

OPEN

Children & Families Committee

16 September 2024

Youth Justice Plan 2024-27

Report of: Tom Dooks (Head of Cheshire Youth Justice Services)

Report Reference No: CF/24/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

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 Youth Justice Service have drafted a three-year strategic plan 2024-27 in partnership with Cheshire Police and other statutory partners and it was approved by Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on the 27th of June.
- 3 This report will brief committee on the content of the 2024-27 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 fewer than 75 WTE staff, including seconded workers plus approximately thirty active volunteers. The human resource arrangements for the entire workforce currently involve eleven different employing organisations but also includes police, probation, three different NHS Trusts and two independent providers (speech and language and substance misuse specialists). This committee approved in April the transition to a simpler fully hosted model for the Youth Justice Service which will see Cheshire West Council acting as 'lead authority' on behalf of the pan Cheshire partnership. The statutory responsibilities remain with each of the four local authorities so an annual refresh of the three-year Youth Justice Strategic Plan will still be presented formally for approval at this committee in 2025 and beyond.
- 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 a 2021 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Formally approve the 2024-27 Youth Justice Plan

Background

- 7 Youth justice plans are an opportunity to review performance and developments and plan for the year (or in this case years) 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.

- 8 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.
- 9 Performance figures included within the YJ Plan show that Cheshire YJS continue to achieve good levels of performance against the main performance indicators: First Time Entrants to the criminal justice system (FTEs), Custody rates and re-offending (detailed within the YJ Plan)
- 10 In 2023-24 there were just twenty-five Cheshire East first time entrants to the justice system and only two Cheshire East children were sentenced to custody. Rates of Serious Youth Violence in Cheshire in 2023-24 were well below the national average at 2.7 offences per 10,000 children compared to a regional average of 4.7 and national average of 5.5.
- 11 The priorities for Youth Justice in Cheshire are described fully in the YJ Plan but include; 1) Further developing participation and relationship based practice across Cheshire to facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote pro-social identity and desistance from crime 2) Ensuring the YJS support offer to victims is compliant with the new duty to collaborate responsibilities outlined in the new Victim and Prisoners Act. and 3) Design a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring the service is data driven and makes full use of the management information system to drive practice and improve outcomes for children, families, and victims.

Consultation and Engagement

- 12 The Youth Justice Service have consulted with children, young people, parents, carers, and stakeholders in the development of the Youth Justice Plan 2024-27

Reasons for Recommendations

- 13 There is provision within the national YJB 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 Full Council. Given the timescales and complex multi-authority configuration of Youth Justice Services across Cheshire this is the approach that was given approval by committee last year. It is recommended again that Cheshire East council (along with the other three councils in the partnership) delegate sign-off of next year's annual update to this Youth Justice Plan to the Chair of the pan Cheshire Management Board so it can be submitted by the end of June again next year before then being presented to committee.

Other Options Considered

- 14 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

- 15 Production of an annual YJ Plan is in compliance with section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and with the refreshed guidance published by the Youth Justice Board in March 2023, which made clear that in order 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

- 16 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.

- 17 Cheshire East Councils financial contribution to the Youth Justice Service in 2024/25 will be £444,538 (Total budget for the service is £3.22m)

Policy

- 18 No policy implications

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 19 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.

Human Resources

- 20 None

Risk Management

- 21 No risks identified.

Rural Communities

- 22 No specific implications identified.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 23 The Youth Justice plan takes full consideration of and makes and explicit reference to Cared for Children and those with SEND – both of whom are over-represented in the Criminal Justice System.

Public Health

- 24 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.

Climate Change

- 25 No specific or relevant implications

Access to Information

Contact Officer:

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Appendices:

Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2024-27 (Cheshire YJS)

Background
Papers:

N/A