

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Youth Justice Plan (2025-26 update)

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/18/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services (YJS). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement a youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.
- 2 Cheshire East have a shared service arrangement for Youth Justice Services with the other three Local Authorities in the sub-region and as such the Governance arrangements for Youth Justice are overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. The Director of Children Services represents each of the four local authorities on the partnership board and chairing rotates bi-annually. The Executive Director for Children and Families in Cheshire West and Chester Council (Amanda Perraton) currently chairs the Youth Justice Management Board. The Youth Justice Service have refreshed the sub-regional Youth Justice Plan for 2025-26 in partnership with Cheshire Police and the other statutory partners (LAs, NHS, National Probation Services and PCC) and it was approved by Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on the 24th of June.
- 3 This report will brief committee on the content of the 2025-26 Youth Justice Plan for Cheshire and seek formal sign off in compliance with Youth Justice Board Guidance (Ministry of Justice) and Regulation 4 of

the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Cheshire sub-region is a large complex area and the Youth Justice partnership between and across the four local authorities provides a powerful base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families, and victims.
- 5 Despite the scale, Cheshire YJS is a comparatively small organisation comprising 77 WTE staff, including seconded workers. The YJS also has approximately forty active volunteers. This committee approved in April 2024 the transition to a simpler fully hosted model for the Youth Justice Service which went live in April 2025 and means Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) now function as 'lead authority' on behalf of the pan Cheshire partnership. To be clear, the actual delivery of youth justice services to children, families and victims in Cheshire East has not changed because of CWAC being lead authority on behalf of the four local authorities. The statutory responsibility for providing youth justice remains with each of the four local authorities so an annual update of the Youth Justice Strategic Plan will still be presented formally for approval at this committee.
- 6 The national body responsible for inspecting Youth Justice Services are His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMiP) with national oversight provided by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). Both HMiP and the YJB recognise Cheshire YJS as of a high standard. The former rated Cheshire YJS as 'Good' in the last full joint inspection (Governance and leadership were rated as 'Outstanding') and the latter granted 2-year pathfinder status for Cheshire's successful youth diversion programme.
- 7 A new three year Inspection programme was launched by HMiP in April 2025 so the youth justice partnership (note not just the Youth Justice Service as an operational team but the youth justice partnership as a whole of which Cheshire East Children Services is an integral part) will be inspected under this new programme at some time between now and March 2028 (with a three week notice period).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee

1. Note the update on performance and progress made against priority areas during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 as set out in the refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire (attached at Appendix 1).
2. Recommend that full Council approves the content of the 2025-2026 refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire.
3. Delegate authority to the Executive Director Children's Services to approve the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for 2026-27 and submission to the national Youth Justice Board in June 2026 prior to it being presented for formal approval, sign-off by members and subsequent publication.

Background

- 8 Youth Justice (YJ) plans are an opportunity to review performance and developments and plan for the year ahead. This allows services to be able to respond to any changes that have taken place including new legislation, demographic changes, delivery of key performance indicators, and developments in service delivery. The production of a youth justice plan is beneficial to partnership working and service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for children, families, victims, and communities.
- 9 The Plan has been produced in accordance with National Youth Justice Board guidance and follows their prescribed template to include, introduction, vision and strategy, governance, leadership and partnership arrangements, board development, progress on the previous year(s), resources and services, performance including national key performance indicators, priorities, information on children from groups which are over-represented, prevention, diversion, education, restorative approaches and victims, serious violence and exploitation, detention in police custody, remands, use of custody, standards for children in the justice system, workforce development, evidence-based practice and innovation, service development, challenges, risks and issues.
- 10 Performance figures included within the YJ Plan show that Cheshire YJS continue to achieve good levels of performance against the three main key performance indicators: First time entrants to the criminal justice system (FTEs), custody rates and re-offending (detailed within the YJ Plan). These are all comprehensively detailed within the plan and are below regional and national averages which is attributable (at least in part) to the strength of the service and a partnership commitment to seeing children in the justice system as children first and offenders

second and adopting an evidence based, trauma informed and restorative approach.

- 11 In 2024-25 there were 39 Cheshire East first time child entrants to the justice system and 4 Cheshire East children were sentenced to custody. Rates of Serious Youth Violence in Cheshire in 2024-25 were well below the national average at 3.4 offences per 10,000 children compared to a regional average of 7.2 and national average of 6.2 (page 56 of YJ Plan) A continued partnership commitment to reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of cared for children means very few cared for children or care leavers are prosecuted with most now receiving out of court disposals in recognition their offending behaviour is often symptomatic of vulnerability or exploitation and rarely presents a risk of harm to the general public (page 47 of the YJ Plan).
- 12 Other notable achievements described in the YJ Plan include the continued development of social prescribing which emerged from the recognition that many justice services involve children arriving in the system with previously unmet health needs and/or where clinical models of healthcare have proven ineffective. Examples of activity are illustrated on pages 38-39 of the YJ Plan and include gardening, fishing, and music as psychosocial therapy. Cheshire's social prescribing has been recognised by the Local Government Association as innovative practice and the first application of social prescribing in a youth justice context. It has also been nominated for a Children and Young People Now award in two categories (Mental Health and Wellbeing Award and the Youth Justice Award).
- 13 The priorities for Youth Justice in Cheshire over the next 12 months are described fully in the YJ Plan but include; 1) Continuing to develop participation and amplifying the voice and influence of children, families and victims 2) Enhance the offer to victims of youth crime, ensuring the Youth Justice service partnership is compliant with the new Victim and Prisoners Act 2024 and 3) Undertake comprehensive quality assurance audits in the following areas of practice; custody and resettlement, the quality and impact of education, training and employment support to justice involved children and work with children subject to out of court disposals.

