

DORSET POLICE & CRIME PANEL – 12 NOVEMBER 2019

YOUTH OFFENDING

REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper updates members on work to tackle youth offending and to reduce youth reoffending locally, including the role of the Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service, Safe Schools and Communities Team and my involvement with these and other services.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Youth offenders are young people who have been convicted or cautioned for a criminal offence. In England & Wales, the age of criminal responsibility is set at 10 years old. Youth offenders, therefore, are aged between 10 and 17 (up to their eighteenth birthday). Youth offenders are often treated differently from adult offenders in the criminal justice system in recognition of their age, vulnerability and the different approach needed to reduce their risk of offending further or more seriously, and to provide appropriate levels of interventions without negatively impacting on their future life opportunities.
- 1.2 The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is a non-departmental public body responsible for overseeing the youth justice system in England & Wales. Their primary function is to monitor the operation of the youth justice system and provision of youth justice services. They also advise the Secretary of State for Justice and those working in youth justice services about how well the system is operating and how improvements can be made, including the identification and sharing of best practice. The YJB vision is that 'Every child should live a safe and crime-free life and make a positive contribution to society'.
- 1.3 A Youth Offending Team (YOT) is a multi-agency team coordinated by a local authority and overseen by the YJB. YOTs were established following the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act with the intention of reducing the risk of young people offending and reoffending, and to provide counsel and rehabilitation to those who do offend. To achieve this, YOTs engage in a wide variety of work with young offenders under the age of 18.

2. DORSET COMBINED YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE (YOS)

- 2.1 The Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service (YOS) is our local YOT, providing pan-Dorset coverage. It is a statutory partnership between BCP Council, Dorset Council, Dorset Police, the National Probation Service and the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 2.2 The YOS is a multi-disciplinary team that includes youth justice officers, restorative justice specialists, parenting workers, education and employment workers, police officers, probation officers, nurses, speech and language therapists and a psychologist. The team works directly with young people who have committed criminal offences to help them make positive changes and to reduce the risks to them and to other people. It also works directly with parents and carers to help them support their children to make changes.

- 2.3 The YOS makes contact with all victims of crimes committed by the young people they work with. Those victims are offered the chance to take part in restorative justice processes to help to repair the harm they have experienced.
- 2.4 The organisations in the YOS partnership also work together to improve the quality of the local youth justice system, and to ensure that young people who work with the service can access the specialist support they need for their care, health and education. The combination of work to improve local youth justice and children’s services systems, and direct work with young people, parents and victims, enables the YOS to meet the Youth Justice Board’s ‘System Aims’:
- Reduce the number of children in the youth justice system
 - Reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system
 - Improve the safety and well-being of children in the youth justice system
 - Improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system.

Funding

- 2.5 Like much of the public sector, the YOS has seen significant reductions in funding in recent years. The main reduction has been in the Youth Justice grant which is administered by the YJB. This table shows the changes over the last few years:

Financial Year	Total grants received	Percentage reduction/increase (year on year)	Percentage reduction/increase (cumulative)
2014/2015	£809,722	-	-
2015/2016	£672,411	-17.0%	-17.0%
2016/2017	£591,937	-12.0%	-26.9%
2017/2018	£594,304	0.4%	-26.6%
2018/2019	£594,304	0.0%	-26.6%
2019/2020	£588,708	-0.9%	-27.3%

- 2.6 Funding for 2020/2021 currently remains unknown but a further reduction somewhere between 5% and 25% is anticipated.
- 2.7 Local partner contributions have also been frozen since 2014/15, apart from a one-off 2% increase in local authority contributions in 19/20 to cover the pay award for staff. So effectively local contributions have been cut in real terms due to annual cost increases, and no further funding is being received from the local authorities to cover any pay award in 2020/21.

Dorset Youth Justice Plan 2019/20

- 2.8 As required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the YOS publish an annual Youth Justice Plan setting out the key priorities and targets for the service for the next 12 months. The headline strategic priorities for 2019/20 are:
- Develop an additional diversion scheme to reduce the number of young people entering the justice system;
 - Become a ‘Trauma-Informed’ Service to improve outcomes for children, young people and families; and
 - Take a leading role in the local multi-agency response to child exploitation and knife crime.

