

COUNCIL MEETING – 10 DECEMBER 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE: YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN (2025-26 UPDATE)

Recommendation:

That Council approves the content of the 2025-2026 refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire.

Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Children and Families Committee held on 10 November 2025.

39 Youth Justice Plan (2025-26 update)

The committee received a report which provided an update of the Youth Justice Plan 2025-26.

Officers explained that Local authorities had 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 set out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan.

Officers highlighted key performance and statistical data, including offending and reoffending rates; the potential causes and motivation behind violent and criminal behaviour, including childhood adversity and trauma; progress on priorities; preventative work taking place with children and young people to develop pro-social behaviours; and the victims of crime.

Members asked questions and provided comments in respect of the following:

- Online-related harms and the impact on physical behaviour.
- Low offending but high reoffending rates among young people.
- The multi-agency approach and effective communication.
- Progress in tackling child exploitation and the apparent lack of a prevention-first approach.
- Hate crime among young people and related statistics.
- The number of young people in the system at any one time.
- Whether those young people receiving custodial sentences were previously known to services.
- How the needs of those entering the system were addressed.
- Wider factors, such as drug use and self-harm, and links to violent and criminal behaviour.
- Any child or young person that appeared to present a need for social care support would be referred for assessment.

- Gender and offending rates.
- The impact of youth homelessness and temporary accommodation on education and wellbeing.
- 'Self-medicating' terminology and the suggestion that this sanitises illegal behaviour.
- The issue of perception and fear of crime among young people.
- The need to consider county lines and the importance of communication and advocacy in safeguarding children and young people.
- The need for updated responses to modern challenges including online and media influence, and drug use in affluent areas.
- The role of Elected Members as Corporate Parents.
- Consideration that behaviour often reflects underlying issues, such as undiagnosed SEND, domestic violence and trauma. It was important to support children and young people in accessing assistance and resources appropriate to their needs.

In response officers reported that:

- There had been a shift in the typology of youth offending, with a move from physical contact offences to online-related behaviours. This was influenced by the content young people consumed and algorithm-driven exposure. YJS staff were well-trained on the issue of online perpetrators, though concerns remained about the nature of content being accessed.
- Youth reoffending rates had remained stable at around 30% over the past 20 years. Early intervention was key: 90% of those released from custody reoffended, compared to only 10% of those engaged early. The issue was linked to complex needs and adversity, rather than a new trend.
- The YJS operated as a multi-disciplinary service with strong communication between professionals.
- The sub-regional YJS, covering four local authorities, was funded to work from the point of arrest and did not provide targeted prevention. However, other local prevention services were in place. Officers acknowledged that while the current model brought benefits, there were trade-offs and so it was important to achieve a balance. Drug markets remained a significant exploitation risk, though communication between partners on this issue had improved. It was felt that the Families First programme would help strengthen early intervention.
- Very low levels of hate crime were reported among children and young people across Cheshire.
- Approximately 250 young people were in the Youth Justice System across Cheshire, with around 40 in Cheshire East at any one time. The 39 new entrants in 2024/25 were all first-time entrants by definition.
- Of the four young people sentenced to custody, officers would confirm whether they were previously known to services. These individuals were sentenced for the most serious violent or sexual offences.

- The Youth Justice Plan had been approved by the other three local authorities.
- Female offending was a priority area for the next 12 months. Nationally, there had been a general increase. Work needed to be undertaken to determine the reasons for this, as well as the treatment that females received in comparison to male offenders. No serious offences by females were recorded in the first quarter of this year in Cheshire East.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That 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 of the report).
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.