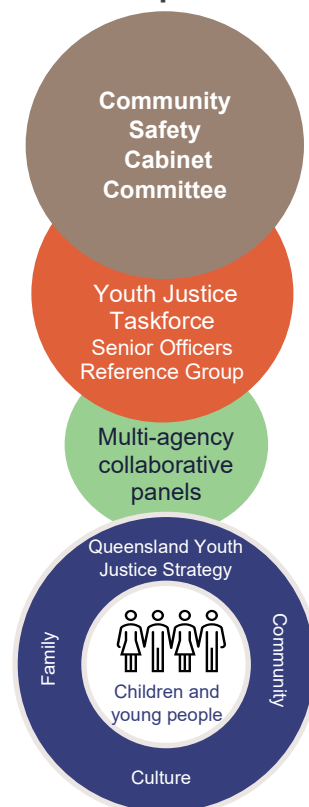
Despite the instability, the government has established cross-agency committees to help lead the system. Figure 4A captures the key governance committees providing leadership and coordination across the youth justice system.

The government’s committees are a positive step to provide strategic leadership, however their effectiveness is diminished by a high proxy attendance and, at times, a lack of action.

The Community Safety Cabinet Committee (formally the Youth Justice Cabinet Committee) was established in 2021. The committee meets quarterly and includes ministers from relevant agencies. It is responsible for:

- ensuring cohesive whole-of-government responses effectively target serious repeat offenders
- reducing the over-representation of First Nations young people at all stages of the system
- restoring community confidence in youth justice responses in Queensland.

**Figure 4A**  
System leadership and coordination



Source: Queensland Audit Office using information from the Department of Youth Justice.



The Youth Justice Taskforce Senior Officers Reference Group (the taskforce) was established in February 2021. The taskforce is responsible for providing whole-of-government strategic leadership and advice to inform the government's responses to young offenders.

This includes:

- identifying risks, blockages, and challenges, and developing appropriate strategies
- ensuring timely, efficient, and effective completion of commitments by members.

The taskforce includes members from all key entities and is chaired by QPS. It has appropriate terms of reference.

Since its creation, the taskforce has met at least monthly. However, its value has been diminished by the poor attendance of members at meetings. From a sample of 9 meetings over 3 years, we found that members only attended 49 per cent of the time. Instead, entities sent a proxy representative who, in some cases, may not have had the appropriate authority to drive system change.

We also found that, although the taskforce identified and discussed key challenges impacting Queensland's youth justice system, it has not always taken the necessary action to address those challenges. Some of those challenges include the pressure on Queensland's youth justice system and the over-representation of First Nations youth in the system. For example, the taskforce has not developed or implemented a strategy to address the over-representation of First Nations young offenders, despite discussing the issue at 3 of the 9 meetings we sampled. We discuss actions taken to address the over-representation of First Nations youth further in this chapter.

While the government has established appropriate governance committees to lead the system, it is not clear who has authority within these committees to make decisions across the system. The Department of Youth Justice (the department) has a lead role across the system, but as an individual entity does not have the authority to make decisions at a system level. Given the high number of stakeholders involved in the system, this creates challenges in effectively delivering initiatives. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which is responsible for whole-of-government policy and evaluating the youth justice system, is well positioned to address this challenge to ensure more effective collaboration across the system.

#### **Recommendation 1**

We recommend that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet continues to work with key system stakeholders to ensure more effective coordination, integration, and delivery of youth justice-related initiatives, including facilitating whole-of-government investment and implementation where appropriate.

## **Queensland's youth justice system is under pressure**

Since 2018–19, the number of serious repeat offenders increased by 65 per cent from 442 to 728 in 2022–23. In addition, the number of young people charged with an offence in Queensland increased from 10,304 in 2021–22 to 10,878 in 2022–23, despite steadily decreasing in prior years. This adds pressure on police resources, watch houses, youth detention centres, courts, and social services. As a result, in 2022–23 all 3 of Queensland's youth detention centres were operating over their safe capacity by an average of 23 young offenders each day. Others were detained in police watch houses, designed to hold adults. The government has taken some actions to address these pressures:

- In March 2023, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General implemented the Fast Track Sentencing Pilot to identify the causes of court delays, reduce the number of young offenders on remand, and reduce the time taken to finalise court cases and reduce the length of time young offenders spend on remand. The department reports that the median time to finalise cases for young offenders has improved at 2 (Cairns and Townsville) of the 4 court locations. The pilot will finish in late 2024.
- In May 2023, the government committed to build 2 new youth detention centres (Woodford and Cairns). These centres are expected to be operational in 2026–27. In addition, the government is converting the Caboolture Watch House to be a specialist watch house for children.



- In October 2023, the government announced it would build a youth remand centre in Wacol, with accommodation for 76 young offenders. The centre will give young offenders access to exercise areas, education, medical care, and therapeutic programs. It is expected to be operational in late 2024.

While these actions will, to some extent, alleviate pressure on detention centres, more effective leadership and coordination are needed to address the pressure on the youth justice system and the drivers of youth crime.

## Multi-agency collaborative panels enable good coordination and collaboration across the youth justice system

In 2021, the Queensland Government established multi-agency collaborative panels (MACPs) to bring together relevant entities and non-government service providers to assess and respond to the needs of serious repeat offenders. MACPs fulfil an important need by enabling entities to collaborate and providing a coordinated response to serious repeat offenders.

Figure 4B shows the key entities that are commonly members of MACPs.

Since 2021, MACPs have operated informally across the state. In March 2023, the Queensland Government amended the *Youth Justice Act 1992* to formally establish MACPs. There are now 19 MACPs across the state. These are chaired by the Department of Youth Justice (the department) and have terms of reference.

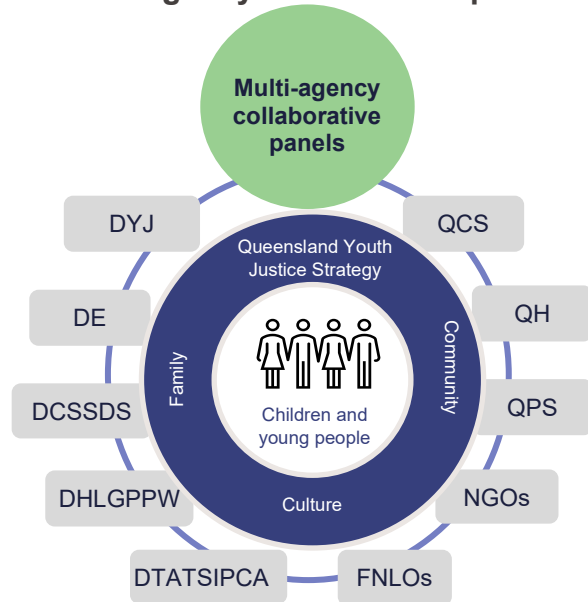
### MACP delivery needs to improve to maximise effectiveness

While MACPs provide an effective platform for entities to coordinate and prioritise their responses, more can be done to maximise their effectiveness and impact on serious repeat offenders.

To be effective, MACPs need the right members with the right authority, who attend meetings regularly. Our audit shows that this is not happening. For example, none of the 19 MACPs had a representative with appropriate authority from each entity on their membership. Six of the 19 MACPs had no representative from the Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts. We reviewed a sample of minutes from 26 MACP meetings across Queensland in 2023. All 26 meetings had at least one absent member or proxy attend, who may not have had the appropriate authority to make decisions. For MACPs to be successful, there needs to be a stronger commitment from entities and members.

MACPs operate inconsistently across the state and, in some cases, this diminishes the value they could add. Some take a strategic and case-management focus. Their agendas include discussions about system issues, youth crime trends, and individual serious repeat offenders. Other MACPs focus solely on individual serious repeat offenders. MACPs should do both. They are well placed to identify and implement strategies to address systemic barriers impacting service delivery.

**Figure 4B**  
Multi-agency collaborative panels



Note: DYJ – Department of Youth Justice; DE – Department of Education; DCSSDS – Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services; DHLGPPW – Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works; DTATSIPCA – Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts; FNLOs – First Nations-led organisations; NGOs – Non-government organisations; QPS – Queensland Police Service; QH – Queensland Health; QCS – Queensland Corrective Services.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

Actions from MACPs were not always captured and followed up. Some panels documented actions and assigned owners. However, this was not the case for all MACPs we reviewed. Documenting actions is critical in driving the desired outcomes from these meetings. We also heard that processes for escalating issues and identifying the right person to raise issues with is not always clear. We found 9 meetings where system barriers were noted but not escalated. The department is aware of these inconsistencies and recently released a revised mandatory terms of reference to provide further guidance.

More work needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of MACPs. While MACPs provide an effective platform, they are resource intensive. Most MACPs meet at least once a month and have a minimum of 8 entity representatives at meetings. The department has commenced some early data collection to inform MACP effectiveness.

## Data and information sharing across the system is improving

In 2019, the government implemented reforms to improve the sharing of data and information between entities. This enabled better system-wide collaboration to support analysis and solutions relevant to serious repeat offenders. Entities advised us that, prior to these reforms, they experienced challenges in sharing data.

In July 2023, the department developed the MACP data dashboard, which allows department staff involved in MACPs to monitor serious repeat offenders (age, gender, location) and their needs (for example, education or housing needs). This dashboard helps the department to better understand and address the highest risks in areas and implement the programs and services needed to support serious repeat offender cohorts throughout Queensland. While MACP members and key government stakeholders do not have direct access to the dashboard, it can be shared at the discretion of the department.

We heard from entities that, while improvements have been made, data and information sharing remains a challenge. The government needs to continue with these reforms to support effective collaboration.

### Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with and other relevant stakeholders, strengthen their leadership and governance of the youth justice system (the system). This should include:

- ensuring relevant leadership committees, including the youth justice taskforce, are attended by appropriate entity delegates with appropriate decision-making authority
- identifying and prioritising key challenges across the system and implementing appropriate strategies and actions
- improving cross-entity collaboration to ensure entities share relevant information in a timely manner, including making the multi-agency collaborative panel data dashboard available to relevant entities.

## Queensland had a well-developed youth justice strategy but lacked sufficient action plans

The state's strategy *Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–2023* (the state strategy) provided an effective framework to address youth crime in Queensland, including crime committed by serious repeat offenders. The department developed the state strategy based on research and extensive consultation with stakeholders.

The strategy clearly outlined key focus areas, including:

- reducing offending by delivering prevention and early intervention programs
- reducing reoffending and the use of remand in custody
- delivering more cost-effective, community-based options.



## Lack of action plans to implement the state strategy effectively

Since 2019, the department, with support from other entities, has implemented a range of initiatives to reduce reoffending. Much of this was informed by its *Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan 2019–2021*, including:

- implementing a framework to assess the needs of each serious repeat offender, and the risk to their own personal safety and the community
- establishing multi-agency teams to assess and address the factors that contribute to offending behaviour
- expanding rehabilitation programs.

The department developed a draft action plan for the final period of the strategy from 2021–2023, but failed to implement it. During this time, the department continued to take action to address youth crime. However, without a clear action plan, the department increased the risk that the decisions and actions of entities were not as effective as they could be or did not align with the strategy. The lack of an action plan also limited the department's ability to monitor the strategy's progress and implementation.

## Queensland needs a better strategy to help First Nations serious repeat offenders

In 2022–23, First Nations youth made up 69 per cent of the serious repeat young offenders in Queensland despite only representing 9 per cent of 10–17 year olds according to 2021 census data. The over-representation of First Nations youth in Queensland's youth justice system is a significant and long-term issue.

The state strategy highlights the high numbers of First Nations young offenders. It included 10 actions to better support First Nations youth, including improving cultural capability across government agencies and increasing investment in First Nations service providers. Eight of these actions were the responsibility of the department and 2 of the former Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

Some actions lacked sufficient detail. For example, one action was for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Led Decision Making Processes to increase cultural authority in the youth justice system. But the action provided no further detail about the level of increase the government was aiming for, or the outcomes it was seeking.

The government reported implementing all 10 actions. In some instances, the government's response did not address the action. For example, an action addressed to the department was:

'monitoring and evaluation for the Youth Justice Strategy will include goals to reduce the rates of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the youth justice system'.

The department reported monitoring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the youth justice system and investing in initiatives, but never set goals to reduce the rates of over-representation.

Actions to date have done little to curb the growing numbers of First Nations youth who become serious repeat offenders.

The department has also taken additional steps to improve how it supports First Nations young offenders. These include:

- establishing a First Nations Action Board and having dedicated cultural support officers
- increasing investment in First Nations-led organisations
- designing and delivering programs tailored to First Nations young people, such as On Country. The On Country program aims to better connect First Nations youth to their culture through activities, mentoring, and camps.

More action is required to address this long-standing issue. A whole-of-system approach is needed.

In 2016, the department established the First Nations Action Board (the board). It provides advice to the department to help ensure the decisions it makes are culturally appropriate and beneficial for First Nations young people. While the board discusses priority issues, it has provided limited advice and is not adding the value it could. It provides advice to the director of the cultural capability unit but does not report to the department's executive leadership team or the system governance committees, and this limits its influence. The board's roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined in its terms of reference.

The department has limited First Nations staff available to support the cultural needs of First Nations young offenders in some areas across the state. For example, in Mount Isa, 98 per cent (72) of young offenders identify as First Nations, but the service centre only has one staff member who identifies as First Nations and who can provide cultural support and rehabilitation. The department has invested in a number of First Nations-led organisations across the state, but currently does not have one in Mount Isa. We acknowledge there are shortages in Queensland of First Nations staff across multiple industries and government. However, more needs to be done to build capacity across government and non-government organisations to better support First Nations young offenders.

