

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	06 February 2025
Title of Report:	Young Female Violence Prevention Programme
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
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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 in relation to a rise in Young Female in the City.

Recommendations and Reasons

For the 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.

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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: David Haley

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

Date agreed: 24/01/2025

Cabinet Member approval: *Cllr Laing via email*

Date approved: 24/01/2025

1. Executive Summary

At the request of the Scrutiny Panel, this briefing report has been prepared to provide assurance on how we understand, address and respond to the recent increase in violent offences committed by young females in our city.

2. What we know about female children and their violence Plymouth

Nationally there has been a spike in violent offences being committed by girls.

In October 2024 we noted that the number of girls committing violent offences had nearly doubled, from 20% of the whole cohort of children pre-pandemic to 38.5% in October 2024 This represents 19 children in total.

To understand this further, we have worked closely with our police colleagues who noted a similar increase in the pattern of offending and reported an increase of 35% in the same period (the difference in the figure is due to police recording all crime reported in the city whilst the Youth Justice Service only report those children who live within the city.)

The Probation Service have also reported an increase in female violence under the age of 25.

Positively, since the peak of 19 in October 2024, as of January 2025 we have 14 girls supported by the service, with only one girl re-offending since intervention started.

3. Patterns of aggression and violence between children

In terms of serious youth violence in the City, the picture is mixed. There has been a welcome decrease of 6% year on year in the number of boys committing violence offences which result in a statutory intervention from the Youth Justice Service. Whilst we continue to see boys being criminally exploited and forced into criminal acts including violence, as a Partnership, we have been working closely with Police to disrupt this and as a result we are seeing a reduction overall. In addition, knife crime involving children in the city remains substantially below the national average.

However, as stated we have seen an increase in girls in the Youth Justice System, when compared to the pre-pandemic cohort, the majority of whom are committing violent offences. To address these concerns, we have worked closely with our partners to understand the reasons behind this increase so that we can target our support and intervention appropriately.

Whilst we continue to see a pattern of violent offences that occur within the home, between children and their parents/carers or siblings, or commonly disputes between peers / friends that results in fights, the more concerning offences we have seen are groups of young females assaulting strangers and recording the event for social media. The violence is pre-meditated and the children we have / are working with have reported being involved either because they fear being expelled from the group or getting recognition or 'kudos' from the online audience. The platforms most used are TikTok and Telegram, both based outside of the UK and the videos and images are uploaded to a closed group making it hard for agencies to access and identify those involved.

The average age of the girls we are working with is 15 years and 9 months and not surprisingly we are seeing a link between the children involved both as victims and perpetrators and increased missing episodes raising the risk of exploitation.

Unlike the spike we witnessed in violence involving boys in 2022, we can find no links to adults, county lines or substance use. However, we cannot rule this out and we need to continue to develop trusting relationships with this cohort to gain a better understanding of the behaviour and how we can support these children to make better and more positive choices in the future.

4. Interventions to address female violence

Nationally, violent offences committed by girls is increasing, however, to date there are no accredited interventions available. As a result, the Youth Justice Board called a meeting in December 2024 to identify areas of good practice and how to address the concerns that have been identified. A working group, which Plymouth is a part of, has been established to look at best practice nationally and internationally, develop specific evidence-based interventions and build a national picture.

Locally, due to the findings of the Youth Justice Service and the Police, the Safer Plymouth Executive is in the process of commissioning Plymouth Argyle Trust to work with schools in the areas where need is identified to work with children to educate and raise awareness around violence committed by girls.

Plymouth Argyle Trust employs a range of youth workers and practitioners that offer education and support to children. We know that some children and their parents will be reluctant to engage with statutory partners or feel judged or a level of stigma with being associated with Children's Services whereas Plymouth Argyle are a much-loved organisation that will be able to reach and engage a larger cohort.

We will develop this approach to engage large groups of girls in schools to educate them on the effects of their behaviour on the victims as well as the consequences of being involved in the criminal justice system. By working with the schools, we will gather a wider spectrum of children's views on why this behaviour is occurring and how to address it to supplement the views of those children who have committed the offence.

Whilst we have been working with partners to support the implementation of the above programme Plymouth Youth Justice Service has also continued to work closely with the school's Designated Safeguarding Leads to raise awareness of the incidents of violence and the use of social media. We know that some schools have taken direct action by addressing the rise of violent offences with their children. Equally, the School Link workers from PCC Targeted Support Team have been supporting the service by raising and addressing this issue in the schools not directly impacted.

The service continues to work directly with each child involved, building relationships to ensure meaningful engagement that not only focuses on the behaviour, but also understanding the root cause of it that enables us to consider the wider implications and address any welfare concerns. PYJS works closely with Children's Services, education providers, police and health to create a team around the child and their family to support a shift to more pro-social behaviour, raise aspirations and improve long term outcomes.

As stated above, girl violence is increasing nationally, and Arsenal and Wolverhampton Football clubs have been commissioned to work with girls who commit violent offences in their areas. Both are offering different interventions to Plymouth Argyle and all three will be feeding back to the Youth Justice Board to develop best practice moving forward.

5. Conclusion

Whilst the spike we have seen is concerning, it should be acknowledged this has happened over a relatively small period, the numbers are relatively small and the response from ourselves and partners has been timely. We are already seeing the numbers of girls open to the Youth Justice Service decrease (from 19 girls open on 01 October 2024 to 14 girls open on 01 January 2025) and to date only one of the children has committed a further violent offence. Re-offending rates in Plymouth continue to be below the national average and one of the lowest in the country.

However, as stated above, this is a trend seen nationally and we will continue to engage with the Youth Justice Board to develop interventions and strategies to address this behaviour whilst also finding creative and innovative ways to work with schools and partners to intervene at the earliest opportunity and prevent children in Plymouth entering the criminal justice system.