

DORSET POLICE & CRIME PANEL – 4 FEBRUARY 2020

YOUTH OFFENDING (SUPPLEMENTARY)

REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Members were briefed on the work underway to reduce youth reoffending locally on 12 November 2019. This included the role of the Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service, the Dorset Police Safe Schools and Communities Team and an overview of relevant initiatives funded by the PCC.

This supplementary paper provides further detail on the involvement of the PCC and his office with these and other relevant services.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The benefits of universal youth services are well established. Whether diversionary, developmental, educational or protective in focus, young people reap significant benefits from these activities both at the time, and later in life. The evidenced based practice around early intervention is also clear, and has been acknowledged by successive governments, and local authorities right across the country.
- 1.2 The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Youth Affairs (APPG) found, in their 2019 report¹, that youth services provide young people with trusted relationships and safe spaces promoting learning and development. They also support schools and colleges, by providing support outside formal education, where the majority of a young person's time is spent.
- 1.3 The report found that whilst local authorities have statutory responsibilities to provide such services, that this has not always been matched by spending commitments, potentially because regulations and guidance are relatively light-touch and there is a lack of clarity on what constitutes a sufficient level.
- 1.4 Similarly, the YMCA found, in their 2020 report², that local authorities had allocated around £429m to youth services in 2018/19, compared to around £1.41bn in 2010/11 – a real terms decline of 70%. The impact of these funding reductions is estimated to be the loss of 4,500 youth work jobs and the closure of 760 youth centres.

2. IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH SERVICES

- 2.1 The PCC remains cautious about the current provision of youth services in Dorset (universal and targeted), and acknowledges the accepted evidence base that has linked this reduction to the challenges of youth offending and serious youth violence (particularly knife crime) that have been the feature of many towns and cities across the country in recent years.
- 2.2 The PCC supports the finding of the APPG that additional investment in youth services is required, and supports the following comments made by leading agencies in this field:

¹ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs: Report from the Inquiry into the Role and Sufficiency of Youth Work (2019)
² YMCA: Out of Service - A Report Examining Local Authority Expenditure on Youth Services in England & Wales (2020)

“We need to set a positive agenda and invest much more in quality services and youth work. This supports young people to develop independence and responsibility, where they deserve to be listened to and have their views heard and respected.”

National Youth Agency, 2019

“Many young people are now missing out on opportunities outside the school setting to engage in positive activities that support their learning and development, opportunities previous generations took for granted”

YMCA, 2019

“We believe properly funded youth services and agencies aid young people in their personal development and their ability to function in society. We believe that youth services should have funding priority over new initiatives to ensure they are able to continue meeting the needs of young people”

British Youth Council, 2019

- 2.3 Whilst local authorities have a clear picture of the requirements relating to, for example, licensing or highways, due to clear legislation, statutory guidance or similar, there is no national youth policy, or long-term youth development strategy. This is acknowledged as a gap, and the National Youth Agency recently undertook a large-scale survey into the provision of youth work, its characteristics and requirements, to help not only build an national case for investment in youth services, but also help inform a future development strategy.

3. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 3.1 As per the previous paper, with a 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.

- 3.2 The PCC is determined that prevention and diversion activity must be the key focus for partners. The preventative activity undertaken by the PCC has previously been outlined in detail, but a few examples are provided below:

- Maintaining the levels of funding to both the Youth Offending Service (currently £75,301) and the Safe Schools and Communities Team (currently £78,149);
- Establishing the first Police Cadet scheme for Dorset, which launched this summer with an initial two units and is set to expand and develop further;
- Funding a Child Exploitation Transformation Lead post for 12 months to help develop and coordinate local responses to children at risk of criminal exploitation;
- Working with AFC Bournemouth Community Trust on a pilot project in Bournemouth using football, education and mentoring to support young people at risk of offending; and
- Commissioning a range of mentoring, counselling, support and skills development sessions for young people engaged in low-level offending.

- 3.3 Youth offending is an issue best addressed in partnership. Therefore, in addition to directly supporting both universal and targeted youth services through commissioning, the PCC and his team continue to actively engage partners to continue to make the case for further investment in youth services. These include through attendance and participation at:

- DC and BCP Community Safety Partnerships;
- Dorset Criminal Justice Board (and Victims and Witness subgroup);
- Fast Track Youth ASB and Crime Task and Finish Group;
- Dorset Combined Youth Offending Service Board;
- Out of Court Disposals Scrutiny Panel; and
- Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership

4. IMPACT AND ENFORCEMENT

- 4.1 As previously highlighted, the outcome is that whilst Dorset has low reoffending rates, and very low numbers of custodial sentences, there has been an increase in the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system.
- 4.2 More work is needed to fully understand the complex reasons behind this increase, as has been described previously. The DCYOS has stated that partners collectively need to make sure that diversion measures are in place for low level offences, to ensure that young people are protected from formal court or police action.
- 4.3 However, in the absence of adequate provision, some challenges in relation to youth anti-social behaviour and low-level offending have emerged. In these circumstances, despite the collective desire of partners to provide a preventative or diversionary solution, an enforcement solution might be necessary.
- 4.5 Whilst the collective reliance on a police-led enforcement response to low-level youth crime and disorder is disappointing, from both an appropriateness and a cost perspective, the PCC is acutely aware that this is a symptom of the wider issue. The implicit understanding that future generations should have access to greater opportunities and quality of life is, according to the Social Mobility Commission report³, no longer a certainty.
- 4.6 As increasing numbers of young people are no longer able to access services that can provide them with skills and resilience to overcome adverse childhood experiences, these issues will persist. Young people themselves state that these kinds of services can help them, for example, the Youth Violence Commission⁴ asked: *“if there was one thing you could change that you think would make young people safer, what would it be?”* The most popular response of the 2,200 young people who responded was *“the provision of more youth centres, sports clubs and other youth activities in their local areas”*.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1 The PCC continues to work closely with partners and make the case for the adequate provision of youth services. More needs to be done, however, and the PCC would 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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³ Social Mobility Commission: Social Mobility Barometer 2019 to 2020 (2020)

⁴ Youth Violence Commission: Interim Report (2018)