The department is doing more to build its cultural capability. This includes delivering cultural awareness training to its staff across the state. The department reported that 1,476 staff completed cultural awareness training between 2020 and 2023, despite it not being mandatory. The department also has a cultural capability unit that provides input into the design and delivery of rehabilitation programs to help ensure they are culturally appropriate. The unit only provides ad hoc advice and could be engaged in a more formal way.

### Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, reviews, updates, and implements its new youth justice strategy. The strategy should:

- include indicators of success to measure performance across the system
- include clear system-wide actions aimed at reducing the over-representation of First Nations young offenders in the system
- clearly define roles and responsibilities across the system to inform entity-level strategies and plans.

## QPS needs to finalise its youth justice strategy

Individual entities need to understand their role in the broader system. They also need to ensure their individual activities and strategies align to the state's overall youth justice strategy. This is particularly important for QPS, given its policing strategy has a significant impact on the system.

QPS had a youth crime strategy from 2019–2023, that broadly aligned to the state strategy. However, it lacked clarity about its objectives and desired outcomes. It has developed a new draft youth justice strategy and supporting action plans. It aims to finalise the draft strategy in June 2024 and begin implementation.

QPS's new strategy sets out its strategic priorities, including its new responsibilities for preventing youth crime, which came into effect in May 2023. QPS needs to ensure its draft strategy aligns with the new state strategy. This new role will require a different approach from its traditional policing focus. QPS will need to address a cultural shift needed among frontline officers, from responding to youth crime to preventing it. It will also need to invest more up-front in youth crime prevention initiatives and early intervention activities.

### Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Queensland Police Service finalises its youth justice strategy, ensuring it includes measurable objectives and aligns to the state strategy.



## Are entities measuring and reporting outcomes across the system?

Entities are not regularly monitoring and reporting the system's performance. They are lacking appropriate key performance indicators at a system level to enable this. This makes it difficult to determine how effective the government's actions have been.

More transparent reporting will provide clarity about whether youth crime across the state is reducing, and may help to address growing concerns in both the media and community.

The department assessed progress against the first half of the 2019–2023 strategy, but not for the full period. While the strategy outlined key focus areas and outcomes, it only included one key performance indicator to measure progress against: to reduce reoffending by 5 per cent. Reoffending has increased from 64 per cent in 2018–19 to 69 per cent in 2021–22. Reoffending trends are measured 12 months after a young offender is found guilty of a crime. As such, reoffending data for 2022–23 is not yet available. Consistent policy and legislative changes have also created challenges for the department in evaluating the overall strategy.

Many of the programs in the strategy focus on prevention. Measuring programs that aim to prevent young people from reoffending can be challenging due to the complex nature of youth crime. It can be difficult to isolate and understand the impact and outcome of a specific program on a young offender's behaviour.



### Work in progress – developing a system-wide evaluation framework

In late 2023, the government established a system-wide evaluation team within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. This team is developing a monitoring and evaluation framework that will examine multi-agency initiatives across the system. This includes developing key indicators that will help to determine the effectiveness of initiatives and whether they are reducing reoffending. It also reported developing a Youth Crime Trend Reporting Tool to provide key trends to the Community Safety Cabinet Committee.

### Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, in collaboration with the Department of Youth Justice, finalises its system-wide monitoring and evaluation framework and commences evaluation of 2023 youth justice reforms. This should include:

- developing a plan for ongoing evaluation across the system
- reporting outcomes of monitoring and evaluation regularly and transparently to the Department of Youth Justice, the Queensland Police Service and other relevant entities, and to the public, as required, to help inform whether the Queensland Government's actions are reducing youth crime.

## Monitoring performance could be improved at an entity level

QPS does not have set targets and indicators to measure its performance against its youth justice strategy, nor does it report the outcomes of its youth justice programs regularly. The department has a range of mechanisms for monitoring its performance. It regularly reviews the performance of its service centres and undertakes other operational performance reviews. It can improve these by setting key performance indicators for service centres to drive further improvements.

The department has developed a framework for measuring the outcomes of programs that seek to rehabilitate young offenders.

Figure 4C is a case study about the department's outcomes framework.

## Figure 4C Case study 1: Measuring performance against outcomes

### The department's outcomes framework

In April 2022, the Department of Youth Justice developed a framework to measure the outcomes it achieves from programs and services. The framework identifies the primary needs of a young offender that must be addressed to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. These include their health and wellbeing, accommodation, employment, and education, and how connected they are to family, culture, and community. It also includes predictors of offending, such as attitudes, behaviours, and substance use. The framework clearly identifies the outcomes needed in the short, medium, and long term to reduce reoffending and increase public safety.

The department is collecting data and is in early stages of reporting against the framework for selected programs. It intends to report performance against all programs and services in late 2024.

*Source: Queensland Audit Office using data provided by the Department of Youth Justice.*

We discuss the evaluation of specific youth justice programs and services in Chapter 6.

### Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice formalises and executes a plan for measuring the effectiveness of programs using its outcomes framework.

## Reporting on youth crime could be more consistent and transparent

The department and the Queensland Government Statistician's Office have published a range of youth crime statistics over the years. While these are useful to understand the demographics of young offenders, they do not shine a light on the number of serious repeat offenders or the effectiveness of the government's actions to reduce crime by this cohort. The department has not consistently reported youth crime statistics, making it difficult to compare performance over time.

From 2015–16 to 2019–20, the department reported on the profile and complexities of young offenders, the types of offences they commit and the average number in custody. The department stopped this reporting until January 2024 when it released updated statistics.

In December 2023, the department also reported its performance against 3 service standards. This includes the proportion of young offenders declared by Childrens Courts as a serious repeat offender. While this is useful, the number of offenders that courts declare as serious repeat offenders is far lower than the number that the department identifies. As such, it does not provide an accurate reflection of the number of serious repeat offenders across the state. We discuss how entities identify and declare serious repeat offenders further in Chapter 6.



## 5. Investment in youth justice services

Knowing where to prioritise funding across Queensland’s youth justice system is vital. Decisions about where to invest should be based on risk and need, and informed by data. This should include detailed analysis of youth crime rates by location, types of offenders, offences and severity of offences, service provider capability, capacity, and other relevant trends. Macro analysis is also important in informing investment across the system. This includes balancing investment in programs that focus on early intervention with those that rehabilitate serious repeat offenders. This analysis can help to identify where there are gaps across the system and a need to build capability.

This chapter examines whether entities prioritise funding and resources based on key priorities and risks. It also examines how the Department of Youth Justice manages the contracts of service providers.

### Are entities prioritising funding and resources based on key priorities and risks?

The Community Safety Cabinet Committee and the taskforce responsible for leading the system do not undertake system-wide investment analysis to inform investment decisions. Nor does the department, who is responsible for investment in youth justice programs and services. As such, it is unclear how much is being spent on youth crime across the system, or whether funding is being invested in the right areas and programs. For example, the government has committed \$104.6 million to the youth co-responder program for the period from 2019–20 to 2026–27. This program fills an important need and provides 24/7 support to young people at risk of offending. However, there is a lack of rationale to support investment in this program over other youth justice programs. We talk about the co-responder program further in Chapter 6.



#### Work in progress – system-wide investment analysis

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet system-wide evaluation team has included system-wide investment analysis in its forward program of work. The Youth Justice Taskforce is also well positioned to analyse investment across the system given that it is responsible for whole-of-government strategic leadership.

### Entities need to do more to ensure their investment is prioritised based on risk

Across the system, entities need to do more to ensure they track their spend on youth justice and ensure investment is well planned and linked to risk. QPS captures some of its spend on youth justice but not all.

The department records its total spend in youth justice services and programs. Between 2018–19 and 2022–23, the department spent \$1.38 billion on youth justice. This includes:

- \$1.25 billion in internal programs and services, including costs associated with detention centres and service centres
- \$134 million in outsourced programs and services (non-government organisations and First Nations-led organisations).

The department analyses youth crime statistics to determine where to invest. However, it does not map its existing investment against youth crime trends to identify gaps. Nor does it assess investment across the system and consider how much it is spending on early intervention compared to reducing reoffending. As such, the department cannot be confident that it has the right types of programs in the right locations.

In 2015–16, the department mapped services across the state to inform its investment decisions. This included analysing the number of young offenders being case managed by its service centres, the capability and capacity of service providers, and other relevant problems and trends. The department has not repeated this mapping, and could not advise why it has not continued doing this important analysis.

## The department is increasing its investment in non-government organisations that deliver youth justice services

The department has shifted its approach from primarily delivering youth justice services itself to engaging service providers in the community to deliver those services. Since 2019–20, the department has significantly increased its spend in non-government organisations that deliver rehabilitation programs and support services to young offenders and their families. Between 2018–19 and 2022–23, the department spent \$134 million in service providers that deliver youth justice services. This included:

- 68 per cent (\$92 million) in non-government organisations
- 32 per cent (\$42 million) in First Nations-led organisations.

## The department could not demonstrate that it is regularly testing the market

The department could not demonstrate that it is regularly testing the market when making its investment decisions. This increases the risk that its investments do not achieve value for money or meet the needs of young offenders.

The government's procurement policy states that all procurement must achieve value for money.

### DEFINITION

**Value for money** means the best available outcome for money spent. To achieve value for money, entities must consider relevant government objectives and targets, whole-of-life costs, and non-cost factors such as supplier capability and capacity.

To achieve value for money, entities need to conduct market research, analyse supply and demand, and assess the level of competition in the supply market. This helps to inform whether it is necessary and beneficial to use:

- an open-offer procurement method, commonly referred to as testing the market. This provides opportunity for all interested suppliers to submit an offer
- a limited-offer procurement method and invite a supplier of its choice to offer. For example, using a limited-offer procurement method may be more appropriate if analysis shows there is only one service provider that can deliver a service in a required location.

The department invested \$29 million in service providers between July 2022 to September 2023. It did not test the market for 60 per cent (\$17 million) of these investments. This includes investments where it renewed contracts with existing service providers. The department advised that analysis was undertaken to support not testing the market in these instances; however, it could not provide evidence to support this work.



## The rationale for funding decisions needs to be strengthened

Since 2018–19, the department has procured some services without adequately documenting the rationale for investment decisions. In these instances, it has not addressed key elements in the Queensland Government’s procurement policy. The policy states that a significant procurement plan must be developed for all significant procurement (the department defines significant procurements as those greater than \$250,000). The plan must:

- include demand and supply market analysis
- develop procurement strategies and methods to achieve a value-for-money outcome
- develop performance measures and contract management arrangements
- identify and assess risks related to the procurement.

The department used a funding memorandum (in place of a significant procurement plan) for 7 significant procurements between March 2023 and September 2023 totalling \$6.3 million. Funding memorandums do not address the elements listed above and fail to justify why the department is investing in certain providers. Some memorandums specifically noted that the procurement process could be strengthened by completing a market analysis. Of these 7 significant procurements, 5 were the result of direction and decisions from ministers rather than based on the department’s advice. These decisions, including who made the decision and the rationale for the decision, could have been documented more clearly. The department needs strong controls in place to ensure the minister is adequately briefed about the provider’s capability and the procurement risks.

We note that the department’s approach to procurement is an area that has been impacted by machinery of government changes. The department has had to adopt new policies and procedures for each of the 5 times the responsibility for youth justice has moved over the past 7 years.

## Is the department managing the contracts of service providers effectively?

---

### The department needs to strengthen its contract and performance-management practices

In recent years, the department has revised its approach to focus on the outcomes achieved by service providers (such as helping to build stronger relationships within a family or better engagement in school or training programs). Funding is primarily contingent on outcomes achieved, not the delivery of outputs (such as time spent with young offenders). This shift encourages providers to prioritise quality service delivery, but it also comes with challenges, given outcomes can be difficult to measure and often long term in nature.

The department needs to strengthen how it monitors progress and service provider performance. While the department’s contracts with providers contain some performance measures, these were limited. They also do not include defined targets. Targets can help to hold service providers to account and drive improvement. The lack of targets is limiting the department’s ability to effectively manage any underperformance.

The department has several other mechanisms for assessing and managing the performance of service providers. These include holding regular meetings with service providers, reviewing information about the activities delivered by service providers, and seeking feedback from regional staff. A lack of clearly defined targets can make managing performance more challenging.

The department has begun to award longer contracts to service providers, in some cases of up to 5 years. The department's rationale is to give providers confidence and help to build capability within the sector. Long contracts place emphasis on the need for proactive and effective performance-management practices. Under this approach, the department also needs to consider how it builds known capability gaps into contracts. Figure 5A is a case study about a service provider that had its contract renewed despite not meeting its obligations and outcomes.

### Figure 5A Case study 2: Managing the performance of service providers

#### Renewing the contract of a service provider not meeting its contractual requirements

In October 2019, the department engaged a service provider to deliver bail support to young offenders. Bail support services help to ensure young offenders meet the conditions of their bail. The service provider was funded \$875,000 to deliver the service over 2 years. The contract stipulated that the service provider needed to report monthly about the young people it engaged with and about the outcomes of its work.

In early 2021, regional staff reported concerns about the service provider's performance, specifically its unwillingness to share information and work collaboratively with staff. As such, regional case workers chose to no longer refer young people to the service provider. It was difficult for the department to proactively address the poor performance without clearly defined performance targets.

In April 2021, the department's regional staff reviewed the service provider's contract to determine whether to grant an extension. They concluded that extending the contract would not result in value for money and that it was necessary to test the market. The review included the following statements.

'There is an unacceptable risk in the fundamental disconnect between the organisation's framework and the department's statutory role.'

'Youth Justice is not receiving the bail support response intended by the funding and would receive more value for money by any other local bail support.'

