

Report subject	Youth Justice Plan 2026-2027
Meeting date	22 July 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive 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 2026/27, with a copy of the Plan appended. The Youth Justice Plan needs to be approved by the full Council. The Youth Justice Plan shows strong performance by the service. Achievements include diverting children from the justice system, avoiding the use of custody for children, and the quality of work to reduce the likelihood of reoffending and to repair the harm caused to victims. Priorities for the year ahead are to respond to national and local reform programmes, enhancing 'Child First' practice, developing work with victims, reducing the over-representation of some groups of children in the justice system, and making best use of available resources.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: The Cabinet recommend approval of the Youth Justice Plan 2026/27 to Full Council.
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 & Young People, Education and Skills
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Recommendation

Background

1. The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) requires Youth Offending Teams (now known as Youth Justice Services) to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan. The Youth Justice Board sets out detailed and prescriptive guidance about what must be included in the Plan, making it a lengthy document. 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.

Summary of the Youth Justice Plan 2026-27

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 2026/27 and sets out our priorities for this year.
3. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service was rated 'Good' in its most recent inspection report, which was published in January 2023. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) was also inspected, in February 2025, as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on 'Out of Court Disposals'. The report from this inspection was published in October 2025. The inspection report refers to good practice in Dorset in the partnership work between DCYJS and Dorset Police, in the work to engage victims and to provide restorative justice, and in YJS Speech and Language work.
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.
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, 104 BCP Council children entered the justice system. In the past year, 2025/26, 56 BCP Council children entered the justice system. Pages 11-18 of the Youth Justice Plan provide more data and analysis about the children entering the justice system and about local work to divert children from the justice system.

6. The second indicator relates to the rate and frequency of reoffending. The national reoffending rate fluctuates, partly because of the counting rules for this measure. Analysis of local data, summarised on pp18-21 of the Youth Justice Plan, provides more insight into how many children are reoffending and the characteristics of those who reoffend.
7. The third national performance indicator looks at the number and rate of children receiving a custodial sentence. There continue to be low numbers of BCP Council children who receive a custodial sentence. Analysis on pp 21-22 of the Youth Justice Plan shows some of the common characteristics of children who are sentenced to custody. It is notable that these children have difficulties across the range of social care, education and health issues.
8. The Youth Justice Board promotes a good practice approach to youth justice work, known as 'Child First'. The Youth Justice Plan shows how the principles of Child First practice are applied in the work of the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service.
9. Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service continues to face resourcing pressures. Section 5.2 of the Youth Justice Plan explains the funding outlook for DCYJS. Making best use of available resources is a service priority for the year ahead.
10. The government published new Knife Crime Guidance in February 2026, for implementation from April 2026. Section 5.6 of the Plan shows how DCYJS and Dorset Police will ensure compliance with the new guidance.
11. It is recognised nationally that some groups of children are over-represented in the youth justice system. Children from minority ethnicities have not been over-represented in the BCP Council area, but data in the second half of 2025-26 shows that the numbers have now exceeded the proportion in the population. A small change in numbers would bring the proportions back in line with the local population; the YJS will continue to monitor this data in 2026/27 to identify if remedial actions are required. Children in Care and children with an EHCP continue to be over-represented. There is also evidence to show that almost all children in contact with the youth justice system have speech, language and communication needs, which are almost always identified for the first time when an assessment is completed by a YJS Speech and Language Therapist. The Youth Justice Plan provides more information about which groups of children are over-represented in the justice system and about actions being taken in response.
12. YJS work with victims, and work with children to help them to repair the harm from their offences, is described in 6.6 of the Plan. This work will be one of the service priorities in the year ahead.
13. In addition to the Knife Crime Guidance mentioned in paragraph 4.10, the government is also initiating other youth justice reforms during 2026. Responding to these reforms, and to other reform programmes in children's services and health services, forms another priority for the YJS in the year ahead.
14. The DCYJS Strategic Partnership Priorities for 2026/27 are:
 - Respond to national and local reforms in youth justice and children's services
 - Enhance Child First Practice
 - Develop YJS and Partnership work with victims
 - Reduce the Over-Representation of some groups of children in the justice system

- Make best use of available resources.

Options Appraisal

15. It is a statutory requirement to publish a Youth Justice Plan, and the Youth Justice Plan must adhere to the Youth Justice Board's Guidance document. Locally, the Youth Justice Service Partnership Board oversees the contents of the Youth Justice Plan and the selection of service priorities. The draft Youth Justice Plan was approved by the YJS Partnership Board on 16 April 2026.

Summary of financial implications

16. Section 5.2, and Appendix Two, of the Youth Justice Plan shows the resourcing of the Youth Justice Service. Local authority funding contributions remain frozen at 2022/23 levels. The Ministry of Justice announced in February 2026 that the national Youth Justice Grant will be frozen at 2025/26 levels until at least 2029. The Youth Justice Service achieves a balanced budget through a combination of staffing reductions and additional fixed-term funding streams.

Summary of legal implications

17. The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) sets out legal requirements for a multi-agency 'Youth Offending Team' in each local authority area and for the publication of an annual Youth Justice Plan. The Youth Justice Plan for 2026/27 shows how Dorset Council fulfils the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act.

Summary of human resources implications

18. 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.

Summary of sustainability impact

19. No adverse environmental impact has been identified. The Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequent reduction of office space, led to an increase in YJS staff members working from home, with a consequent reduction in staff travel. YJS work with children includes some activities in the natural environment, such as the 'Discover You' project at Upton Country Park, which is described on pp 44-46 of the Youth Justice Plan.

Summary of public health implications

20. 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 46-50).

Summary of equality implications

21. 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.
22. 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.

Summary of risk assessment

23. 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 councillors to endorse 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 2026/27.