Consultation and Engagement

The Youth Justice Service have consulted with children, families, victims of youth crime, and professional stakeholders (including specialist academic advisors) in the development of the Youth Justice plan. The sub-regional partnership board have approved it as ready for publication.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 14 There is provision within the national Youth Justice Board guidance for the Chair of the local Youth Justice Management Board to sign off the Youth Justice Plan and for retrospective approval to be sought from Council(s). Given the timescales and the complex multi-authority configuration of Youth Justice Services across Cheshire this is the approach that was given approval by committee last year (and by cabinet in CWAC, Halton and Warrington councils). It is recommended again that Cheshire East council (along with the other three councils in the partnership) delegate responsibility to their respective Executive Director of Children Services to approve a final draft of the annual update to next year's Youth Justice Plan so it can be submitted to the national board in June 2026 prior to being presented for formal approval, sign-off and publication.

Other Options Considered

- 15 The only other option is for the annual Youth Justice plan to be presented to full council in four local authority areas prior to the deadline for submission at the end of June. Given the timelines and different processes across four separate councils this would be logistically challenging hence the recommendation for councils to delegate authority for sign-off to the Chair of the pan Cheshire Board which is permissible within the guidance.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 16 Production of an annual Youth Justice plan is in compliance with section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Refreshed guidance published by the Youth Justice Board in March 2023 made clear that to comply with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 there is a requirement for Full Council to approve and sign off their local areas annual Youth Justice Plan.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 17 Cheshire Youth Justice Service is a shared service partnership arrangement and is funded by the four Local Authorities, with contributions from statutory partner agencies (Police, Health, National Probation Service) with the largest amount of funding coming from the National Youth Justice Board as a ring-fenced national grant.
- 18 There are no financial implications relevant to this decision. Cheshire East Council formally entered into a partnership agreement for the provision of Youth Justice Services as a shared service delivery model

with Cheshire West and Chester Council as the lead authority. CEC financial contributions are set out within that legal agreement. Because of the economies of scale achieved by delivering youth justice on a shared service basis across the sub-region it represents excellent value for money (less spend on the statutory provision of youth justice services than comparable councils regionally or nationally).

- 19 The CEC annual budget for 2025.26 is £615k which includes the Youth Justice element of the MTFs (15) Growth to Deliver Statutory Youth Justice Service and Meet Safeguarding Partnership Duties budget increase of £198k. The forecast is £607k producing an underspend of £8k.

Human Resources

- 20 None

Risk Management

- 21 No significant risks identified.
- 22 Section 3 on page 24 of the Youth Justice Plan identifies modest risks to service delivery. These relate to the complexity of the geographical and multi-stakeholder landscape across which YJS operates and the high level of risk and need within the cohort of children it supports.

Impact on other Committees

- 23 None

Policy

- 24 No policy implications

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 25 The Youth Justice plan has been produced with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act 2010 and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 26 The plan provides data relating to the proportion of children in the criminal justice system from different ethnic backgrounds because historically children from certain ethnic backgrounds are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Note data shows that (unlike most regions) children from Black or dual heritage backgrounds are not over-represented in the criminal justice system.

- 27 Similarly, the plan takes full consideration of and makes explicit reference to cared for children and those with SEND – both of whom are over-represented in the Criminal Justice System (see section 11 pages 47-50 in the YJ Plan on over-represented groups in the justice system).

Other Implications

- 28 No specific public health implications of this report other than to state the strategy for Youth Justice partnership is to minimise the volume of children with previously unmet health needs that are criminalised for offences/behaviour that is symptomatic of previously unidentified health needs.
- 29 There are no specific implications relating to climate change, rural communities (the YJS outreaches into all communities across the Cheshire sub-region).

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	14/10/25	21/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	14/10/25	17/10/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green	Finance Manager	05/09/25	11/09/25
Jennie Summers	Legal Team Manager (People	05/09/25	05/09/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			

Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director Children's Services	21/10/25	22/10/25
Tracy Stephen	Director Family Help and Children's Social Care	13/10/25	14/10/25

Access to Information	
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Contact Officer:	Tom Dooks – Head of Youth Justice Services (pan Cheshire)
Appendices:	Annual Refresh 2025 3-Year Strategic plan 2024-2027