Despite the concerns raised, the review recommended that a one-year contract should be offered with changes to the contract's terms. In July 2021, the department renewed the contract for another 4 years (\$2 million), instead of the recommended one year. The department reported that this decision supported its current strategic direction. No further explanation was provided about how this contract supported the current strategic direction or provided value for money.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

#### Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice strengthens its investment and procurement practices to ensure that all investment decisions are based on sound market analysis, with the rationale for decisions clearly documented in line with evidence. This should include:

- regularly mapping its investment against youth crime trends across Queensland
- ensuring its contracts contain sufficient performance measures and targets that assess outputs and outcomes
- developing a framework to build capability in the sector.

# 6. Rehabilitation and community safety

The first principle of the *Youth Justice Act 1992* is to protect the community from offences and, in particular, from high-risk repeat offenders. These offenders often have complex needs and their offending behaviour can be triggered by many factors. Quickly and effectively assessing their needs and the risks they pose to the community is critical. Designing and delivering effective rehabilitation programs is equally important. Rehabilitating young offenders takes time. Entities need to understand the causes of their offending behaviour and deliver programs that address those needs.

Some young offenders continue to reoffend. In some cases, the nature and severity of their offending increases and they become a significant risk to the community. Judges and magistrates may order young offenders to be detained in a youth detention centre for a specific time (also referred to as a detention order).

Young offenders need appropriate plans and support when they leave detention and transition back into the community. This includes making sure they have a safe place to live and appropriate role models to support them through their transition period.

This chapter is about how effectively entities assess the risk and needs of serious repeat offenders and deliver effective rehabilitation programs. It also examines how entities are keeping communities safe, including how effectively the department rehabilitates young offenders in youth detention centres and supports them as they transition back into the community.

## Do entities have a consistent and effective approach for identifying high-risk young offenders?

In 2022–23, serious repeat offenders committed 55 per cent of all youth crime in Queensland. It is, therefore, important that entities have a consistent and effective approach to identifying this cohort, and others who may pose a high risk. Good identification enables effective monitoring to inform strategies and coordinate activities. The Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Department of Youth Justice (the department) do not have a consistent way of identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending.

Figure 6A shows the different approaches entities use to identify high-risk young offenders, including serious repeat offenders.

**Figure 6A**  
**Approaches used to identify high-risk young offenders**

Entity	Description
QPS	QPS uses the Chronic Youth Offender Index to identify high-risk offenders and prioritise its response. It identifies the top 10 per cent of all offenders as high risk by calculating the number of charges, whether a weapon was used in the offending, the seriousness of the offending and whether the offender was on bail at the time of the offending.
The department	The department uses the Serious Repeat Offender Index to identify serious repeat offenders. The index considers a range of factors, including number of charges over the last 2 years, severity of offences, time spent in custody, and the young offender’s age. It also uses its risk assessment tool to assess the risk of individual young offenders. This is not utilised to identify broader cohorts of high-risk young offenders.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Queensland Police Service and the Department of Youth Justice.



In addition to this, the Childrens Court can declare that a young person is a serious repeat offender as part of their sentence.

QPS, the department, and the Childrens Court use these approaches for different purposes. However, the differing approaches mean they cannot, as part of the broader system, consistently identify the cohort most at risk of reoffending. For example, in July 2023, QPS identified 1,363 high-risk young offenders, while the department identified 440 young people as serious repeat offenders. The courts declared 48 young people as serious repeat offenders between March and December 2023.

The department uses its index to determine which young offenders it refers to multi-agency collaborative panels (MACPs). It also uses its index to determine which offenders need a 72-hour plan to help them transition from detention to the community. The department's index identifies the cohort that has been charged with the most offences based on offending history, but it does not identify those most at risk of reoffending. While past offending may indicate future offending, other variables must be considered, including whether the young person is currently demonstrating aggressive and anti-social behaviour.

While the department has a tool to assess the risk of young offenders, it applies this to individuals only and does not use this to identify the cohort of young offenders across the state with the highest risk of reoffending. This assessment is not used to determine who should get referred to a MACP and get a 72-hour plan. By solely using its index, the department increases the risk that some young offenders who are likely to reoffend may miss out on being collectively managed by MACPs and receiving the rehabilitation they need to address their offending behaviour.

The differing approaches between QPS, the department, and courts increase the risk of miscommunication. Entities need a consistent approach for identifying those young people at highest risk of reoffending. This approach needs to be defined, agreed to by all relevant entities, and integrated across the system.

#### Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and governance committees agree on a uniform, evidence-based approach to identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending and ensure this information is shared with relevant stakeholders across the system.

## Are the risks and needs of serious repeat offenders identified to inform their rehabilitation?

The risks and needs of young offenders need to be identified quickly and effectively, so entities can deliver rehabilitation programs that address the underlying causes of their behaviour. The department's case workers are responsible for assessing the risk of young offenders.

### The department uses an appropriate tool to assess the risk and needs of serious repeat offenders

The department uses the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory Tool (the tool) to assess the risk and needs of young offenders, including serious repeat offenders. The tool is informed by evidence and developed from an international model for assessing the risk and needs of young offenders. The department's youth justice case workers use the tool to assess:

- the young offender's risk to their own personal safety and the community, and the appropriate level of support
- the young offender's criminogenic needs (the cause of the offender's behaviour), enabling those needs to be targeted during case planning.

The tool indicates whether the young offender is a low, moderate, high, or very high risk. The higher the risk, the more likely it is that the young person will reoffend and the more support they will likely require.





## The department does not consistently assess the risk and needs of serious repeat offenders before commencing rehabilitation

The department requires its case workers to assess the risk and needs of young offenders before they deliver rehabilitation programs. This helps to ensure they deliver the right type of rehabilitation at the right frequency. The department does not monitor whether risk assessments are being completed prior to programs commencing.

We examined whether the department assessed the risk of young offenders engaged in Intensive Case Management (ICM). ICM is one of the department’s core rehabilitation programs, delivered to high-risk young offenders and their families over 6–12 months.

Of the 276 young offenders engaged in ICM between 2018 and 2023, 10 per cent (28) did not have their risk and needs assessed, before starting the program. As a result, the department may be delivering ICM to young offenders who are lower risk, while more serious repeat offenders may be missing out.

## The time taken to assess the risk and needs of serious repeat offenders is improving

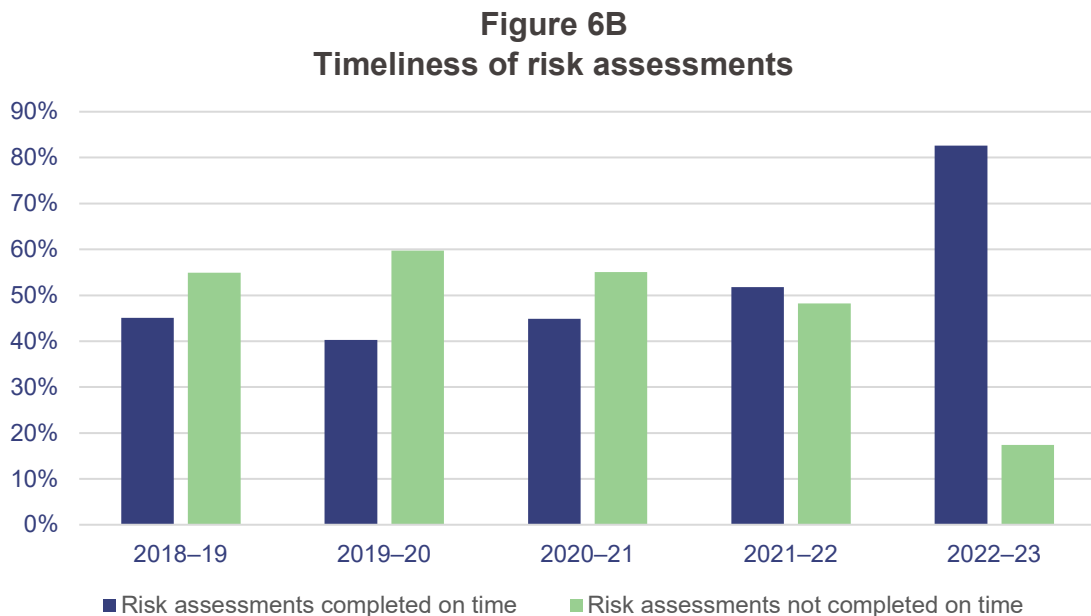
The department is improving the time it takes to assess the risk and needs of serious repeat offenders, but more work is needed.

A case worker is required to assess the risk and needs of young offenders within 6 weeks of receiving a court order. They then reassess the young offender’s risk every 6 months.

The department assessed the risk and needs of 2,417 serious repeat offenders between 2018–19 and 2022–23. Of these, only 56 per cent (1,364) were completed on time.

The percentage of risk assessments completed on time has increased from 45 per cent (155) in 2018–19 to 83 per cent (571) in 2022–23.

Figure 6B shows the percentage of risk assessments completed on time and those not completed on time for serious repeat offenders between 2018–19 and 2022–23.



Source: Queensland Audit Office using data supplied by the Department of Youth Justice.

Of the 1,053 risk assessments not completed on time, 18 per cent (186) were completed 3 or more months after the due date. In these instances, the department cannot be sure it is delivering the right programs to serious repeat offenders to address the causes of their offending behaviour.



## How are entities keeping communities safe and rehabilitating young offenders?

---

The *Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019–2023* (the strategy) focuses on the need for a rehabilitative approach to reducing youth crime. However, this is underpinned by the need for community confidence and safety. Reducing youth crime and keeping communities safe requires a multi-pronged approach. Entities need to work together to deliver effective strategies and programs that both keep the community safe and address the root causes of youth crime.

Increasing the number of police officers in some communities may deter youth crime in the short term. However, targeted rehabilitation programs and other strategies that address the underlying causes of offending behaviour are necessary in the longer term. These short- and long-term strategies are both necessary, and need to complement one another.

### Improving support in high-risk areas

Entities undertake a range of activities to address youth crime in high-risk areas and provide better support to communities. We provide 2 examples below of work being undertaken by QPS and the department.

#### Youth crime co-responder teams

A high proportion of youth crime occurs in the evenings and at night, when there are limited support services available to young offenders through Queensland Government or community programs. To address this, the government introduced youth co-responder teams in 2020. These teams, staffed by a specialist worker from QPS and the department, patrol streets and engage young people who are at risk of offending. These teams fill an important gap in services and ensure 24/7 support. They support young people at risk of offending and those already subject to a court order, including serious repeat offenders. This includes helping young offenders transition from detention back into the community.

The government has committed \$104.6 million to co-responder teams for the period from 2019–20 to 2026–27. Co-responder teams are now operating in 13 locations across the state. Of these, 11 are located in areas where there are high rates of youth crime.

While the introduction of co-responder teams is positive, there is opportunity to maximise their impact. Some co-responder staff we spoke with said they were unclear about their priorities and where to focus their effort. The department's service response matrix, which teams use to inform their priorities, lacks sufficient detail. For example, while it outlines responsibilities, it does not highlight priorities.

QPS does not permanently fund positions for the youth co-responder teams. Instead, it rotates its officers through the co-responder teams, either on secondment or in an overtime capacity. As a result, officers may find it difficult to build effective relationships with young people. Some officers may also experience fatigue as they juggle competing responsibilities.

#### A greater police presence in high-risk areas

QPS is increasing its police presence in communities where there are high rates of youth crime.

QPS launched Operation Victor Unison in March 2023. This operation investigated youth crime in high-risk areas across the state, including Townsville. It also sought to prevent youth crime by having a greater police presence in public spaces. As a result of the operation, QPS reported that it charged 2,809 young people between 1 March and 30 October 2023.

QPS commenced Taskforce Guardian in May 2023 to target high-risk youth offending across the state. It reported charging more than 400 young people as a result.



## Granting bail to young offenders

A judge or magistrate may decide to grant bail to a young person who has been charged with an offence. In some circumstances, a police officer can also grant bail. Bail is the temporary release of an accused person while they wait for the court trial. The judge or magistrate may place certain conditions on the young person while they are on bail. For example, they may be required to attend school every day or abide by a curfew. These conditions are designed to help keep the young person and the community safe.

In April 2021, the government amended the *Youth Justice Act 1992* to create a presumption against bail for young offenders accused of committing serious crimes while on bail. This change means the young person needs to prove why they should not be detained for their alleged offending.

In March 2023, the government made breach of bail an offence for children. The number of serious repeat offenders that reoffended while on bail decreased from 434 in March 2023, to 307 in December 2023. Prior to the legislation change, the number of serious repeat offenders who reoffended while on bail increased from 390 in March 2022 to 451 in December 2022. QPS opposed bail for some of these offenders, but it does not have adequate systems to track the overall number that it opposed. Entities and system governance committees need to monitor the number of offenders that reoffend while on bail and share this information with judges and magistrates for their consideration.

## Monitoring young offenders' compliance with their bail conditions

QPS is responsible for checking that young offenders comply with their bail conditions. QPS has a system that police officers use to record details about the bail checks they do. While QPS monitors the total number of bail checks its officers do each year, it does not know whether officers are doing all of their checks. Nor does it know whether officers perform checks in a timely manner.

### Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Queensland Police Service monitors bail checks for serious repeat offenders to ensure timely and appropriate action.

## Using electronic devices to monitor serious repeat offenders

In May 2021, the government amended the *Youth Justice Regulation 2016*, which allows judges and magistrates to order that an electronic device be fitted to 16–17 year olds as a condition of their bail. The device monitors the young offender's location using GPS coordinates and provides real-time alerts of unauthorised movement.

The devices were first introduced as a trial in Gold Coast, Logan, Moreton, North Brisbane, and Townsville. In June 2023, they were expanded to include Cairns, Mount Isa, and Toowoomba, and to include 15 year olds.

The department is required to assess whether a device is suitable for a serious repeat offender and report its findings to the court. It must consider the offender's capacity to understand their bail conditions and their ability to comply with those conditions. It must also consider what level of parental support the offender has. The department's court officers undertake these assessments, but there is no independent moderation to ensure officers are assessing young offenders consistently across the state.

