

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	10 October 2024
Title of Report:	Youth Justice Service
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture, Events and Communications)
Lead Strategic Director:	David Haley (Director of Children's Services)
Author:	Martine Aquilina
Contact Email:	martine.aquilina@plymouth.gov.uk
Your Reference:	Click here to enter text.
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide information to Scrutiny Board to enable them to scrutinise and provide challenge to the Youth Justice Service.

Recommendations and Reasons

For the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel to note the report.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This report directly links to The Plymouth Plan 2014-2034 'to create the conditions where children, young people and families can thrive, assisting them to build resilience through the early development of good physical and emotional health and by equipping young people and parents with the skills to improve their wellbeing'.

A Bright Future 2021-2026 states that 'As partners, we want to make sure all children and young people in Plymouth have a Bright Future, supported by a system which works seamlessly to spot difficulties early, responds quickly and effectively, and makes sure that help is there for as long as it is needed'.

The Youth Justice Plan 2025 vision is to 'To develop a youth justice system in Plymouth that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. Diverting Children early will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims in the city.'

Implications for the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

There is no financial implication

Financial Risks

N/A

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

N/A

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

* When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.

N/A

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Briefing report title							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Temilola Salimon											

Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes

Date agreed: 30/09/2024

Cabinet Member approval: Councillor Laing (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Culture and Communications)

Date approved: 01/10/2024

1. Executive Summary

This briefing is to inform members of the council of the role of the Youth Justice Service and the current position in Plymouth relating to children in the Youth Justice system.

2. Background information

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act introduces the principal aim for youth justice as being the prevention of offending and established multi-agency youth offending teams and a range of court orders specifically for children. The Act states the Chief Executive of each local authority is responsible for the establishment of a local Youth Justice Management Board which must contain representatives of the Police, the Probation Service, Social Services, and the Health Service who also fund the service. As a minimum, the Youth Justice Service must contain one representative from each of these services. Whilst subsequent legislation has been imposed since 1998, setting out further sentencing options for children, the principles of the Crime and Disorder Act remain which state the aim of the Youth Justice System to prevent offending by children and young persons. Until 2020, Youth Justice Services were only funded to work with children who receive a Youth Conditional Caution or a Court Order. We now receive additional funding to prevent children from entering the system by diverting children at the earliest opportunity.

Evidence shows, once a child enters the system, their prospects and aspirations are greatly impacted. In 2011, the Centre for Justice Innovation estimated the average cost of a child entering the criminal justice system cost £3,620 in the first year rising to £22,995 over the following 9 years. Whilst this research has not been updated since 2011, one can imagine this sum has increased dramatically since then. Therefore, diversion is the best option for the child as well as society in general.

3. Plymouth Youth Justice Service

The Crime and Disorder Act states the minimum structure of each team. In Plymouth, we receive an annual budget of £1,046,448 pounds made up from the statutory partners set out above as well as the Youth Justice Board and provides services to prevent children offending and entering the Youth Justice system.

We have 3 teams within the service,

- The first team undertakes most of the work with children on statutory interventions including Police Cautions, Court Orders and children in custody.
- The second team undertakes our very successful prevention and diversion work to prevent children entering the criminal justice system.
- The third team is made up of specialist works including 2 CAMHs workers, a Psychologist, a Police Officer, a Probation Officer, a Speech and Language worker and a Substance use worker.

In total the team consists of 4 managers, 14 Youth Justice workers and a victim worker (who provides support to victims of crime), and 7 specialist workers seconded to the team.

4. Current offer

Currently, the team are working with 105 children, made up 54 children on statutory interventions (court orders) and 51 children working with the service voluntarily on non-statutory, diversionary interventions. This is the highest percentage of statutory cases we have had for 3 years. Of the children we are working with, 51 are for violent offences and we are seeing a spike in violence from

female children, up by 20% when compared with pre-pandemic levels. The recent protest has resulted in 7 children being convicted and sentenced, 4 are on intensive orders (these include curfews and 35 hours of contact arranged by the service per week) and this has increased the pressure on the service as a result.

All children receive a comprehensive assessment to assess their needs as well as the risk of reoffending and any risk of harm to members of the public or themselves. The level of intervention required is determined by the risk assessment and the 'scaled approach' principle, meaning children with the greatest risk of reoffending and harm will require the greatest intervention.

Our data shows we perform exceptionally well in terms of children's re-offending rates which are currently 14% in Plymouth compared to the England average of 32.6%. We only have one child in custody and 96% of our children live in suitable accommodation. We have also been praised to our approach to disproportionality when dealing with children who class themselves as any ethnicity other than White British. 18 months ago, 13.2% of our caseload was made up of children who do not class themselves as White British, (the school roll in Plymouth showed 9.8% of children class themselves as non-White British), we have reduced this to 6% by working closely with the Child Centred Policing Team, voluntary agencies and schools. Equally, we see a high percentage of children open to the team who are Children in Care, and we have worked hard with partners, placement providers and Children's Social Care to reduce this level from 51%, 12 months ago, to 34% today.

