

Report subject	Youth Justice Plan 2024/2025
Meeting date	17 July 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	To present the Youth Justice Plan for 2024/25. There is a statutory requirement 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.
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>a) The Cabinet recommend approval of the Youth Justice Plan 2024/25 to the Full Council.</p>
Reason for recommendations	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 Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and from Dorset Council.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director for Children's Services
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

Background

1. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Youth Offending Teams (now more widely known as Youth Justice Services) are required 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.
2. The Youth Justice Plan includes information about local work to reduce first-time entrants and youth violence, which are priorities for the Youth Justice Partnership. Councillors have requested an update on these issues, which is included in this report.

Summary of the Youth Justice Plan 2024/25

3. 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 2023/24 and sets out our priorities for this year.
4. 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 arrangements are well developed and will be completed during 2024.
5. The Youth Justice Board continues to publish data for three 'key performance indicators' for youth justice. The first indicator relates to the rate of young people entering the justice system for the first time. Local performance in this area 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 10-17 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 10-17 year-olds in the previous year. For context, the local rate for the year 2019/20, before the pandemic, was 309 per 100,000 10-17 year-olds.
6. Data on the DCYJS case management system enables us to monitor numbers of first-time entrants in each local authority area. This local data shows that there was a big reduction in the number of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole children entering the justice system in the past year. A total of 52 children received a formal justice outcome for the first time in 2023/24, compared to 79 children in 2022/23. 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.
7. One of the reasons for the recent reduction in first-time entrants is joint work between DCYJS, Dorset Police and the BCP Council Targeted Support Service to divert children from formal justice outcomes. Some of this work has been done under the Ministry of Justice 'Turnaround' programme, which provided funding until March 2025 to work with children 'on the cusp of the youth justice system'.
8. 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.

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. Local implementation of the Serious Violence Duty has been coordinated by the Community Safety Partnership. A Serious Violence Needs Assessment was published in January 2024. Funding from central government has been used to address the priorities identified in the needs assessment. Although most serious violence is committed by and against adults, it is recognised that some of the local activity should focus on early intervention, during adolescence, to prevent future violent behaviour. Much of this work will focus on knife crime, alongside the '8 weeks of action' knife crime campaign in April to June 2024.
12. One of the priorities for the Youth Justice Service, in reducing youth violence, is to work with the Police and CPS to speed up investigations and outcomes for alleged violent offences by children. Other activities include work by the YJS Nurses, Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapists to identify children's communication needs and trauma histories, in order to understand the child's behaviour and to respond to their individual needs.
13. 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 work will commence in June 2024, aimed at reducing school exclusions and thereby reducing the risk of future offending.

Options Appraisal

14. Cabinet members are asked to recommend approval of the Youth Justice Plan for 2024/25 to the full Council.

Summary of financial implications

15. 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.
16. 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.

Summary of legal implications

17. Local authorities are legally required to form a youth offending team with the statutory partners named in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Act also stipulates that youth offending partnerships must submit an annual youth justice plan setting out how youth justice services in their area will be provided and funded; how the youth offending team will be composed and funded, how it will operate and what functions it will carry out. The Youth Justice Plan for 2024/25 meets these legal obligations.
18. The Youth Justice Board guidance states that Youth Justice Plans must be signed off by full council in accordance with 'Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

Summary of human resources implications

19. 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.
20. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 also 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.

Summary of sustainability impact

21. 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.

Summary of public health implications

22. 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.

Summary of equality implications

23. It is recognised nationally that young people from minority ethnic groups, 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, show that some of these issues of over-representation also apply locally. Actions have been identified in the Youth Justice Plan to address these issues.

Summary of risk assessment

24. The Youth Justice Plan sets out local priorities and actions to prevent and reduce offending by young people. These priorities and actions have been developed in response to identified risks and concerns. The recommendation for Cabinet to recommend approval of the Youth Justice Plan is intended to support the Youth Justice Service to reduce the risks associated with youth offending. No specific risks have been identified as arising from this recommendation.

Background papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Youth Justice Plan 2024/25