Since May 2021, judges and magistrates have requested whether electronic devices would be suitable for 61 young offenders. Police prosecutors requested assessments for an additional 53 young offenders. In total, the department has assessed whether devices would be suitable for 114 young offenders. Of these, 80 per cent (91) assessments were for young offenders located in South East Queensland and the remaining 20 per cent (23) were outside South East Queensland. Since May 2021, electronic devices have been fitted to 48 serious repeat offenders, the majority located in South East Queensland.

In November 2022, the department conducted a review of electronic monitoring. It found there were some benefits from their use but could not conclude on their overall effectiveness due to the low number fitted. The department is planning to review their effectiveness again in 2025.

## Poor data capture makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the department’s core programs

The department delivers 8 core rehabilitation programs to young offenders. These are used for serious repeat offenders and other young offenders. Figure 6C names the department’s core rehabilitation programs and shows whether the programs were based on (or informed by) evidence and whether they have been evaluated.

**Figure 6C**  
**The department’s core rehabilitation programs**

Name of program	Is the program based on, or informed by, evidence?	Has the program been independently evaluated?
Aggression Replacement Training (ART)	✓	✓
Black Chicks Talking (BCT)	✓	✗
Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART)	✓	✓
Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control (ERIC)	✓	✗
Intensive Case Management (ICM)	✓	✓
Rethinking Our Attitude to Driving (ROAD)	✓	✗
Transition to Success (T2S)	✓	✓
Young, Black and Proud (YBP)	✓	✗

Note: Changing Habits and Reaching Targets and Aggression Replacement Training have both been evaluated by entities from other states.

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

Poor data capture is hindering the department from determining the effectiveness of its core programs. The department does not accurately capture the number of programs it delivers to young offenders. As such, it is difficult to determine their effectiveness.

While the department has a case management procedure, it does not contain information to guide case managers on what to capture in case notes. This has led to inconsistent practices and vague records. Some staff capture records for programs in Excel spreadsheets. Others record notes in the department’s Integrated Case Management System, which is the department’s primary system for capturing case notes about young offenders, including the rehabilitation programs delivered to them.

One of the core rehabilitation programs, Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART), is mandatory. The department’s case workers must deliver it to all serious repeat offenders in Queensland. CHART is a cognitive-behavioural tool used in Australia and internationally, which aims to help young offenders think about their actions and motivate change.

We reviewed the case files of a sample of 50 serious repeat offenders to determine what rehabilitation programs the department had delivered to them. Of our sample, 34 per cent (17) had no records of CHART (which is mandatory) being delivered to them. There were no instances of young offenders refusing to consent to receiving CHART. In addition, 18 per cent (9) had no records of any rehabilitation programs being delivered at all.

The department is aware that it needs to improve the way it records data for its rehabilitation programs.





### Work in progress – the department’s new case management system

In June 2024, the department intends to implement a new case management system, Unify. The system will capture personal details about young offenders, including any rehabilitation programs and support they are receiving. It will also capture case workers’ notes about their engagement with young offenders. The department hopes the new system will allow for better data capture of its core programs and assess their effectiveness against the outcomes framework.

### Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice improves and standardises its processes and systems for collecting and recording data about its core rehabilitation programs and support services. This should include providing appropriate training and guidance to staff to ensure data is collected as required.

## More evaluation of core programs is needed

The department has commissioned independent reviews for 2 of its 8 core programs (Transition to Success in September 2018 and Intensive Case Management in May 2023). These reviews both found that the programs decreased reoffending and additional staff were needed to operate more effectively. In addition to these core programs, another 2 (CHART and Aggression Replacement Training) have been evaluated in other states. The evaluation of Aggression Replacement Training only assessed the outcomes of the program for 5 17-to-18 year old males and therefore is of limited value.

The Emotional Regulation and Impulse Control (ERIC) program used by the department was designed by a team of Australian psychologists to help young adults better control their emotions. ERIC was designed for 16–25 year olds, but the department is delivering it to 10–17 year olds. In 2018, the department commissioned a review of ERIC’s effectiveness. The review only sampled 8 young offenders aged 16 and 17 and, therefore, could not be used to conclude on the program’s overall effectiveness. While the designers of ERIC advise that the program is appropriate for younger children, a future evaluation should assess whether it is effective for children below the age of 16.

It is important that the department evaluates the remaining 4 programs to ensure they are effective at reducing youth crime.

## The department collects data but needs to evaluate outsourced programs

The department currently has 17 outsourced programs and services that are delivered by non-government and First Nations-led organisations. Similar to the department’s core programs, they focus on addressing the needs of young offenders and reducing their reoffending behaviour. As part of their funding arrangements, non-government organisations provide quarterly data to the department on young offenders’ progress and outcomes. The department collates this data to understand trends, but does not use it to formally evaluate these programs.

Since 2018, the department has commissioned evaluations of 9 of the 17 outsourced programs. These were comprehensive reviews that considered the implementation and operation of programs statewide. Three of these evaluations concluded there is a need for greater community consultation in the programs’ design and delivery. Another 2 evaluations found the programs’ outcomes needed to be stated more clearly.

It intends to evaluate the remaining 8 outsourced programs by mid-2025. The outcomes and learnings from these evaluations should inform future investment decisions as discussed in Chapter 5.

## Are serious repeat offenders rehabilitated while in detention?

A young offender’s time in detention should involve attending rehabilitation programs to address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour. Many programs have a therapeutic focus, helping young offenders to change their habits. Others have a cultural focus and help to build life skills.

Time in detention is also an opportunity for qualified teachers to deliver education to young offenders. All 3 youth detention centres have onsite schools that aim to deliver 17 hours of education to young offenders each week.

### Young offenders need more rehabilitation and education in detention

Young offenders in detention are not always getting the rehabilitation they need to address their offending behaviour, nor are they getting the education they need. This is because some youth detention centres are often locked down due to staff shortages, safety incidents, and other factors.

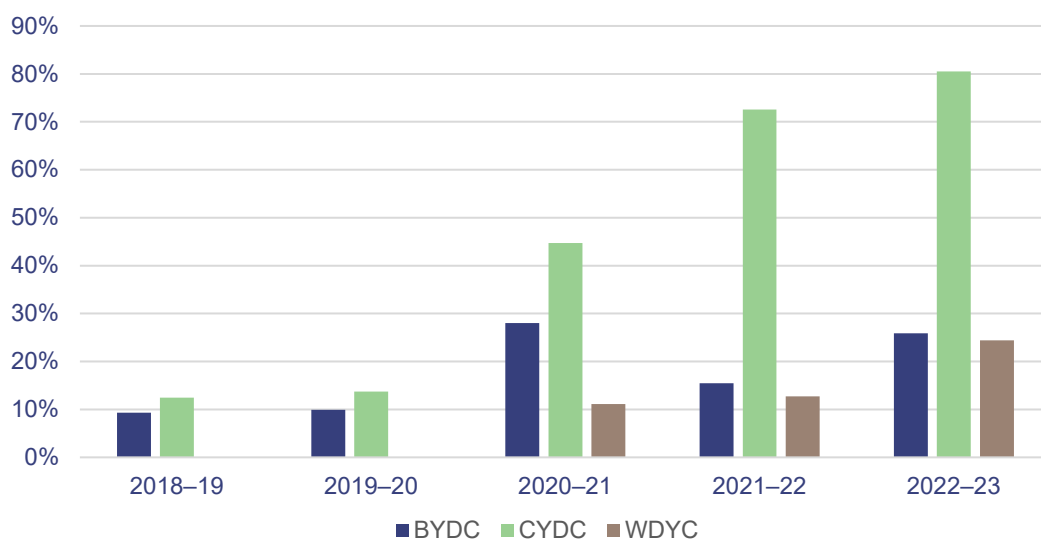
During a lockdown, young offenders are kept in their rooms or in a breakout area within their unit. If kept in their room, they must be permitted a minimum of 2 hours outside of their room each day unless it is unsafe to do so. During this time, young offenders can request access to a case worker and other support staff and attend scheduled appointments.

It is difficult to determine the amount of time that young offenders are locked down, due to limitations with the department’s data. Prior to November 2023, the department recorded the start and finish time of a lockdown event at each detention centre, but it did not record the amount of time each young offender was locked down. A detention centre may go into a full lockdown or individual units within a centre may go into lockdown. The department rectified this issue in November 2023.

We analysed the percentage of time Queensland’s 3 youth detention centres spent in lockdown between 7 am and 7 pm.

Figure 6D shows this data for 2018–19 to 2022–23. West Moreton Youth Detention Centre was established in 2020–21 and could only provide lockdown data from 2020–21 to 2022–23.

**Figure 6D**  
Percentage of time detention centres were in lockdown, 2018–19 to 2022–23



Notes: BYDC – Brisbane Youth Detention Centre; CYDC – Cleveland Youth Detention Centre; WDYC – West Moreton Youth Detention Centre. West Moreton opened in December of 2020 meaning its 2020–21 data does not include the full year.

Source: Queensland Audit Office, based on audit evidence.



Cleveland Youth Detention Centre has the highest rates of lockdown. Since 2018–19, it has increased from 12 per cent to 81 per cent in 2022–23. This is equivalent to 294 days in lockdown in 2022–23.

Cleveland Youth Detention Centre reported that the number of young offenders who completed rehabilitation programs decreased from 215 in 2018 to 31 in 2022. In addition to this, most young offenders only received an average between 3 and 5 hours of face-to-face education each week from 2021 to 2023. We acknowledge that some young offenders may have been provided with education materials in their room over this period.

Brisbane and West Moreton locked down less frequently. Between 2018–19 to 2022–23, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre was in lockdown 18 per cent of the time and between 2020–21 to 2022–23 West Moreton was in lockdown 18 per cent of the time.

Neither Brisbane or West Moreton youth detention centres accurately and consistently record the number of young offenders who complete rehabilitation programs. This data is critical if centres are to determine the effectiveness of their programs. The department has advised that it is working with centres to improve their data capture.

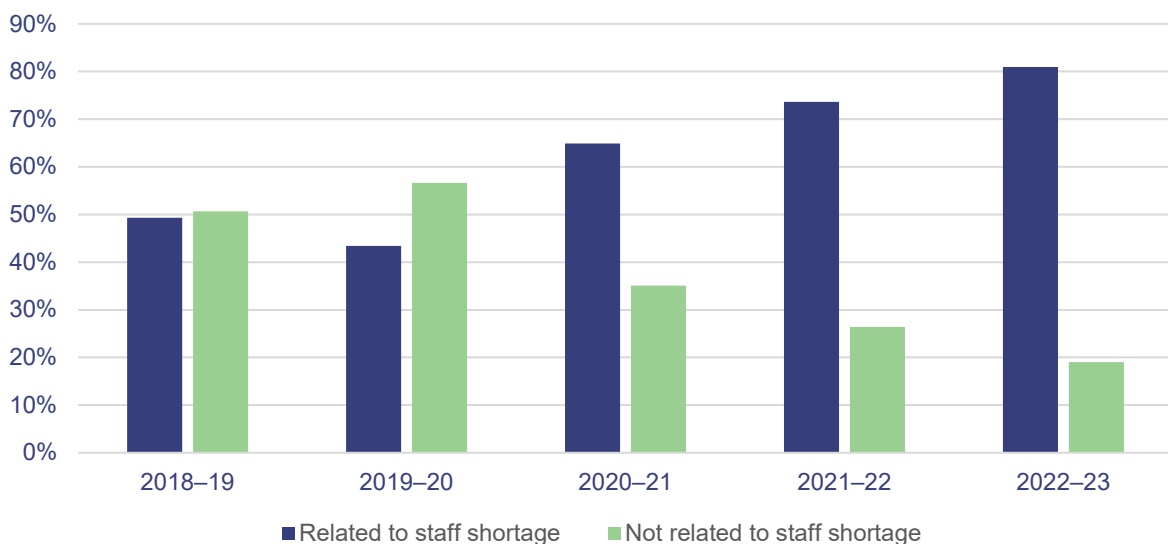
### Staff shortages are contributing to increased lockdowns

All 3 of Queensland’s youth detention centres have experienced staff shortages. These shortages have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, mandatory vaccination directives, and general workforce shortages in human services.

We found a correlation between staff shortages and lockdowns in detention centres. In 2022–23, 81 per cent of lockdowns were related to staff shortages.

Figure 6E shows the percentage of lockdowns that were related to staff shortages.

**Figure 6E**  
**Percentage of detention centre lockdowns related to staff shortages, 2018–19 to 2022–23**



Source: Queensland Audit Office, based on audit evidence from the Department of Youth Justice.

The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre had the highest number of staff shortages of the 3 centres. Its staff shortages are caused by vacant positions, staff acting in higher duties, staff on maternity leave, and staff on leave due to injury or illness.

The department has undertaken a range of activities to address staff shortages at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. This includes using a greater variety of platforms to attract more applicants and interviewing staff that leave to understand the reasons for their decision.





While the number of full-time equivalent staff has increased at the centre from 267 in July 2021 to 284 in June 2023, it still needs additional staff to operate effectively and avoid lockdowns.

#### Recommendation 11

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice continues to implement plans to address staff shortages at detention centres, including considering alternative methods to rehabilitate young offenders while centres are in lockdown.

## Queensland's youth detention centres are operating above capacity

Queensland's youth detention centres are consistently operating above their safe capacity. The department's procedures state that a safe capacity is achieved when no more than 85 per cent of beds are utilised. It requires a ratio of one youth worker to 4 young offenders when in open spaces. Where a young offender is a threat to the safety of others in the centre, they may require one-on-one supervision.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the average utilisation rates were:

- Brisbane Youth Detention Centre – 94 per cent
- Cleveland Youth Detention Centre – 88 per cent
- West Moreton Youth Detention Centre – 95 per cent.