3. PERFORMANCE, CONTEXT AND ISSUES

3.1 The Youth Justice Plan 2019/20 also sets out the three national performance indicators for youth offending, which are:

- The number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time ('First Time Entrants');
- The rate of proven re-offending by young people in the youth justice system; and
- The use of custodial sentences for young people.

3.2 The YOS target for 2019/20 is to outperform regional and national averages for these three measures.

3.3 In terms of current performance, it is encouraging that the YOS is performing well in terms of reoffending, outperforming regional and national averages at the time that the Youth Justice Plan was developed. The YOS also continues to see very low numbers of custodial sentences, exceeding regional and national averages and remaining low for a number of years.

3.4 First time entrants into the youth justice system is a cause for concern however, with an increase having been experienced over the last two years – particularly marked in the former Dorset County Council area which traditionally experienced very low rates. At the same time, national and regional averages have continued to decline and it is therefore worrying that children in Dorset now seem more likely to enter the justice system than children elsewhere.

3.5 More work is needed to fully understand the complex reasons behind this increase. However, it does coincide with a reduction in local authority supported youth services – Dorset County Council took the decision in 2016 to reduce their youth budget from £2.2 million to no more than £1.2 million, for example. National research by the YMCA has identified a 69% reduction in funding for youth services between 2010/11 and 2019/20 – including a 42% reduction in Bournemouth and 21% reduction in Poole.

3.6 School exclusion increases are another potential factor. In August 2018 the Daily Echo reported on 1,811 school exclusions in Bournemouth for 2016/17 – a 29% increase on the previous year (and 71% higher than five years previously). It was a similar picture for the old Dorset County Council area – 2,201 exclusions in 2016/17, up 27% on the previous year (and an 86% rise over five years). This trend appears to be continuing.

3.7 Following the presentation of the Youth Justice Plan to the BCP Council Cabinet in July, Councillor Sandra Moore, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, said:

“Whilst it is good news that the Council and its partners are performing well in two of three important areas of the youth justice system, it is clear that more needs to be done to prevent our young people entering the system for the first time and I’m confident that with refocused efforts we can further support young people and improve performance in this area. We remain fully committed to helping local young people to make positive changes, to keep them safe, to keep other people in the community safe, and to repair the harm caused to victims.”

YOS Service Manager David Webb went on to say:

“Young people who enter the youth justice system for the first time will usually receive a youth caution, the lowest level of justice. However, we want to do all we can to reduce the numbers even reaching this point by working closely with the police to look at ways to best deal with offending young people. Quite often a young person will not go on to reoffend and their behaviour can be as the result of things happening in a child’s life and so it’s important

we look at approaches that avoid unnecessary or premature criminalisation of children.”

“We currently use restorative justice, putting in place additional support for a young person, support to schools to manage behaviour and taking a multi-agency approach to offending by children in care which has seen a reduction in police call outs. More work is needed, and we are looking at best practice from other areas of the country to assess what other approaches would work here.”

3.8 At an earlier meeting of the BCP Council Children’s Scrutiny Committee in June, Mr Webb had stated:

“The first time entrants issue relates to work that is or isn’t being done before they reach our system. We need to make sure we have diversion measures in place for low level offences so that it doesn’t result in formal court or police action.”

4. PREVENTION

4.1 With this recognised retreat in the provision of universal, protective youth services it is perhaps understandable that the numbers of first time entrants into the youth justice system have increased. Equally, it is right that prevention and diversion activity must be the key focus for partners.

4.2 As a key partner, Dorset Police has recognised its role and has now completed the first phase of a review and restructure of the Dorset Police Prevention Department (part of the wider Territorial Policing Command). This involved the prevention team now working as a discrete team in Dorset with separate line management arrangements (previously these were alliance roles).

4.3 The second phase is to restructure the team with the principles of a ‘whole place’ approach to prevention and a clear vulnerability and demand focus, in mind. The team’s work will continue to focus on:

- Citizens in Policing (Specials, Volunteers, Cadets and Home Watch schemes);
- Child Centred Policing;
- Integrated Offender Management;
- Community Safety Accreditation Schemes and wider prevention; and
- The prevention of crime, ASB, youth offending and violent extremism.

4.4 More specifically with respect to youth services, or so-called child centred policing, the Safe Schools and Communities Team (SSCT) also sits within the Prevention Department.

