

CABINET – 12 OCTOBER 2017

**REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
19 SEPTEMBER 2017**

YOUTH JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2017-18

The Committee received a report on the Council's draft Youth Justice Partnership Plan for 2017-18. The Divisional Director, Children and Young People introduced the report commending those who had worked to produce the draft plan and to achieve improvements in the service such that the "priority rating" of the Youth Offending Team had now been withdrawn. He apologised to the Committee for the late circulation of a further version of the plan which contained certain minor amendments. He established the context of the draft plan, including various relevant reviews of youth justice such as those conducted by Charlie Taylor, David Lammy and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MoPAC). The officer reported that the plan included proposals made by the Youth Justice Board and was aligned with the Community Safety, Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy; the intention was to bring together a more coordinated "youth offer" for local young people. The officer confirmed that the staffing position had developed with fully permanent appointments and a good skills mix in place; he considered that there was now an effective "triage" system diverting young people away from behaviours likely to put them at risk of entering the youth justice system.

In response to a Member's query about crime levels, the officer confirmed that while overall levels were down, there were increases in certain crimes and in the severity and seriousness of some of these; for example, there had been an increase in the use of knives. So while there had been success in reducing first time entrants to the youth justice system, the seriousness and impact of violent crimes was a real area of concern.

A Member considered that the plan contained too much detail in certain parts and did not adequately highlight the key issues; he gave the example of the section on "Out of Court Disposals" (Page 18 of the plan) as being unclear as to the trend compared to previous periods.

The representative of the Harrow Youth Parliament considered that there was room for improvement in the "youth offer" as part of the Early Support Service, particularly in relation to activities and initiatives to develop self-confidence in young people. His view was that the current offer did not go far enough in addressing these needs and he proposed that the Council should do further work with relevant voluntary organisations in this area. An officer reported that such opportunities were available in existing programmes although they tended not to be overtly labelled as "self-confidence" sessions since this was likely to deter young people. Instead, the relevant skills and approaches were included in sessions on such subjects as creative writing, drama and even cookery; there were also classes on presentation skills. It was intended that these programmes would continue with the involvement of groups such as Ignite.

A Member raised concerns about street crime in South Harrow, particularly incidents involving knives. The Divisional Director, Children and Young People confirmed that knife crime was a top priority for multi-agency work on crime reduction and prevention; this reflected the seriousness of its impact on victims and their families. The Council and local Police had made representations to the MoPAC about improved cross-border work to address individuals and groups involved in incidents outside their own boroughs of residence. It was hoped that this would lead to increased resources for this work.

A Member felt that the analysis of local crime trends did not readily equip councillors to make decisions about the appropriate allocation of resources, nor to evaluate the degree of success of the Council's programmes. The Divisional Director, Children and Young People conceded that it was very difficult to understand the reasons for crime trends; however, he referred to the development of "problem profiles" making use of data drawn from a wide range of sources, including the YOT, Police and Early Support Hubs. He gave the example of the Council assisting the Police to shut down the operations of one gang in Wealdstone. An officer added that the causes of crime were complex and difficult to understand fully; the factors included levels of education, family life changes and housing conditions. Nevertheless, these could mislead, an example being the increase in the incidence of certain crimes locally even in a period of reducing deprivation.

A Member suggested that the Council's regeneration strategy should address the implications for youth crime; for example, how Wealdstone town centre would be affected in this respect. The Divisional Director, Children and Young People confirmed this was being addressed in one of the strategy workstreams, though the work was in its infancy. Consultation with young people would be part of this project. The Corporate Director, People Services cautioned that this particular report to the Committee was solely about the Youth Justice Partnership Plan, much of which was constrained by the requirements of the youth Justice Board; its focus would be diluted by extending its range to cover other areas such as the regeneration programme. He underlined that preventative work was a significant part of the plan.

A Member proposed that the Council should make arrangements for young people who had been victims and perpetrators of knife crime to become involved in preventative programmes as this approach was much more likely to influence others. An officer confirmed that young people with such involvement in crime were invited to explain the impact of the crimes on them to audiences of school pupils and other young people. This type of work was supplemented by an annual viewpoint survey of young people to inform the development of services.

The Harrow Youth Parliament representative was concerned about the apparent reduction in the drama programme during the summer and about the infrequency of other related sessions which were often held at times of the day which were inconvenient for some young people. He acknowledged that the programme included much good work, but he considered that there was considerable scope to improve provision. He referred to the indications in Table 13 of the draft plan that there were more vulnerable young people and, in this context, he was concerned that the opportunities for one-to-one mentoring had been removed. The Corporate Director,

People Services underlined that the YOT did not provide a universal service; it was a targeted provision operating within budget constraints and pressures, and it was therefore difficult to do more. He acknowledged the points made by the Harrow Youth Parliament, which he had noted in many other forms and meetings, but the Council could not keep repeating its explanations of the reasons behind the reorganisation of the services.

The Harrow Youth Parliament representative considered that the Council could do more to use data available on young people exiting the criminal justice system to offer a more customised and targeted service. An officer advised that while there was no specific mentoring scheme in place, staff were engaged in coaching and advising young people who had been involved in and affected by crime.

A Member asked about the following aspects of the plan: the extent of the IT challenges, the timing of the equalities impact assessment, the need to strengthen the references to preventative work and to joint work with MoPAC on knife crime involving young people. An officer acknowledged the difficulties which had been experienced with the new IT system and confirmed that work continued to improve performance; there had been further investment in both infrastructure and software. The Divisional Director, Children and Young People reported that the equalities impact assessment was very nearly ready to circulate to Members; it was the first time that such an assessment had been conducted for the youth justice partnership plan. The assessment would be included in the documents submitted to the Cabinet when considering the plan. The principal equalities issue was the over-representation of people from BME communities in the criminal justice system.

RESOLVED - That the draft Youth Justice Plan 2017-18 be noted and that the Committee's consideration of it be reported to the Cabinet which will then report to full Council for formal adoption of the plan.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 19 September 2017

Contact Officer:

Frankie Belloli, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Tel: 020 8424 1263

Email: frankie.belloli@harrow.gov.uk