Operating beyond the safe capacity increases the risk of safety incidents, including assaults on detention centre staff. The government's commitment to build 2 new youth detention centres will help to address this capacity issue in the long term, providing the department can recruit staff.

To provide interim capacity, the government converted the Caboolture watch house to accommodate young people from December 2023. It is also building a new Youth Remand Centre at Wacol, which it expects will be operational in December 2024.

## Do serious repeat offenders get appropriate support when they leave detention?

### Serious repeat offenders need more effective and sustained support

Leaving detention is a particularly vulnerable time for serious repeat offenders. It is a time when they are likely to reoffend. They need effective and timely support, and role models who can help them to reintegrate successfully back into their community.

The department's primary approach to managing this transition is 72-hour plans, which include key information about the young offender, family, and support people, and a schedule for the next 3 days (including what they will do, where they will go, and who will support them). The department provides case management support to young offenders during and after the first 72 hours, but these do not focus specifically on helping a young offender transition back into the community.

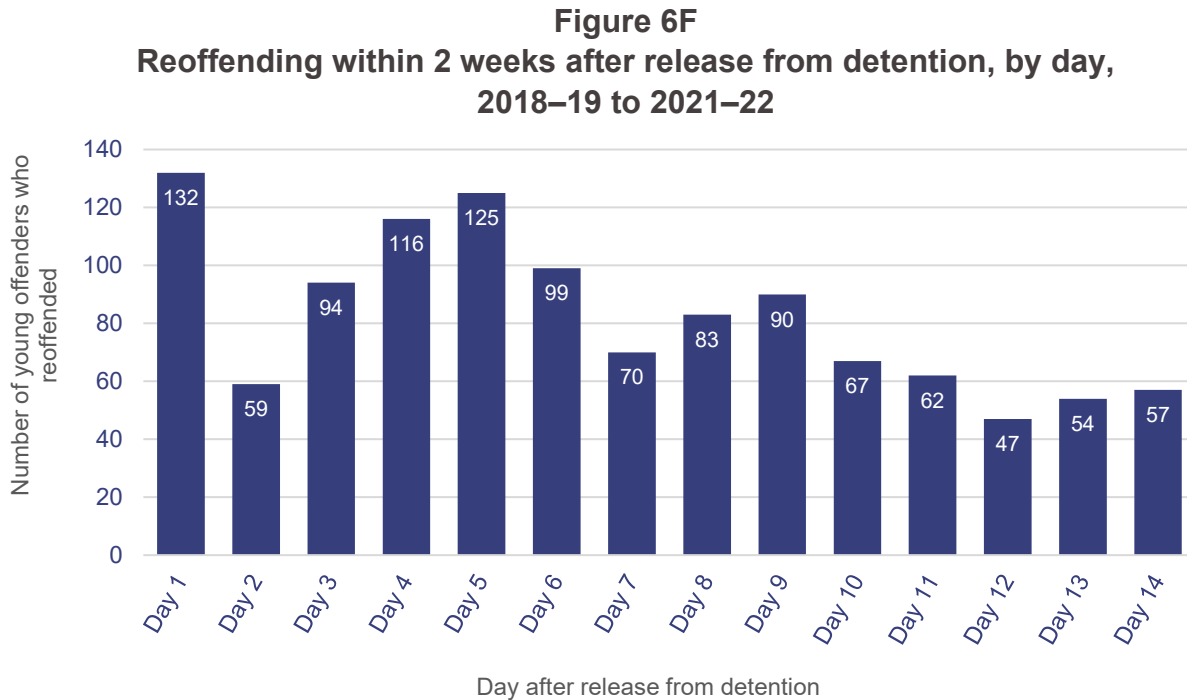
The department introduced 72-hour plans in March 2022. They are designed to improve support for serious repeat offenders who are leaving detention or a police watch house.

### 72-hour plans are not based on evidence

The department could not explain the rationale for only planning for the first 72 hours after a young offender's release. It did not base its decision to introduce 72-hour plans on evidence.

Approximately 75 per cent (2,197) of young offenders who left detention between 2018–19 and 2021–22 reoffended.

We analysed how soon these young offenders reoffended after leaving detention. Figure 6F below shows the number of young offenders between 2018–19 to 2021–22 who reoffend within 2 weeks of being released from detention.



Source: Queensland Audit Office using data provided by the Department of Youth Justice.

Our analysis indicates that a plan for the first 72 hours may not be sufficient, and a plan covering a longer period may be needed. We found that 53 per cent reoffended within 2 weeks of their release. Most reoffended on the first day of their release (within the first 24 hours), or on the fourth or fifth day. The department should consider research and best practice in determining how long to plan for. Young offenders leaving detention in Queensland need better support over a longer period.

### Not all serious repeat offenders leaving detention get a 72-hour plan

We took a sample of 77 serious repeat offenders who were released from detention between March 2022 and August 2023. Over this period, these 77 young offenders were detained and released 260 times. Of these, there were 73 instances (28 per cent) where they were released from detention without a 72-hour plan, despite being required to have one.

### The quality of 72-hour plans varies significantly

The quality of the plans we reviewed varied significantly. Some case workers developed a detailed plan in discussion with the young offender. These plans outlined the activities and programs the young offenders would complete, and the key support people who would help them. In other cases, 72-hour plans were vague and lacked detail.

Our review of plans found that 45 per cent (85 plans) had no support person or mentor from the community listed. In addition, 27 per cent (50 plans) were incomplete, missing key information such as where the young offender was living, who was picking them up from detention, and their bail conditions.



## Better coordination and information sharing is needed

There are inherent challenges in developing 72-hour plans. Case workers do not always know when a young offender will be released, young offenders may not have a permanent address to include, and there may be limited support services available over the weekend for young offenders who are released on a Friday. The system as a whole does not collaborate to effectively support a smooth transition out of detention.

We spoke with multiple non-government organisations who said that better planning, coordination, and information sharing is needed when young offenders are released from detention. They advised that, at times, they receive little notice about the date and time of a young offender's release. We repeatedly heard that this is a challenge, particularly given the lack of services that operate outside standard business hours.

Non-government organisations also reported that the department would fail to provide key information about the young offender, making it difficult to provide appropriate care. This included:

- information about their family, health, housing, education, and cultural needs
- information about the young offender's current behaviour to ensure they provide the right support to keep the young person and their staff safe.

### **Recommendation 12**

We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice ensures there is effective and sustained support to young offenders transitioning from detention into the community. This should include:

- evaluating the length of time a young offender requires support
- implementing a more structured process for planning a young offender's release
- communicating in a timely way with relevant stakeholders about the young offender's risk, needs, and transition plan
- providing appropriate support to meet the young offender's social and cultural needs.



# Appendices

---

<b>A.</b>	<b>Entity responses</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>Audit scope and methods</b>	<b>61</b>
	Performance engagement	61
	Audit objective and scope	61
	Method	62
<b>C.</b>	<b>Serious repeat offenders by service centre</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>Machinery of government changes</b>	<b>65</b>



# A. Entity responses

---

As mandated in Section 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, the Queensland Audit Office gave a copy of this report with a request for comments to:

- the Premier, the Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice, the Minister for Police and Community Safety and the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.
- the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Youth Justice, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Queensland Police Service.

This appendix contains their detailed responses to our audit recommendations.

The heads of these entities are responsible for the accuracy, fairness, and balance of their comments.



# Comments received from Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence



The Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP  
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice  
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

1 William Street Brisbane Q 4000  
GPO Box 149 Brisbane Q 4001  
Telephone +61 7 3719 7400  
Email [attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

Our ref: 587827/1, 7048077

24 JUN 2024

Mr Brendan Worrall  
Auditor-General  
Queensland Audit Office  
[QueenslandAuditOffice@gao.qld.gov.au](mailto:QueenslandAuditOffice@gao.qld.gov.au)

Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your correspondence dated 31 May 2024 regarding the Queensland Audit Office's (QAO) proposed report Reducing serious youth crime (the Report) and for the opportunity to provide a response.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General (the Department) supports the review being undertaken by the QAO and acknowledges the importance of providing coordinated and effective responses to address youth crime in Queensland. I note the Report makes 12 recommendations primarily directed at the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service in their capacity leading the Government response to youth crime. The Department looks forward to working collaboratively with these agencies as a key stakeholder to consider the recommendations.

I refer you to the response to your report from Ms Jasmina Joldić PSM, Director-General of the Department, for further information.

If you have any questions in relation to the above, I invite you to contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

**YVETTE D'ATH MP**  
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice  
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

## Comments received from Director-General, Department of Premier and Cabinet

---

For reply please quote: SocPol/CC – TF/24/11460 – DOC/24/119721



Department of the  
**Premier and Cabinet**

Mr Brendan Worrall  
Auditor-General  
Queensland Audit Office  
qao@qao.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Worrall

I refer to the email of 31 May 2024 from your office providing the Queensland Audit Office's draft audit report on *Reducing serious youth crime*. I appreciate the opportunity to provide a formal response to this report.

Recommendations 1 and 5 concern the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC). DPC accepts these recommendations.

DPC is committed to progressing the systems evaluation of the 2023 youth justice reforms. DPC notes that its role in, and responsibility for evaluation is limited to the 2023 reforms only, and does not extend to subsequent or future reforms. DPC will continue to support all Queensland Government efforts to increase the evidence base around what works to reduce youth offending and keep communities safe.

While DPC has no legislative responsibility for the youth justice system, DPC will continue to actively work with all relevant agencies to increase community safety through reducing youth crime. This includes fostering and supporting collaborative governance, comprehensive program evaluations and enhanced service integration.

If you require any further information on these matters, please contact

Yours sincerely

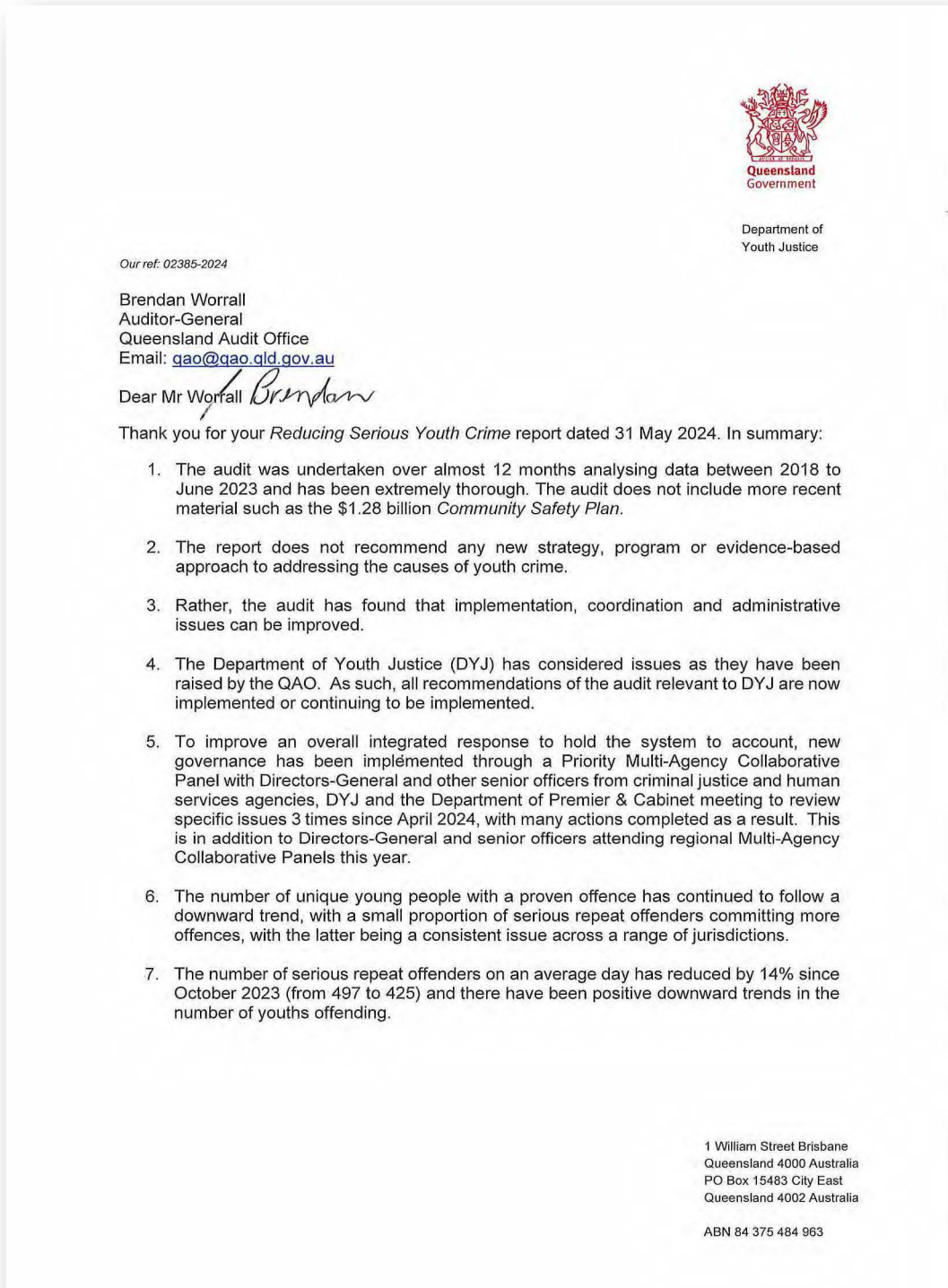
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Kaiser".