Safe Schools and Communities Team (SSCT)

4.5 The SSCT is a partnership between Dorset Police, the OPCC and the YOS. The SSCT plays an important role in preventing offending by young people across Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The team provide education, awareness and advice to students, schools and parents. The work of the team is reported to the YOS Partnership Board as an important element of the YOS Partnership’s work to prevent youth offending. The SSCT’s School Incidents Policy is a key part of local work to reduce the number of youths entering the justice system, helping schools to manage incidents without the need for a criminal outcome.

4.6 The SSCT also lead on the management of youth out of court disposals (youth restorative disposals, youth cautions and youth conditional cautions) and officers are trained in restorative justice (RJ) practices and participate in RJ conferences that deal with bullying,

shoplifting and possession of drugs. They also take part in retail and drugs workshops as part of the rehabilitative conditions of youth conditional cautions.

- 4.7 Supported by PCC funding, the SSCT has long delivered education and interventions to a range of school-age children and young people, including their GRiP (Gaining Respect in People) road shows for Year 7 students that cover diversity, weapons, preventing gang culture and Anti-Social Behaviour. More recently, in line with research into our local knife crime problem profile, the SSCT will be taking a more targeted approach to knife crime education, focusing on areas of high reported levels of knife crime/weapons incidents and social deprivation.

5. POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER ACTION & ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 The PCC is committed to supporting youth justice within the full extent of his role, and currently provides annual core funding of £75,301 towards the YOS, and £78,149 towards the SSCT. In line with his 2016 election pledges, he supported an increase in the strength of the SSCT by one post within the first 100 days of his term.

- 5.2 With regard to his other commitments relating to youth diversion and behaviour changing activity, he also commissions and/or funds a number of other local initiatives, including:

- **Child Exploitation Transformation Lead (CETL)** – funding for 12 months for this post the help develop and coordinate local responses to children at risk of criminal exploitation. It is hoped that this will reduce youth offending along with safeguarding young people at risk;
- **Police Cadets** – working with the Chief Constable, the PCC has established the first Police Cadet scheme for Dorset, which launched this summer with an initial two units and is set to expand and develop further. Crucially, a significant proportion of the intake will include vulnerable young people and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds or communities;
- **Pop Up Youth Clubs** – held in Poole to reduce anti-social behaviour, these are hosted away from crime hotspots and offer differing activities each session;
- **AFC Bournemouth Community Trust** – support for a pilot project in Bournemouth using football, education and mentoring as a diversionary project for young people at risk of offending, and with a view to expanding more widely across the County;
- **Action for Children** – the ‘Side by Side’ Mentoring Programme offering mentoring and diversionary activities for young people aged 10-15 engaged in low-level offending; and
- **AIM Community** – offering a range of interventions for young people aged 8-18 referred by the YOS, including 1 to 1 sessions, group work, art and drama therapy and/or peer mentoring.

- 5.3 Through his Safer Dorset Fund – Community Grant Scheme the PCC has also been able to support local neighbourhood level projects, including:

- **Life Education Wessex** ‘Life Space’ project – working with young people to enable them to resist the temptations of drug and alcohol and becoming vulnerable to drug-related crime;
- **Sturminster Newton Youth Club** – funding for a Community Interactive Day and Skate Jam to help build community cohesion and spirit and showcase young people in a positive light;
- **Alcohol Education Trust** – a grant towards the Pavilion in the Park project in Poundbury, including specific youth education work regarding drug and alcohol abuse;
- **Best Training** ‘Skills Support for Young People’ project – working with 15-24 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) to develop their skills; and

- **Escapeline** – educational and awareness workshops delivered predominantly to Year 5 and 6 pupils (but also to Years 7 and 8) specifically around County Lines and exploitation, with associated workshops for parents on how to keep their children safe.

5.4 More needs to be done however and the PCC, and his office, continue to work with partners to explore further opportunities around prevention and diversion activity, including a proposal currently to work further with the YOS to expand the diversion offer currently available to their cohort, alongside further restorative justice and mediation work.

5.5 The PCC would also welcome the support and influence of Police and Crime Panel Members where possible in highlighting the need for further prevention and diversionary activity across all statutory partners, and identifying opportunities for partners to progress this accordingly.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Members are asked to note the report.

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