

Cabinet – 16 November 2023

Reference from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 November 2023

66. Youth Justice Plan

The Committee received the Annual Youth Justice Plan, in advance of it being presented to Cabinet on 16 November 2023. Cabinet be requested to recommend the Plan to Council for approval and note the submission of the report to the Youth Justice Board. Cabinet might also make suggestions to feed into next year's plan.

The Youth Justice Plan outlined the arrangements and planned priorities for the Harrow Youth Justice Partnership to deliver Youth Justice Services in Harrow.

The Committee requested that Portfolio Holders be invited to future meetings to respond to queries on the Administration's priorities.

In the discussion that ensued, Members raised questions and the following issues:

- What police resources were available from the Borough Command Unit, and whether they were sufficient for Harrow?
- What was the percentage rate of re-offending?;
- Whether the Harrow Youth Justice Service worked with the families of young people involved in crime, and whether resources were available to them, such as parenting classes;
- Why had the Wealdstone Action Group ceased operating and providing support in stopping knife crime?
- Why were knife crime and county line issues not referenced in the report?
- Whether over-crowding and unsuitable housing in Wealdstone could be addressed to reduce crime among the youth;
- Whilst the report had listed outputs, there seemed to be a gap in providing data on what was working well;
- What role could Harrow Councillors play in the Harrow Youth Justice Service;
- Whether Harrow Council met the remand costs;
- Citing page 45 of the report, how many cases were there per year;
- What trigger points resulted in the Harrow Youth Justice Service being involved in a young offender's life;
- What was the percentage of minority groups in care of the programme and how had that percentage changed over the years?

- In response to the questions, the officer advised as follows:
- The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) had provided Harrow with two officers with experience in youth justice. However, one had been seconded to Brent, and the replacement officer would be joining Harrow within the next few weeks;
- The re-offending rate among 16-18 year olds was around 22.2%. The data presented to the Committee showed that Harrow had a lower rate than statistical neighbours and the London and National averages.
- Harrow Youth Service worked with families of young offenders, and conducted home-visits to determine reasons behind offences and administer questionnaires. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100% from the young persons and 78% from their parents. However, the intervention with parents was voluntary and some did not wish to participate;
- Wealdstone Action Group had been a community action project involving residents, businesses and statutory partners. With regards to addressing street drinking, it had been successful, as the Holy Trinity Church had noticed a reduction in the disposal of empty beer cans from 100 to 20 per day within six months. Currently, the Youth Justice Service engaged a teacher to work with the youth and assist them into employment, education, and training. Furthermore, work on county lines was conducted through a joint partnership with Brent Council, and still operated on a “rescue and response” basis;
- Knife crime and county lines were still issues in Harrow, however, overall numbers had reduced. The detail of these were not in the report as they were part of the Community Safety reports, to which the Youth Service contributed;
- Housing still remained an issue in Harrow and was a city-wide problem. Whenever the Youth Service was alerted to a housing issue, efforts were made to re-house, particularly if it was gang related.
- The plan did not capture all details on what was working well but would seek to do so in future plans;
- Councillors could continue playing a significant role in promoting the idea that young offenders were “children” first and foremost. Any negative attitudes towards children being referred to as young offenders should be challenged. Councillors could also go on visits with Youth Justice Service officers. Another area to offer support was in facilitating secure premises in which to see children;
- Remand costs were met by Harrow Council. But these were partly refunded through grants;
- There were between 90 to 100 cases of youth offending per year;
- Harrow Youth Justice Service would get involved when there was a conviction by the courts or an admission to an offence in court. Being arrested did not necessarily lead to the Service being involved in a young person’s life. However, the strategic direction was to provide more early intervention and prevention work.
- There was a higher percentage of young black offenders than other ethnicities but that the percentages were substantially influenced by small changes due to the low number of cases. The percentage rate had remained similar over the past 2-3 years.

RESOLVED: To RECOMMEND (To Cabinet):

- 1) the Plan be noted; and the Committee's comments be
- 2) referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Reason For Recommendation

The establishment of a Youth Justice Service is a statutory requirement (Section 39 Crime and Disorder Act 1998). There are certain partners who must form part of the Multi-Disciplinary Team including Police, Probation, Education, Health and Social Work and others may form part of the team and partnership governing Board. The Youth Justice Board contributes a part of the budget required to fund such a service. However, the local authority and partners need to contribute additional resources to enable a suitable arrangement to fulfil the statutory duty. As such it is right and proper for the Council to approve and be assured that arrangements are suitable and effective in discharging its statutory duties.

The Safer Harrow (Community Safety Partnership) have received a specially arranged briefing regarding the aims and objectives of the Youth Justice Plan and it is agreed will receive quarterly updates on the progress of the Youth Justice Service in line with those provided to the Harrow Youth Justice Management Board. They will also be involved in considering the plan for 2024-25 which will be put to cabinet for approval rather than this one which is just for noting.

Options Considered

Establishing a Youth Justice System and the core composition of the professionals which must take part in such a system is a statutory requirement. (Section 39 Crime and Disorder Act 1998).

The priorities established are a matter of local discretion based on data reflecting types of reported crimes committed as well as local intelligence regarding what crimes may be being committed and which young people are at risk of committing them even though they are not at this point subject to a formal finding or admission of guilt.

The level of prevention and early intervention work is a judgement based on available resources and the ability to understand if prevention work is actually working. As by its nature one cannot report on prevention apart from through extrapolation of what was expected to happen but did not. Our data shows that our levels of reoffending (specifically the amount people committing reoffences) is decreasing overall. However, the overall smaller cohort are a more complex and entrenched group and the number of re-offences they commit reflects this.

Currently the service is mainly established on the basis of addressing the reported and admitted levels of crime. However, the service has awarded a small grant of around £50K per year starting in Autumn 2023 (until end of March 2025) specifically

to address children who have only been arrested once and not been otherwise involved in the criminal justice system to work with them so they do not get arrested or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system. From next year (April 2024) it may be an option to attempt to shift the resourcing towards this specific cohort of children to further reduce inequalities and support those children further in need to reduce their vulnerability to being involved in the criminal justice system.

However, for now there are no specific alternative options.

For Consideration

Background Documents:

Annual Youth Justice Plan - Report

Minute extract of Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 7 November 2023

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