The Youth Justice Board undertakes quarterly assessments of Youth Justice Services in England and Wales using our current data as well as attendance at board meetings and monthly one to one meeting with the Youth Justice Service Manager. Plymouth is currently assessed in the top quadrant of Youth Justice Service in the country and one of only services to achieve this in the Southwest.

5. Challenges and capacity

Plymouth Youth Justice Service was last inspected 3 years ago and was graded as good. We are now in scope to be inspected again and have an aspiration to build on this and be graded as outstanding. To do this, we must improve on 3 aspects of our performance.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation have recently altered the inspection criteria for Youth Justice Services with the focus on meeting the aspirations of children to achieve their life goals. Currently, 33% of our children do not meet their aspirations in terms of education, training and support. Plymouth recently completed a peer review of the new inspection criteria with Derby and Southampton Youth Justice Services and performed well in all areas except for education and training and it is assumed the inspectors will form the same view. Both Derby and Southampton have Education workers within their teams to address this given the high number of children in the Youth Justice system with Special Educational Needs. We will be working closely with our Education, Participation and Skills colleagues to work together to improve the outcomes for our children and young people.

The second challenge we currently face is in terms of the number of First Time Entrants (FTE) we are seeing, which is almost double in terms of children receiving statutory interventions.

This year, the Youth Justice Board have changed their counting rules for FTE where previously, it was based on Police data, they now use Youth Justice data, as a result, driving offences which result in a fine are counted. We are also seeing an increase in the number of children given Youth Conditional Cautions since the new Police gravity matrix was introduced, the other 3 Youth Justice Services in Devon and Cornwall are reporting similar figures, and we are working with the Police and Crime Commissioner to seek a resolution to how Devon and Cornwall Police are interpreting the matrix in comparison to other Police Services in the South West.

As previously stated, we have seen a 20% increase in violent attacks committed by female children, the Police are reporting a 35% increase of violence committed by female children over the same period which has also impacted on our FTE rate. The behaviours we are seeing are concerning and similar to

the behaviour of boys we first saw in 2020 who were being exploited by County Lines gangs, for example planned attacks that are recorded and posted on the internet, often on strangers.

Whilst the girls are not disclosing anything that would suggest they are being exploited, we continue to be curious. To address these concerns, we have received funding from the Safer Executive to work with Plymouth Argyle who have been commissioned to go into 3 of the schools where this behaviour is most prevalent to work with girls to understand the reasons for this behaviour and offer alternatives.

In addition, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner have commissioned Make Amends, a restorative justice charity, to work with individual girls who have committed violent crimes and their victims to address this behaviour. Plymouth is at the forefront of this work nationally as there are no current, accredited programmes to work with girls who display violent behaviours. This pattern has been noted across the Southwest and we will now be reporting data to the YJ Board.

Finally, as previously stated, our Diversion and Prevention work has been recognised nationally as a good practice model and our results have exceeded all expectation. Previously, the Ministry of Justice funded the non-statutory, diversionary work undertaken in the city with a grant of £110,053 per annum. This funding ended in September and the new government have given no indication this funding will be replaced. As a result, we have had to restructure the service with 3 Youth Justice workers and one manager leaving the service. The Plymouth Youth Justice Management Board have given a commitment that our prevention and diversion should continue, however, this restructure will limit the number of children we can work with.

Knife Crime update – Nationally, we have seen an increase in young people carrying and using knives within communities resulting in tragic incidents. In 2023, we saw a rise in children reporting carrying knives so in June 2023 the Youth Justice Manager and Superintendent Scott Bradley (now acting Chief Superintendent) worked together to understand the problem and discovered that whilst well below national indicators, there was an increase in reporting the use of knives. To address these concerns the police undertook an exercise where those children identified as carrying knives were disrupted. Plymouth Argyle Trust were then commissioned to work in secondary schools to raise awareness of carrying knives. Those individual children that were found to be in possession of bladed articles were provided with support and intervention to address the risk. This is consistently monitored, and Plymouth remains below national indicators.

6. Conclusion

Plymouth Youth Justice Service is recognised locally and nationally as an innovative and high-performing service. As a result of our performance, the Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board recently visited Plymouth to look at our Child First approach, especially considering the praise the service received when dealing with the 40 children identified as attending the protest in the city. Whilst children received appropriate, intensive orders for their behaviours, our child first approach ensured all remained in the community.

After her visit in August, the CEO of the Youth Justice Board, Steph Bibby Roberts commented,

The leadership of the service and staff ensures they are clearly led by children's needs, with a strong commitment to Child First principles.