

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

## 20 SEPTEMBER 2016

<b>Chair:</b>	† Councillor Jerry Miles	
<b>Councillors:</b>	* Ghazanfar Ali * Richard Almond * Mrs Chika Amadi * Jeff Anderson † Jo Dooley	* Ameet Jogia * Kairul Kareema Marikar (2) * Chris Mote * Paul Osborn (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
<b>Voting Co-opted:</b>	(Voluntary Aided)  Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors)
<b>Non-voting Co-opted:</b>	* Harrow Youth Parliament Representative	
<b>In attendance: (Councillors)</b>	Simon Brown Barry Macleod-Cullinane Mrs Christine Robson	Minute 178, 179 Minute 181 Minute 180

- \* Denotes Member present
- (2) Denotes category of Reserve Member
- † Denotes apologies received

### 177. Youth Justice Plan

The Committee considered a report which set out the annual updated Youth Justice Plan.

Following a brief overview of the report by officers, Members asked the following questions and made the following comments. Officers responded accordingly:

- What was the relationship between the data relating to first time offenders, the rates of re-offending and the issuing of custodial sentences?
- Was the ethnicity and any gang affiliation or gang membership of offenders and re-offenders monitored and was this data available?
- Why had the Black/African/Caribbean/Black British group been consistently over represented in youth offending services in recent years? Why was the white population now over represented in youth offending services?
- What figures were available regarding gang activity and knife crime in the borough? Had there been a noticeable increase in the levels of hate crime in the borough in the wake of Brexit?
- The figures showed that there had been a steady decrease in the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System between 2010-2011 and 2013-2014, however, this had increased in 2014-15. The figures also showed an increase in re-offending rates. What were the reasons for these increases? Had the types of offences committed worsened on a national level?
- What improvement had there been in the performance of the Youth Offending Service (YOT) recently?
- What was the reason for the high proportion of Children Looked After (CLA) in the YOT caseload?
- If a young person was cautioned or arrested but not charged with an offence, would they still enter the youth justice system?

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) had set the following three outcome indicators for the Youth Offending Team, namely, to reduce the number of First Time Entrants (FTE) to the Youth Justice System, to reduce Re-offending and to reduce the Use of Custodial sentences. There was no single reason for the recent increase in rates of offending. There remained a strong relationship between FTEs and re-offending and the re-offending rates related to a small cohort of 'hard-core' re-offenders. Because the overall number of FTEs was relatively low, the figures for re-offending may at first glance appear high. It was important to note that the numbers of offenders in question were in the hundreds and not thousands.

Data relating to the ethnicity of offenders was monitored but had not been included in the report under consideration. Due to Harrow's unique demography, it was difficult to make comparisons to National and London averages for the ethnicity of young offenders. Thus, all ethnicity comparisons

were made against the local demographic make-up of the 10-17 year old population.

The over-representation of Black/African/Caribbean/Black/Mixed British group in the service was a common trend in most urban areas. However, there were a number of complex factors for this and this over-representation may equally relate to poverty and deprivation as much as to race/ethnicity.

There had been an increase in knife crime both locally and nationally. The YOT team were involved in the 'Violence, vulnerability and exploitation' initiative which was focussed on prevention. Each young offender had an individual plan. There was also improved data sharing between the YOT and local partners, such as the Police and the Community Safety Team. Gang related activity was proportionately lower in Harrow in comparison to other London boroughs, however, it was important to note that recently Harrow had been recognised by the Home Office as a 'priority borough' with regard to gang activity. There was a potential relationship between the small cohort of re-offenders and gang affiliation and this phenomenon would require further investigation and analysis.

Although there had been a spike in the levels of hate crime nationally in the wake of Brexit, the Borough Commander had confirmed that there had been no significant increase in reported hate crime in Harrow, and it was not clear whether recent local incidences of hate crime could be attributed to gang activity. The officer undertook to look into the figures and report back to Members after the meeting.

An officer undertook to provide Committee Members with more detailed information and figures relating to knife crime in the borough. The Chair advised that the issue of knife crime and gang activity locally would require further scrutiny either by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee or by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The increase in the rates of re-offending and in the seriousness of the nature of offences was a national trend. Changes in local demography, such as the substantial increase in the numbers of young people in the borough (as borne out by the annual schools' census), increasing numbers of whom had arrived from war torn countries and had complex needs plus the existence of pockets of deprivation in the borough were all contributing factors.

The Youth Justice Board, which was an external body, no longer considered the Harrow Youth Offending Team (HYOT) a priority YOT based on improved outcome indicators. There was a robust process of scrutiny in place of the YOT Board.

The high proportion of Children Looked After (CLA) in the YOT caseload was a cause for concern. The figures in the report may be misleading as often CLA who entered the system often had complex personal circumstances and needs. Some had offended prior to entering the system and others subsequent to entering the system. The issue of CLA fell within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Panel which would be receiving a report regarding this in the near future.

Increasingly, out of court disposals allowed the police to deal quickly and proportionately with low-level, first-time offending which did not merit prosecution at court. Some offences may expire. Furthermore, YOT triage services were aimed at reducing the number of young people entering the criminal justice system and ensuring they were effectively diverted away from offending. The officer undertook to provide information to Councillor Almond regarding this issue after the meeting.

**Resolved to RECOMMEND:** (to Council)

That the Committee's comments be noted.