Mike Kaiser  
**Director-General**  
2516 124

1 William Street Brisbane  
PO Box 15185 City East  
Queensland 4002 Australia  
Telephone 13 QGOV (13 74 68)  
Website [www.premiers.qld.gov.au](http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au)  
ABN 65 959 415 158



# Comments received from Director-General, Department of Youth Justice



**Auditor-General's response:** As highlighted in my foreword on page 1, the Auditor-General must not question the merits of government policy objectives. This means we cannot make recommendations on the specific direction or strategies government should take.

The report acknowledges the "significant work entities do to identify at-risk young people and intervene early in their lives". The audit points out that "this work, in areas such as education, health and housing, is critical to deter young people from entering the system", but this report does "not assess or conclude specifically on these areas".

The report includes comments about a "greater need to regularly test the market", and "possible increases in the risk that investments do not achieve value for money or meet the needs of young offenders". The report would have been strengthened by acknowledging that in human services, there are "thin" markets, especially in regional areas. This means there are few (and sometimes no) capable service providers, and so continually retesting the market can have adverse effects on fledgling or small service providers (especially community-controlled organisations).

There is work underway to implement the Government's recently developed *Best Practice Industry Conditions for Social Services Procurement*, outlining key principles to be adopted across the government. DYJ is working with the Social Services Category Council Industry Reference Group, to develop guidelines and policies that strengthen social procurement capability in what is an increasingly complex environment for social services organisations. This includes moving to five-year contracts and early provision of advice that a contract will cease where requirements are not being met.

The report also mentions that of "7 significant procurements, 5 were the result of direction and decisions from ministers rather than based on the department's advice. These decisions, including who made the decision and the rationale for the decision could have been documented more clearly. The department needs strong controls in place to ensure the Minister is adequately briefed about the provider's capability and the procurement risks".

The providers are established providers of services and previous recipients of Federal and State funding (including for example, one or more evaluations of the providers work). The providers have been subject to the necessary due diligence and conformity checks.

The focus in the report on serious repeat offenders only, seems to be a little at odds with the findings about system-wide approaches and processes. For example, there is significant evidence about prevention and early intervention, with the system having seen a reduction of 31 percent in the number of young people with a proven offence across Queensland over the past 10 years.

Reducing the number of young people entering or in the system has been a significant achievement which evidence suggests has prevented more serious repeat offenders.

There is strong evidence: (1) about what works in terms of preventing the causes of crime by investment in families and children in their early years; (2) which explains why many young people offend, including clear connections between lack of economic participation by a family, offending behaviour and exposure to violence; and (3) to inform problem-oriented policing, restorative justice and support for victims.

While it does not excuse the behaviour, many young people have experienced domestic and family violence, have contact with the child protection system or have a parent who has been incarcerated. Issues such as disengagement with schooling, problematic drug, alcohol and substance misuse, untreated mental health issues, developmental disorders, and cognitive and intellectual disabilities can significantly affect a young person's ability to learn and make sensible decisions, making them more likely to take risks and unable to consider the



consequences of their actions. To this end, it is promising that the audit has called for better implementation of the current evidence-based approaches which have been the result of significant reform since 2019.

Some of these reforms include:

- legislative change each year from 2019;
- establishment of and improvements to Multi Agency Collaborative Panels;
- establishment and expansion of Early Action Groups;
- establishment of a Youth Justice Peak Body;
- implementation of the *Youth Justice Outcomes Framework*;
- Youth Response and Diversion including the Mt Isa Hub;
- extension of after-hours services, drug and alcohol treatment services and On Country programs;
- Community Based Crime Action grants and Targeted Responses for Youth Crime grants (\$7.5 million in 2023-2024);
- expanded restorative justice conferencing;
- a new therapeutic detention centre with additional centres to be built;
- 24/7 Youth Co-Responder Teams (over 140 DYJ staff with matching police resources) in 15 locations with over 96,000 contacts with young people;
- 82 staff to provide Intensive Case Management through 16 locations across the state, working with over 300 young people with an evaluation demonstrating reduced offending by 50%, with a 72% reduction in offences against the person;
- trialled and expanded electronic monitoring;
- extended bail support initiatives;
- outsourced service delivery with 41% delivered by community-controlled organisations;
- significant safety and accountability improvements (e.g., body worn cameras) and improved training within detention centres along with extended education, training, rehabilitation and health services.

As part of a whole-of-systems approach, a new *Community Safety Plan for Queensland* has been released. The *Community Safety Plan* is centred on five targeted pillars of action, supported by \$1.28 billion in additional investment and drives focus and investment across government agencies and Non-Government Organisations. The soon to be released *Youth Justice Strategy* supports the *Community Safety Plan* released on 30 April 2024 and is further supported by new investment over \$500 million in the *Putting Queensland Kids First Plan*.

These plans build on the successful measures that we have seen reduce youth offending in the first part of this year, with new investment and expanded initiatives. These measures bring together different agencies to provide direct, one-on-one support for high-risk young people and their families. This typically includes getting young people back into education, training or employment, helping families to improve parenting skills and home environments, and connecting them to support services to tackle issues such as substance abuse.

There are more young people in detention (309 on an average day in 2023 compared to 236 on an average day in 2019) who are now detained for longer (55 days in 2023 compared to 44 days in 2019). Staff shortages of around 50 vacancies in May 2023 have been rectified, with detention services now having 120 staff over allocated strength which provides a strong base for better rehabilitation and accountability. In addition, the Wacol Youth Remand Facility will soon be finalised, with new youth detention centres funded, so that young people are not detained any longer than necessary in police watchhouses.



We also undertake regular monitoring and review of existing youth justice programs and services to help us better understand not only 'what works', but what works for specific cohorts of young people, where and why. Where the evidence indicates programs or services are not effective, we will change or stop them and the recommendations provided support this ongoing work.

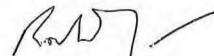
Thank you for acknowledging the complexity of delivering highly specialised tertiary responses and the operational decisions across multiple individually registered or qualified professionals that are often needed to deal with one individual young person (e.g. paediatric psychiatrists; specialist psychologists; speech pathologists; specialist education and training; disability support; specialist medical care; specialised and qualified law enforcement and legal officers; child protection specialists; cultural support along with support for parents and families; youth detention workers; youth justice officers and non-government agencies that provide after hours services).

Each of these professionals must operate within the rule of law, according to the requirements of their registered profession given the often intrusive intervention required or complex, interrelated causes of behaviour (e.g. mental and physical health, substance abuse, disability, offending behaviour, lack of a parent or kin, housing, education or training difficulties, impacts of sexual or physical violence, poverty, law enforcement and administration of justice). Coordination of these scarce, highly specialised resources across regional areas continues to be a focus.

If you require additional information or would like to discuss this matter further, including the specific responses to recommendations attached, I invite you to contact me [REDACTED]

I acknowledge you and your staff's efforts to provide real-time advice during the audit so that any improvements to implementation and administration could be acted on immediately.

Yours sincerely



**Robert Gee APM**  
**Director-General**

26.6.24



# Responses to recommendations

## Department of Youth Justice

### Reducing serious youth crime

Response to recommendations provided by Robert Gee, Director-General, Department of Youth Justice on 21 June 2024.

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders:</p> <p>2. strengthen its leadership and governance of the youth justice system (the system). This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring relevant leadership committees, including the Youth Crime Taskforce, are attended by appropriate entity delegates with appropriate decision-making authority.</li> <li>identifying and prioritising key challenges across the system and implementing appropriate strategies and actions.</li> <li>improving cross-entity collaboration to ensure entities share relevant information in a timely manner, including making the Multi-Agency Collaborative Panel (MACP) data dashboard available to relevant entities.</li> </ul>	Agree	Implemented. Q4, 2023-24	<p>The Department of Youth Justice (DYJ) notes that (1) no new strategy, program or evidence-based approach to addressing the causes of youth crime have been recommended by this audit; and (2) the audit has found that implementation and administrative issues can be improved.</p> <p>Emphasis on direct system oversight by Directors-General has increased with three meetings of a new governance arrangement for oversight of cross agency responses to youth offending, attended by Directors-General &amp; Commissioners [DYJ (Chair), Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC), Queensland Police Service (QPS), Department of Education (DoE), Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), Department of Child Safety Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS), Department of Justice &amp; Attorney General (DJAG), Queensland Health (QH), Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities &amp; the Arts (DTATSIPCA), Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning &amp; Public Works (DHLGPPW)] and Deputy Directors-General.</p> <p>Directors-General now meet with the cross agency Senior Officers Reference Group (SORG) (Deputy Director-General level) that was overseeing the Youth Crime Taskforce, including updated terms of reference.</p> <p>In April 2024, the Government permanently established the Youth Crime Taskforce, enhancing the capability to respond to youth offending.</p> <p>In addition to a completed review of the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Crime Taskforce, and the SORG, key thematic issues and specific operational issues arising from MACPs (case management) have been addressed to improve statewide service coordination.</p> <p>A MACP dashboard is regularly shared with panel members including information on serious repeat offenders. Directors-General and other senior officers are now meeting with or attending MACPs and Early Action Groups to support delegates with decision-making authority.</p> <p>Ministers for the following portfolios: Community Safety, YJ, Health, JAG, Education, TATSIPCA, and HLGPPW, Corrective Services, CSDDS, are represented on the Community Safety Cabinet Committee, which provides a cohesive whole of government response to adult and youth crime, and ensures there is an accountable governance system that can operate effectively across the State including the regions, and across multiple government agencies.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders:</p> <p>3. review, update, and implement its new Youth Justice Strategy. The Strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include indicators of success to measure performance across the system.</li> <li>• include clear system-wide actions aimed at reducing the over-representation of First Nations young offenders in the system.</li> <li>• clearly define roles and responsibilities across the system to inform entity-level strategies and plans.</li> </ul>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Implemented. Q4, 2023-24</p>	<p>A new <i>Youth Justice Strategy</i> will be released imminently. Consultation with targeted stakeholders, including the Youth Justice Strategy Reference Group, Independent Ministerial Advisory Council, and government and non-government agencies is currently being finalised now that this audit and the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee have reported.</p> <p>DYJ notes that (1) no new strategy, program or evidence-based approach to addressing the causes of youth crime have been recommended by this audit; and (2) the audit has found that implementation and administrative issues can be improved.</p> <p>The <i>Youth Justice Strategy</i> includes indicators of success to measure performance across the system. The Strategy highlights the responsibilities of other government strategies and plans, for example, through links with the <i>Education Reform Package</i>, <i>Putting Queensland Kids First</i>, <i>Homes for Queenslanders</i> and <i>Community Safety Plan</i>, and reflects responsible entities for current and future programs.</p> <p>The Strategy includes a focus on reducing the over-representation of First Nations young offenders in the system, through co-design with First Nations organisations and a commitment to place and evidenced-based community-led and First Nations led justice solutions. DYJ will also continue engaging with community-controlled organisations and working with First Nations young people to support re-engagement with education and divert them away from crime.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:</p> <p>6. formalise and execute a plan for measuring the effectiveness of programs using its outcomes framework.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Continuing to Implement. Q1, 2024-25 when "Unify" goes live</p>	<p>Program evaluations routinely include measures of effectiveness using outcome data that aligns with the <i>Youth Justice Outcomes Framework</i>.</p> <p>The <i>Youth Justice Outcomes Framework</i> was developed to measure the outcomes achieved from programs and services. The framework identifies the primary needs of a young offender that must be addressed to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. These include their health and wellbeing, accommodation, and how connected they are to family, culture, and community. The Framework clearly identifies the outcomes needed in the short, medium, and long term to reduce reoffending and increase public safety.</p> <p>Program logics for new initiatives are developed to align with outcome measures in the Framework. The consistent collection of outcome measures will be achieved through the implementation of a new IT system ('Unify') in 2024, that will improve and standardise processes and systems for collecting, recording, and disseminating departmental data.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:</p> <p>7. strengthen its investment and procurement practices to ensure that all investment decisions are based on sound market analysis, with the rationale for decisions clearly documented in line with evidence. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regularly mapping its investment against youth crime trends across Queensland.</li> <li>• ensuring its contracts contain sufficient performance measures and targets that assess outputs and outcomes.</li> <li>• developing a framework to build capability in the sector.</li> </ul>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Continuing to Implement. Q4, 2023-24 Q2, 2025-26 for investment mapping.</p>	<p>DYJ has strengthened its investment and procurement practices in line with the <i>Queensland Government Social Services Category Strategy 2023-2025</i>. A key priority of the Strategy is increased collaboration with the sector and improved access to data to support investment decisions, ensuring services are community-led and client-focused to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable Queenslanders.</p> <p>DYJ will work collaboratively with the Social Services Industry Reference Group to implement the Government's recently developed <i>Best Practice Industry Conditions for Social Service Procurement</i> and develop guidelines and policies that strengthen social procurement capability. This includes moving to five-year contracts and early provision of advice that a contract will cease where requirements are not being met.</p> <p>A reporting dashboard is regularly provided for departmental governance to review investment against identified priorities.</p> <p>All outsourced service delivery contracts include key performance indicators and output and outcome measures, which providers are required to routinely record in the Outsourced Service Delivery Client Management System (Service Record System). Specific targets are included where relevant, appropriate and necessary. Supplier performance is monitored and reviewed quarterly to ensure alignment with contractual obligations.</p> <p>Market and demand analysis is undertaken for all investment decision-making and a clear rationale with supporting evidence is now included in relevant briefing material.</p> <p>A Queensland Youth Justice Peak Body has been established to drive evidence-based approaches to improve community safety. A key deliverable for the Peak is the development of strategies to deliver a capable and effective Youth Justice workforce. This includes building the capability of service providers in rural and remote locations and those providing services to First Nations and culturally diverse communities. DYJ is developing an Employee Value Proposition to support development of the Workforce Strategy, which will include a range of professional development and workplace engagement initiatives. As part of the <i>Youth Justice Evaluation and Monitoring Program of Work</i>, investment mapping will be undertaken to map place-based youth justice investment across the State by location, program, and service mix. This work will be drawn on in conjunction with consideration of evaluation findings to inform future cost benefit analyses of initiatives in scope.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and governance committees:</p> <p>8. agree on a uniform, evidence-based approach to identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending and ensure this information is shared with relevant stakeholders across the system.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Implemented. Q4, 2023-2024</p>	<p>The QPS and DYJ agree that legislative amendments in 2023 enables courts to declare a child a serious repeat offender if the eligibility criteria is met. It is also agreed that a separate measure, the Serious Repeat Offender Index (SROI) is a tool that can provide an overview of a young person's offending and custodial history.</p> <p>It is also well understood across agencies that DYJ systematically applies an evidence-based risk assessment tool, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI), to identify a young person's highest priority needs and risk of reoffending.</p> <p>The YLS/CMI is the most widely implemented and investigated risk assessment tool worldwide and proven to be one of the best tools available to assess young people's reoffending risk.</p> <p>DPC are leading a process with relevant criminal justice and human service agencies to revitalise the Youth Justice system governance including roles and responsibilities of key decision-making groups, and mechanisms to support statewide collaborative service coordination for young people who are identified as high-risk offenders.</p> <p>As a key contributor of the MACPs, DYJ works collaboratively to improve coordination of service delivery, identify themes and trends to improve service responses, problem solve, address local barriers and identify best use of existing services and improve information sharing across key agencies.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:</p> <p>10. improve and standardise its processes and systems for collecting and recording data about its core rehabilitation programs and support services. This should include providing appropriate training and guidance to staff to ensure data is collected as required.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Implementing, Q1, 2024-25</p>	<p>DYJ is implementing a new IT system ('Unify') and data governance framework that will improve and standardise its processes and systems for collecting, recording, and disseminating departmental data (including data about its core rehabilitation programs and support services).</p> <p>Unify goes live in 2024, introducing increased structured data aligned with the <i>Youth Justice Outcomes Framework</i> which will improve ability to analyse outcomes and compare effectiveness of service provision. The program benefits include better monitoring and reporting with improved access to information for service delivery (for individual young people) and reporting (across programs).</p> <p>DYJ has developed the <i>Youth Justice Data Governance Framework and Operating Model</i> to outline the Department's approach to the governance of youth justice data and embed best-practice data governance at DYJ. The program includes appropriate training and guidance to staff to provide clarity about their roles and responsibilities with regards to Youth Justice data.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:</p> <p>11. continue to implement plans to address staff shortages at detention centres, including considering alternative methods to rehabilitate young offenders while centres are in lockdown.</p>	Agree	Implemented. Q4, 2023-24	<p>In May 2023 when this audit was commenced, DYJ detention services had about 50 FTE vacancies. In May 2024, DYJ is currently 120 FTE over strength in detention services.</p> <p>DYJ notes the ongoing competitiveness of the labour market, particularly in human services in regional areas and continues a range of activities to address staffing across detention centres. Recruitment initiatives include ongoing investment in staff training, utilising analytics to refine processes, strengthening applicant supports, improving staff compensation, building a diverse workforce, redeploying staff as required and partnering with a range of education and employment service providers to build an ongoing applicant pool for scheduled recruitment cycles.</p> <p>The Department has developed an Employee Value Proposition to support the development of the Workforce Strategy, which will include a range of recruitment, retention, professional development and workplace engagement initiatives.</p> <p>Separations due to staff shortages have reduced significantly over the last year (e.g., by about 50% at CYDC). Separations are subject to strict approvals and supervision protocols in line with legislative requirements. At all times whilst separated, young people have access to operational staff and a range of support staff including nurses, cultural staff, caseworkers, psychologists and speech-language pathologists.</p> <p>Additionally, Queensland Youth Detention Centres have one of the most comprehensive and frequent observation protocols in the nation. The separation policy also clearly states the need for young people to be provided time outside of the room for each day separated, unless it is unsafe to facilitate this.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice:</p> <p>12. ensure there is effective and sustained support to young offenders transitioning from detention into the community. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluating the length of time a young offender requires support.</li> <li>• implementing a more structured process for planning a young offender's release.</li> <li>• communicating in a timely way with relevant stakeholders about the young offender's risk, needs, and transition plan.</li> <li>• providing appropriate support to meet the young offender's social and cultural needs.</li> </ul>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Implemented. Q4, 2023-24</p>	<p>DYJ applies a <i>Youth Justice Case Management Framework</i> across the entire youth justice system, including for young offenders transitioning from detention into the community. This approach supports a service delivery model where intervention is planned, integrated, goal-oriented and accountable while ensuring each young person receives culturally appropriate services in an effective and efficient manner that is consistent throughout the youth justice system.</p> <p>Service Response Plans are developed for all young people in detention to support ongoing community-based responses that address criminogenic risk factors. Other tools, such as 72-hour transition plans which are focused on information sharing and practical activities post release, are designed to complement the response plans. An evaluation of transitional planning policies and procedures for those exiting detention is occurring and DYJ will continue to refine processes and practice.</p> <p>DYJ will also be conducting performance reviews of this process.</p>



