

People and Health Overview Committee

13 June 2024

Youth Justice Plan 2024/25

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author:

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) sets out a statutory requirement for local authority youth offending teams to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan which must provide specified information about the local provision of youth justice services. This report summarises the Youth Justice Plan for 2024/25, with a copy of the plan appended. The Youth Justice Plan needs to be approved by the full Council.

Recommendation:

For the Overview Committee to endorse the Youth Justice Plan so that Cabinet can recommend its approval to Full Council.

Reason for Recommendation:

Youth Justice Services are required to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan which should be approved by the Local Authority for that Youth Justice Service. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service works across both Bournemouth,

Christchurch and Poole Council and Dorset Council. Approval is therefore sought from both Dorset Council and from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.

1. **Report**

- 1.1 The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) requires Youth Offending Teams (now more widely known as Youth Justice Services) to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan. The Youth Justice Board provides detailed and prescriptive guidance about what must be included in the Plan. The draft Youth Justice Plan for the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service is attached at Appendix One. A brief summary of the Youth Justice Plan is provided in this report.
- 1.2 The Youth Justice Plan provides information on the resourcing, structure, governance, partnership arrangements and performance of the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service. The Plan also describes the national and local youth justice context for 2024/25 and sets out our priorities for this year.
- 1.3 Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service was rated 'Good' in its most recent inspection report, which was published in January 2023. An action plan was produced, in response to the inspection recommendations. All actions have been completed, with the exception of ongoing partnership work to establish new arrangements and procedures for working with children who experience harm outside the home. The new Extra-Familial Harm working arrangements are well developed and will be completed during 2024.
- 1.4 The Youth Justice Board continues to publish data for three 'key performance indicators' for youth justice. National performance data is published as a combined figure for the two local authorities within the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service partnership.
- 1.5 The first indicator relates to the rate of young people entering the justice system for the first time. Overall local performance in this area, across both local authorities, improved significantly in the past year. The latest national data, relating to the 12 months to December 2023, shows a combined pan-Dorset rate of 161 per 100,000 10 to 17 year-olds entering the justice system for the first time. This represents a 30% reduction on the previous year, when the rate was 229 per 100,000 10 to 17 year-olds

in the previous year. For context, the local rate for the year 2019/20, before the pandemic, was 309 per 100,000 10 to 17 year-olds.

- 1.6 Data on the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) case management system enables us to monitor numbers of first-time entrants in each local authority area. This local data shows a mixed picture for 2023/24, with an increase in the number of Dorset Council first-time entrants offset by a reduction in the number of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole children entering the justice system. A total of 56 Dorset children received a formal justice outcome for the first time in 2023/24, compared to 39 children in 2022/23. Closer analysis indicates that delays in dealing with offences committed in 2022/23 led to some Dorset Council children receiving their justice outcome in 2023/24. The total number of first-time entrants for Dorset Council across these two years is consistent with the numbers in the previous two years. The Youth Justice Plan provides more detail about the children who enter the justice system and about work to divert children from the youth justice system, including local implementation of the Ministry of Justice 'Turnaround' programme.
- 1.7 The other two national indicators relate to reducing reoffending and minimising the use of custodial sentences. The reoffending rate fluctuates, partly because of the current counting rules for this measure. Our local reoffending rate has for the most part remained close to the national rate. Local analysis, summarised in the Youth Justice Plan, shows some of the patterns underlying the reoffending data. The Youth Justice Plan sets out some of the actions that have been taken and future plans to address these issues.
- 1.8 DCYJS has low rates of custodial sentences, below the national average. Young people who are sentenced to custody have often experienced significant trauma in their earlier life, affecting their current behaviour. Analysis in the Youth Justice Plan shows some of the common characteristics of the children who have been sentenced to custody.
- 1.9 Although the numbers remanded or sentenced to custody are low, these outcomes usually reflect serious offences causing significant harm to victims. Reducing youth violence, and harm to victims, is a priority for the Youth Justice Service and for other local strategic partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnership and the Safeguarding Children's Partnership. In 2023 the government introduced the Serious Violence Duty, which requires specified local partners, including youth offending teams, to work together to share information and target interventions to

prevent and reduce serious violence. Local implementation of the Serious Violence Duty is coordinated by the Community Safety Partnership.

- 1.10 One of the priorities for the Youth Justice Service, in reducing youth violence, and other offending, is to work with the Police and CPS to speed up investigations and outcomes for alleged offences by children. Delays in bringing cases to court can make it harder to support children into more positive behaviour and to repair the harm caused to victims. Other activities include work by the YJS Nurses, Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapists to identify children's communication needs and trauma histories, to help us to understand the child's behaviour and to respond to their individual needs.
- 1.11 The Youth Justice Service Partnership priorities for 2024/25 align with the strategic priorities of other services and partnerships, including the Community Safety Partnership and the Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership. More work is planned to divert children from the justice system and to ensure their needs are identified and met, using the Ministry of Justice 'Turnaround' programme; further work will be undertaken to improve the education outcomes of children in the youth justice system; additional action will be taken to address risks of some groups of children being over-represented in the youth justice system. The Youth Justice Plan also outlines plans for a project to identify and support the speech, language and communication needs of children who are at risk of school exclusion. This project will commence in June 2024, aimed at reducing school exclusions and thereby reducing the risk of future offending.

2. **Financial Implications**

The Youth Justice Plan reports on the resourcing of the Youth Justice Service. Like all local authority services, the YJS is subject to significant resource pressures. Although there was an increase in the national Youth Justice Grant in 2023/24, taking it to £764,718, this did not restore it to the allocation of £790,000 in 2014/15. At the time of writing this report, in late April, the Youth Justice Grant allocation for 2024/25 has not yet been announced.

The creation of the pan-Dorset youth offending service in 2015 increased the service's resilience and ability to adapt to reduced funding and increased costs. The management of vacancies, and the deletion of some posts, enabled a balanced budget to be achieved in the years to 2023. Budget pressures from pay awards, without a corresponding increase in

budget contributions, means that staffing costs will be reviewed in 2024/25.

3. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

No adverse environmental impact has been identified. The Covid-19 pandemic led to changes in the working arrangements of the Youth Justice Service. These changes included significant reductions in staff travel, both to and from work and to visit service users, with more activities being carried out remotely. Although staff travel has increased, with the return to more face-to-face work, team members continue to undertake some tasks remotely.

4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Young people in contact with youth justice services are known to be more likely than other young people to have unmet or unidentified health needs. The Youth Justice Service includes seconded health workers who work directly with young people and who facilitate their engagement with community health services.

5. **Other Implications**

No Human Resources implications have been identified. Local Authority YJS staff members are employees of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council, including those team members who work in the Dorset Council area. The YJS also includes employees of the partner agencies who have been seconded to work in the team and who remain employed by the partner agency. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 contains statutory requirements for the staffing composition of youth offending services. The Youth Justice Plan shows how Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service meets these requirements.

6. **Risk Assessment**

6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low.

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The Youth Justice Plan does not relate to a new strategy, policy or function so an Equalities Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

Some information about equalities issues is included in the report. No adverse equalities impacts have been identified.

It is recognised nationally that young people with diverse heritage, and young people in the care of the local authority, are over-represented in the youth justice system and particularly in the youth custodial population. It is also recognised that young people known to the YJS may experience learning difficulties or disabilities, including in respect of speech, language and communication needs. Information from Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service records, summarised in the Youth Justice Plan, shows that some of these issues of over-representation also apply in our area. Actions have been identified in the Youth Justice Plan to address these issues.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix One: Youth Justice Plan 2024/25.

9. **Background Papers**

None.

10. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)