

People and Health Overview Committee

19 May 2025

Youth Justice Plan 2025/26

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Cabinet Member and Portfolio:

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

Local Councillor(s):

All

Executive Director:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report Author: David Webb

Job Title: Head of Service, Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service

Tel: 01202 994321

Email: david.webb@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) places a statutory requirement on 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 2025/26, 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 Dorset Council and

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole 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 2025/26 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. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service has also been inspected, in February 2025, as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on 'Out of Court Disposals'. The national report will be published in the summer. The Youth Justice Plan includes some references to the findings and learning from this inspection.
- 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, has improved significantly in recent years. In the year before the pandemic, 2019/20, 78 Dorset Council children entered the justice system. In the past year, 2024/25, 49 Dorset Council children entered the justice system. Pages 11-16 of the Youth Justice Plan provide

more data and analysis of our work to divert children from the justice system.

- 1.6 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 on pages 17-19 of the Youth Justice Plan, shows some of the patterns underlying the reoffending data. The Youth Justice Plan sets out some of the actions that are being taken to address these issues.
- 1.7 Locally we have low rates of children being sentenced to custody, below the regional and national averages. Young people who are sentenced to custody have often experienced significant trauma in their earlier life, affecting their current behaviour. Analysis on pages 19-20 of the Youth Justice Plan shows some of the common characteristics of the children who have been sentenced to custody.
- 1.8 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.
- 1.9 The Youth Justice Board promotes a good practice approach to youth justice work, known as 'Child First'. The Youth Justice Plan includes examples of how the principles of Child First practice underpin the work of the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service.
- 1.10 It is recognised nationally that some groups of children are over-represented in the youth justice system. Locally, we have identified a particular concern about the over-representation of Children in Care. A multi-agency task and finish group is now working on two main themes: earlier identification of Children in Care who may be at risk of entering the justice system and improvements to the joint multi-agency work with

Children in Care who have already entered the justice system. This activity is one of the service's priorities for 2025/26.

1.11 During the past year we have launched a two-year programme, known as 'Re-Engage', aimed at identifying the speech, language and communication needs of children in Key Stage 3 who are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream schools. The objective is to reduce school exclusions and to prevent future offending. Part of the rationale for this project was the recognition that almost all children who enter the justice system have unidentified communication needs. The Youth Justice Plan also includes data analysing the outcomes of the assessments completed by the YJS Speech and Language Therapists (see pages 43-45). The findings are significant, notably the evidence that 94% of children in the justice system are not at the expected level for understanding spoken language. The YJS plans for the coming year include adaptation of our interactions with children to focus more on activities and less on talking-based interventions.

1.12 The DCYJS Strategic Partnership Priorities for 2025/26 are:

- Continuing to divert children from the formal justice system.
- Reducing the over-representation of minority groups.
- Improving education outcomes for children in the youth justice system.
- Earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs for children at risk of school exclusion.
- Increasing public awareness and confidence in work undertaken by children to repair the harm from their offence.

2. Financial Implications

The Youth Justice Plan reports on the resourcing of the Youth Justice Service (pages 25-26). 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 2024/25, taking it to £767,922 this did not restore it to the allocation of £790,000 in 2014/15. At the time of writing this report, in mid-April, the Youth Justice Grant allocation for 2025/26 has not yet been announced.

The Youth Justice Service faces budget pressures arising from the additional staffing costs of annual pay awards, with no increase in local authority contributions to the YJS budget since 2022/23. The Youth Justice Service achieved a balanced budget in 2024/25 through a combination of staffing reductions and additional fixed-term funding from the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office.

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. The Youth Justice Plan includes an update on health provision for children in the justice system (see pages 42-45).

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 2025/26

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.