# Comments received from Director-General, Department of Justice and Attorney-General



Department of Justice and Attorney-General  
Office of the Director-General

In reply please quote: 601874/1, 7046104

17 JUN 2024

Mr Brendan Worrall  
Auditor-General  
Queensland Audit Office  
[QueenslandAuditOffice@gao.qld.gov.au](mailto:QueenslandAuditOffice@gao.qld.gov.au)

1 William Street Brisbane  
GPO Box 149 Brisbane  
Queensland 4001 Australia  
Telephone 13 74 68 (13 QGOV)  
[www.justice.qld.gov.au](http://www.justice.qld.gov.au)

ABN 13 846 673 994

Dear Mr Worrall

Thank you for your email dated 31 May 2024, seeking a formal response to the Queensland Audit Office's (QAO) proposed report *Reducing serious youth crime* (the Report).

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General (the Department) welcomes the Report, aimed at addressing serious youth crime through a comprehensive systems approach, building stronger collaboration, leadership and accountability across the system.


The Department notes the 12 recommendations in the Report relating to the management of Queensland's youth justice system, investment in youth justice services, and rehabilitation and community safety.

The Department is committed to working collaboratively with government agencies and stakeholders to improve community safety and reduce crime by serious repeat offenders. Through the *Community Safety Plan for Queensland*, the Queensland Government has committed \$39.14 million for strengthening and sustaining court reforms, including Fast Track Sentencing. Fast Track Sentencing is a whole-of-government initiative, led by the Department, to ensure timely finalisation of matters before the Childrens Court (Magistrates Court). This initiative drives collaboration across key youth justice stakeholders involved in court proceedings. The Department will consider the findings of the Report and take into consideration enhancements recommended relevant to this initiative.

I thank the QAO for its positive engagement throughout the performance auditing process.

Should you require further information, please contact [REDACTED]

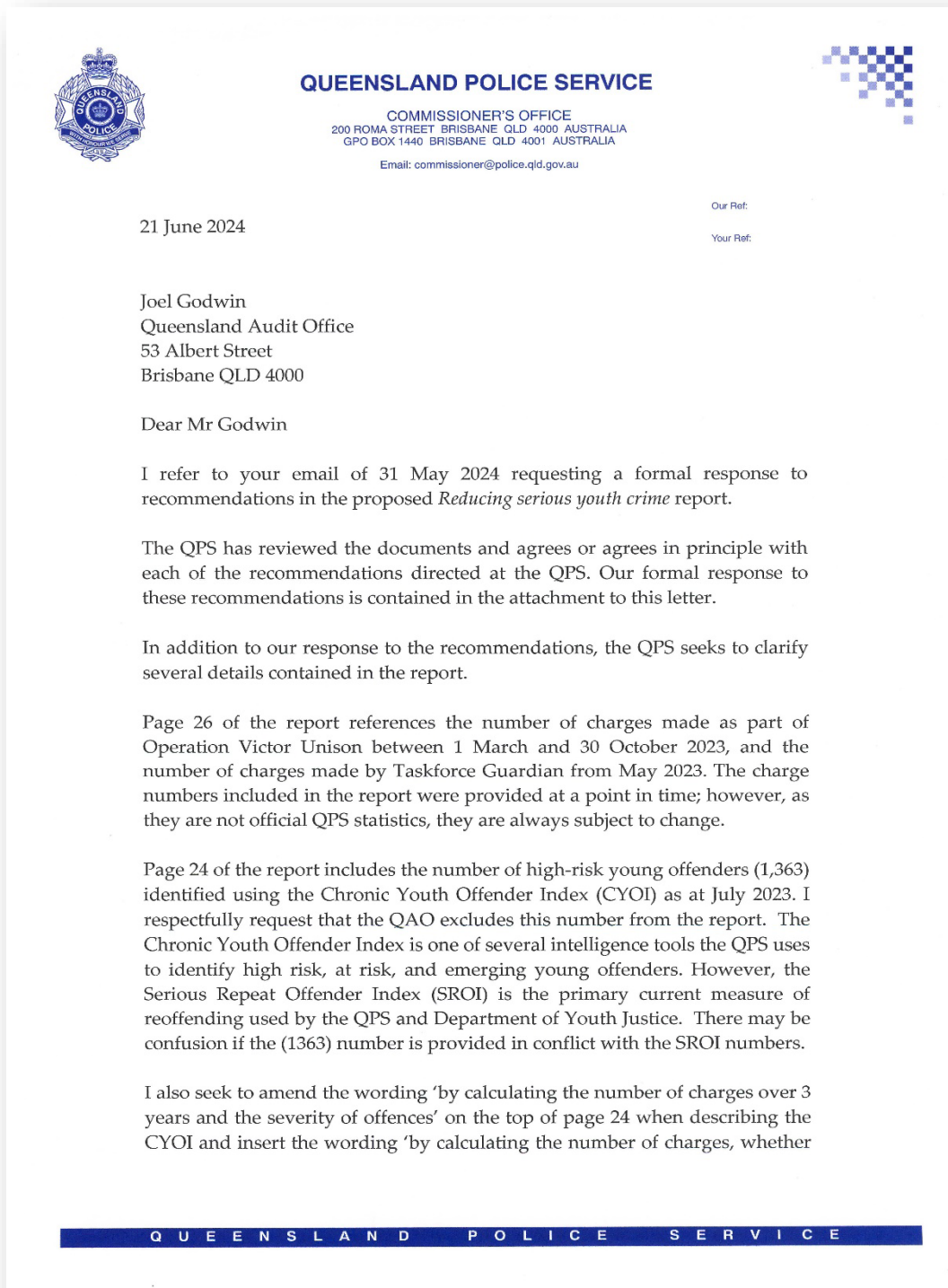
Yours sincerely



Jasmina Joldić PSM  
Director-General



## Comments received from Commissioner, Queensland Police Service



**Auditor-General's response:** We have updated the description of the Chronic Youth Offender Index (CYOI) based on this feedback.

The number of high-risk young offenders has been retained as it highlights the variance in methods used by different entities. Recommendation 8 of this report requires entities to agree on a uniform, evidence-based approach to identifying the cohort of high-risk offenders.



a weapon was used in the offending, the seriousness of the offending and whether the offender was on bail at the time of the offending’.

Page 27 of the report refers to the Youth Co-Responder Teams (YCRT) which pairs QPS officers with Youth Justice staff 24/7 in 13 of our 15 police districts. The rotation of staff through these teams has been seen as a significant benefit to the individual officers and the organisation, and this aspect of the team’s make-up has been key to their ongoing success. Whilst in some part this model inhibits the ability of the young person to form a deeper and meaningful relationship with the police officer, there is the broader application of this model where more police officers become more exposed to troubled youth in their particular District and therefore have greater visibility of their needs and overall support required. Notwithstanding this, Youth Justice staff maintain consistency within the YCRT across all 13 police districts.

A recent evaluation of the Co-Responder Teams by the ‘Nous Group’ found that as of 31 March 2024 YCRT have had nearly 90,000 engagements with at risk young-people in total. YCRT currently engages with approximately 6,000 distinct young people per month. Almost half of YCRT engagements are with 15 to 17-year-olds (49 per cent), followed in frequency by 12 to 14-year-olds (38 per cent) and 9 to 11-year-olds (7 per cent). Of the unique young people engaged by YCRT, approximately 39 per cent were female and 46 per cent were First Nations.

As a direct result of these interactions the ‘Nous Group’ made the following findings;

- 12 per cent of young people did not reoffend in the six months following engagement with YCRT among a sample where 79 per cent had one or more offences six months before their engagement;
- A general reduction of reoffending was observed across the sample of youth who had previously offended, with an overall reduction of six offences on the average when comparing offending six months pre and post engagement with YCRT;
- The greatest reduction in reoffending was with serious repeat offenders, where the average amount of offending reduced by 73 per cent among those who had ten (or more) offences, with youth responsible for an average of 25 offences in the six months before engaging YCRT reducing to an average of 7 offences in the period after YCRT engagement;

- YCRT was contributing to reductions in specific types of offending including significantly reduced rates of breaking and entering, illegal use of a motor vehicle, and theft.

In relation to the observations about bail monitoring on page 27 of the report the current bail monitoring 'app' used by the QPS currently doesn't have the functionality to prioritise which young people are checked nor if or when they are checked. The Youth Crime Task Force is currently reviewing those procedures and KPMG are currently working with the Task Force to impose the governance required to address this shortfall.

Also, on page 27 the report makes reference to the QPS having inadequate systems to track the number of times the QPS makes an objection to bail of a young person appearing in court. The current QPS Q-Prime system has challenges in retrieving data for bail objections and when data is retrieved it can often be inaccurate. As bail can be opposed either at the watchhouse, Childrens Court or District Court the system has difficulty identifying when this occurs. QPS works with partner Government agencies to obtain accurate information when required. Future updates to Q-Prime functionality will be required to address this issue.

I also would like to acknowledge that the report uses or references ABS data rather than data provided by the Queensland Government Statisticians office.

Should you require any further assistance or wish to discuss the QPS feedback, please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

  
STEVE GOLLSCHESKI APM  
COMMISSIONER



## Responses to recommendations

### Queensland Police Service

#### *Reducing serious youth crime*

Response to recommendations provided by Stephan Gollschewski, Commissioner, Queensland Police Service on 21 June 2024.

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders:</p> <p>2. strengthen its leadership and governance of the youth justice system (the system). This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring relevant leadership committees, including the youth justice taskforce, are attended by appropriate entity delegates with appropriate decision-making authority</li> <li>identifying and prioritising key challenges across the system and implementing appropriate strategies and actions</li> <li>improving cross-entity collaboration to ensure entities share relevant information in a timely manner, including making the multi-agency collaborative panel data dashboard available to relevant entities.</li> </ul>	Agree		<p>The QPS recognises the scope of this audit focused on (1) what the work entities are doing to address crime by high risk and serious repeat offenders; and (2) found that there was a lack of cohesion across the system in part largely due to an ineffective authorising environment across the range of governance and inter-departmental committees and working groups.</p> <p>The QPS has always ensured that committees for which we chair are attended by substantive members in line with the agreed Terms of Reference. The Assistant Commissioner, Youth Crime Taskforce, and the Director General Youth Justice, currently chair the Directors General Senior Officers Reference Group and are committed to leading a whole of Government approach to address the drivers and thematic issues affecting youth crime in Queensland. Information sharing across all Government Departments is a key cornerstone of the operations of this Reference Group which ensures informed decisions can be made with respect to preventative interventions with young people.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
			<p>The QPS is also engaged in ongoing collaboration with the Justice Reform Office (JRO) positioned within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and other Queensland Government stakeholders regarding initiatives to reduce demand on Queensland’s prisons and across the criminal justice system. The Justice Reform Committee oversees the JRO and provides oversight of the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce Reforms and recommendations stemming from the Independent Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence (QPS COI). The QPS is represented at this forum.</p> <p>A continued focus of the JRO is to strengthen the foundational elements of the criminal justice system including better understanding, monitoring and addressing the impacts of policy and legislative changes on outcomes for First Nations peoples and enhancing the governance and decision-making architecture.</p>



Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Queensland Police Service:</p> <p>4. Finalise its youth justice strategy, ensuring it includes measurable objectives and aligns to the state strategy.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Q2 2024/2025</p>	<p>Strategy finalisation is currently dependent on finalisation of the youth justice strategy.</p> <p>The QPS will consider the issues raised by the QAO as it finalises the QPS Youth Crime Strategy and subsequent measures, noting this work relies upon the release of the state's overall youth justice strategy to ensure alignment of measures to break the cycle of offending.</p> <p>The QPS equally recognises the relevance of the strategies aligning to the new <i>Putting Queensland kids first: Giving our kids the opportunity of a lifetime plan</i> to ensure initiatives target the risk factors associated with offending during a young person's formative years. The Queensland Community Safety Plan is also relevant providing investment to support victims and make the community feel safe.</p> <p>The Queensland Government has invested \$501.9 million to implement the <i>Putting Queensland kids first: Giving our kids the opportunity of a lifetime plan</i> and committed an extra 1.28 billion to deliver the Community Safety Plan for Queensland.</p>

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Additional comments
<p>We recommend that the Department of Youth Justice and the Queensland Police Service, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and governance committees:</p> <p>8. agree on a uniform, evidence-based approach to identifying those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending and ensure this information is shared with relevant stakeholders across the system.</p>	<p>Agree in principle</p>		<p>The QPS recognises the benefits of having a uniform, evidence-based tool to identify those young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending.</p> <p>The QPS agrees with this recommendation in-principle, noting it currently collects and analyses a range of data from various sources and products.</p> <p>The QPS also recognises the Serious Repeat Offenders Index as being the current measure of Serious Repeat offenders within Queensland with both the QPS and Youth Justice using this index to monitor and assess young offenders throughout Queensland. Such assessment is undertaken by Youth Justice using their YLS/CMI tool.</p> <p>The QPS however is committed to undertaking further work to explore new opportunities to trial structured and validated assessment tools to identify young offenders with the highest risk of reoffending, combined with the risk of harm they present to the community by measuring static factors, criminogenic needs, treatment needs and overall offending risk profile. The QPS also recognises potential value in adopting the Risk-Needs-Responsivity Framework used in other Australian jurisdictions amongst the youth cohort and intends to undertake further assessment of that framework.</p>



We recommend that the Queensland Police Service:

9. monitor bail checks for serious repeat offenders to ensure timely and appropriate action.

Agree

Q1 2024/25

The QPS conducts bail checks on young people, particularly those subject to specific conditions. A framework is in development to help prioritise bail response frequency and action focused on those young persons who pose the highest risk to the community.

The QPS will consider Recommendation 47 of the Youth Justice Select Reform Committee Inquiry into ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support or victims of crime which recommended existing intensive bail initiatives be evaluated to ensure children and young people with complex needs receive the help they need to comply with their bail conditions. The QPS will consider this recommendation as it implements the Queensland Government commitment to intervene when young people offend.

The Youth Co-Responder initiative is a joint program between the QPS and DYJ, where specialist staff connect with young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system or are at risk of doing so. They assist in referring young people to relevant support services and ensure they comply with bail conditions.

The Youth Co-Responder initiative originally commenced at five locations before expanding around the state. The Queensland Government has recently committed to \$13.55 million to extend the current teams and add two more. This investment will expand Youth Co-Responders to the Sunshine Coast and the South West locations.

The QPS and DYJ is currently trialling electronic monitoring for serious repeat offenders with an evaluation to inform future state.



## B. Audit scope and methods

---

### Performance engagement

---

This audit has been performed in accordance with the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*, incorporating, where relevant, the standards on assurance engagements issued by the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board. This includes the Standard on Assurance Engagements ASAE 3500 *Performance Engagements*. This standard establishes mandatory requirements and provides explanatory guidance for undertaking and reporting on performance engagements.

### Audit objective and scope

---

The objective of this audit is to assess whether youth justice strategies and programs are effective in reducing crime by serious repeat offenders and improving community safety. We addressed this through the following criteria.

#### Criteria

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 1.1 | Entities design effective strategies and programs to reduce crime by serious repeat offenders                              |
| 1.2 | Entities implement effective strategies and programs to reduce crime by serious repeat offenders                           |
| 1.3 | Entities monitor and report on the outcomes of their strategies and programs and use learnings to improve community safety |
- 

### The entities we audited

- Department of Youth Justice (the department) – responsible for leading the youth justice system and supporting the needs of young offenders to keep the community safe (see [Appendix D](#) for details on machinery of government changes)
- Department of Justice and Attorney-General – responsible for administering the courts who sentence young offenders
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet – responsible for system-wide evaluation
- Queensland Police Service – responsible for preventing youth crime and keeping the community safe.

### Scope exclusions

We included young offenders whom the department identified as ‘serious repeat offenders’ and the department’s management of select programs and initiatives these offenders could be involved in. This did not include programs and services designed to intervene early and keep children out of the court and custody.

We did not audit or assess the effectiveness of individual programs and services that entities deliver.



## Method

---

### Field interviews and site visits

We conducted interviews with key people, staff, and stakeholders from across the youth justice system, including regional areas of Queensland. This included but was not limited to:

- Department of Youth Justice
- Queensland Police Service
- Department of Justice and Attorney-General
- funded non-government organisations
- non-funded non-government organisations.

The audit team conducted site visits to:

- Cleveland Youth Detention Centre
- Brisbane Youth Detention Centre
- West Moreton Youth Detention Centre
- Mount Isa Watch House
- Brisbane Watch House
- Caboolture Watch House
- North Townsville and South Townsville youth justice service centres
- Caboolture youth justice service centre
- Toowoomba youth justice service centre
- Mount Isa youth justice service centre
- Logan youth justice service centre
- Gold Coast youth justice service centre.

### Document review

We obtained and reviewed relevant documents from the entities involved in the audit. This included legislation, strategic plans, operational procedures, guidelines, correspondence, performance reports, reviews, evaluations, transition plans, case notes, and meeting minutes. We also considered research from other jurisdictions and academia.

### Data analysis

We analysed the following data from the Department of Youth Justice covering the period from 2018–19 to 2022–23:

- alleged offences for all serious repeat offenders
- serious repeat offender detention
- overdue risk assessments
- serious repeat offender ratings over time
- funding over time
- staffing numbers



- reoffending rates
- youth detention incidents and lockdowns.

Due to limitations with the Department of Youth Justice’s procurement data, we were unable to obtain data that showed the number of open offer and limited offer procurements it made for the period from 2018–19 to 2022–23. As such, we analysed the department’s open offer and limited offer procurements between July 2022 to September 2023.

## Subject matter experts

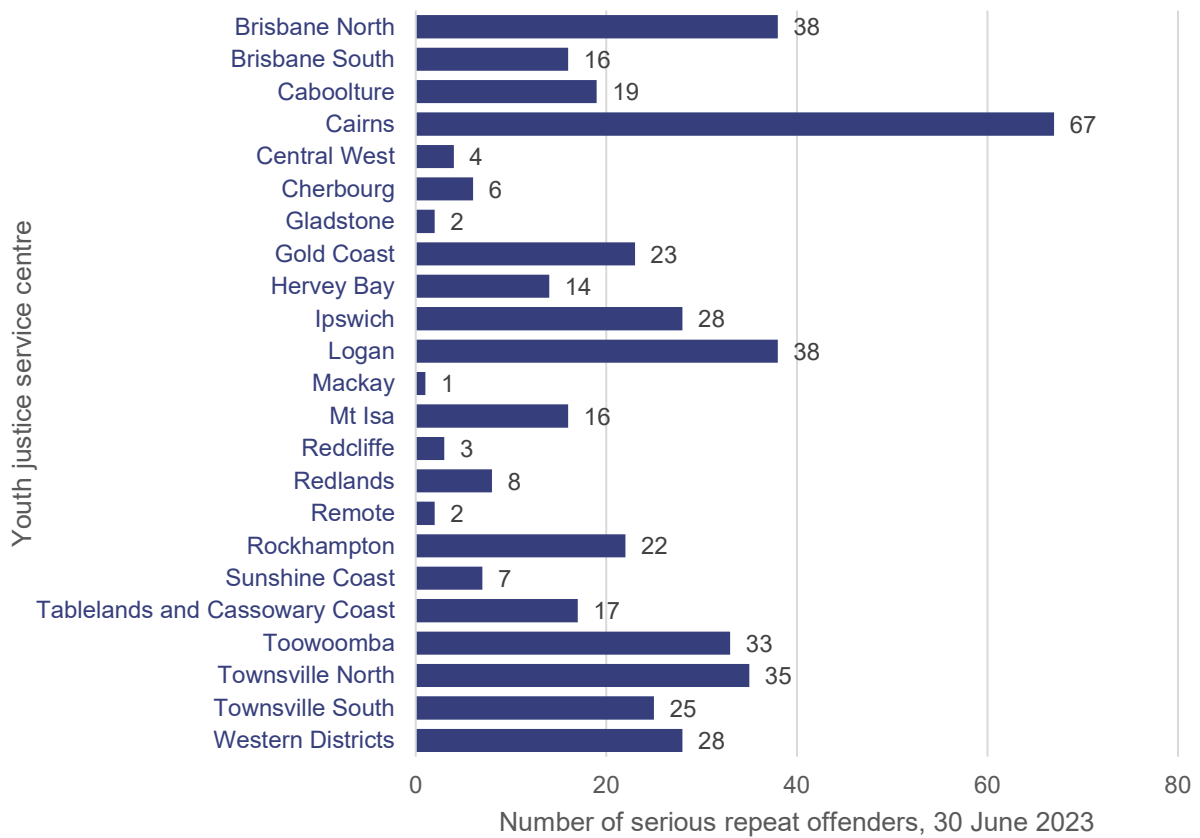
We engaged subject matter experts. This included a criminologist specialising in youth crime and a criminologist focusing in First Nations research. We also met with a range of academics with knowledge in youth crime and program delivery.



# C. Serious repeat offenders by service centre

The graph below shows the number of serious repeat offenders in each youth justice service centre as at 30 June 2023.

**Figure C1**  
The number of serious repeat offenders by service centre as at 30 June 2023



Source: Queensland Audit Office using data provided by the Department of Youth Justice.



# D. Machinery of government changes

Machinery of government (MoG) changes are the restructure of roles and responsibilities across government departments. Youth justice functions have moved 5 times in 7 years. Prior to December 2017, the roles and responsibilities for youth justice were with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

The table below outlines the MoG changes which impact the department responsible for youth justice from December 2017 to December 2023.

**Figure D1**  
**Machinery of government changes impacting youth justice**

Date of MoG change	Department responsible for youth justice
December 2017	Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women
September 2019	Department of Youth Justice
November 2020	Department of Children, Youth Justice, and Multicultural Affairs
May 2023	Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training
December 2023	Department of Youth Justice

Source: Queensland Audit Office using information reported by the Queensland Government.







[qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/reports-parliament](https://qao.qld.gov.au/reports-resources/reports-parliament)

[qao.qld.gov.au/contact-us](https://qao.qld.gov.au/contact-us)

---

T: (07) 3149 6000  
E: [qao@qao.qld.gov.au](mailto:qao@qao.qld.gov.au)  
W: [www.qao.qld.gov.au](http://www.qao.qld.gov.au)  
53 Albert Street, Brisbane Qld 4000  
PO Box 15396, City East Qld 4002