

Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

Strategic plan 2019-2022

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Foreword

This year marks twenty years since the creation of the first youth offending teams (YOTs), and tremendous achievements have been made since then. In this time, the youth justice system has adapted and innovated to meet the shifting needs and offending behaviour of the cohort. My Board and I recognise that we must also adapt and innovate so we are able to support partners both strategically and operationally to improve children's lives.

We have worked to develop a new vision for a youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their own strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. We aim to prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims. We have reflected on how our work and statutory functions can contribute to making this vision a reality. For this, we know that we need to focus our efforts on a handful of priority areas, such as serious youth violence and improving local practice, where we know change is needed.

All of our work will be underpinned and guided by a child first, offender second principle, and I continue to be amazed by the commitment and dedication to this principle shown by those working with children in the youth justice system. I would like to pay tribute to the work they carry out daily to prioritise the needs of children who have so frequently been let down by other services. I look forward to continuing to work with them.

Context

The youth justice system has made significant progress since its creation in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and we continue to see year-on-year falls in those entering the system. The 12 months ending September 2018, saw an 18% fall in first time entrants (FTEs)¹ when compared with the previous year. This means there are fewer victims and more children have the chance to change, grow, learn and lead positive lives.

These continued falls are encouraging and illustrate the ongoing success of youth justice services and the practitioners who work to deliver them. However, falling FTEs tell only part of the story and should be no cause for complacency as the system faces a series of both ongoing and emerging challenges. Many of these now make up the YJB's priorities.

As the cohort of children in the system gets smaller it becomes more concentrated with children who have more complex needs (including health and education) and as a result, demonstrate challenging behaviours. This is evident by the high reoffending rate of this much smaller group, especially for those leaving custody.

We know the proportion of children entering the system for more serious and violent offences is increasing with possession of weapons and robbery on the rise². In particular, the high rate of knife crime is destroying families, communities and senselessly ending lives. In 2018, children committed 21% of all knife and offensive weapon offences³. There has been an increase⁴ in gangs and organised crime groups who use county lines to exploit those children who are particularly vulnerable or at a crisis point in their lives. These children frequently experience family breakdown, intervention by social services, looked after status, frequent missing episodes, behavioural and developmental disorders and exclusion from mainstream schooling. They have all too often been the victims of crime themselves, and, because of this, are deliberately targeted.

There remains a disproportionately high number of children from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds in the system. In 2017/18 black children were four times more likely than white children to be arrested⁵. While BAME children make

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-september-2018>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/knife-and-offensive-weapon-sentencing-statistics-october-to-december-2018>

⁴ <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2017-to-2018>

up 18% of the 10-17 general population, in the year ending September 2018⁶, BAME children made up a quarter of FTEs to the youth justice system⁷, and the most recent figures on custody population⁸ show that an average of 48% of children in custody are from BAME backgrounds⁹. This is particularly pronounced for black children who account for 16% of FTEs, and 28% of children in custody.

Despite a slight increase (3%) in the average youth custody population¹⁰ in 2017/18, provisional figures for 2018/19¹¹ show that the youth custody population is falling again (down 3%). In 2017/18¹², rates of proven assaults, self-harm and restrictive physical intervention (RPIs) all increased. Notably, 2017/2018 saw the first increase in the last decade, of the number of children held in custody on remand (19% increase). Those on remand made up nearly a quarter of all children in youth custody. The majority of children who were remanded at some point during court proceedings did not subsequently receive a custodial outcome.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-september-2018>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly>

⁸ Provisional data for April 2018-February 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-custody-data>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-custody-data>

¹⁰ Under 18 years of age only

¹¹ Provisional data for April 2018-February 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-custody-data>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2017-to-2018>

Who we are and what we stand for

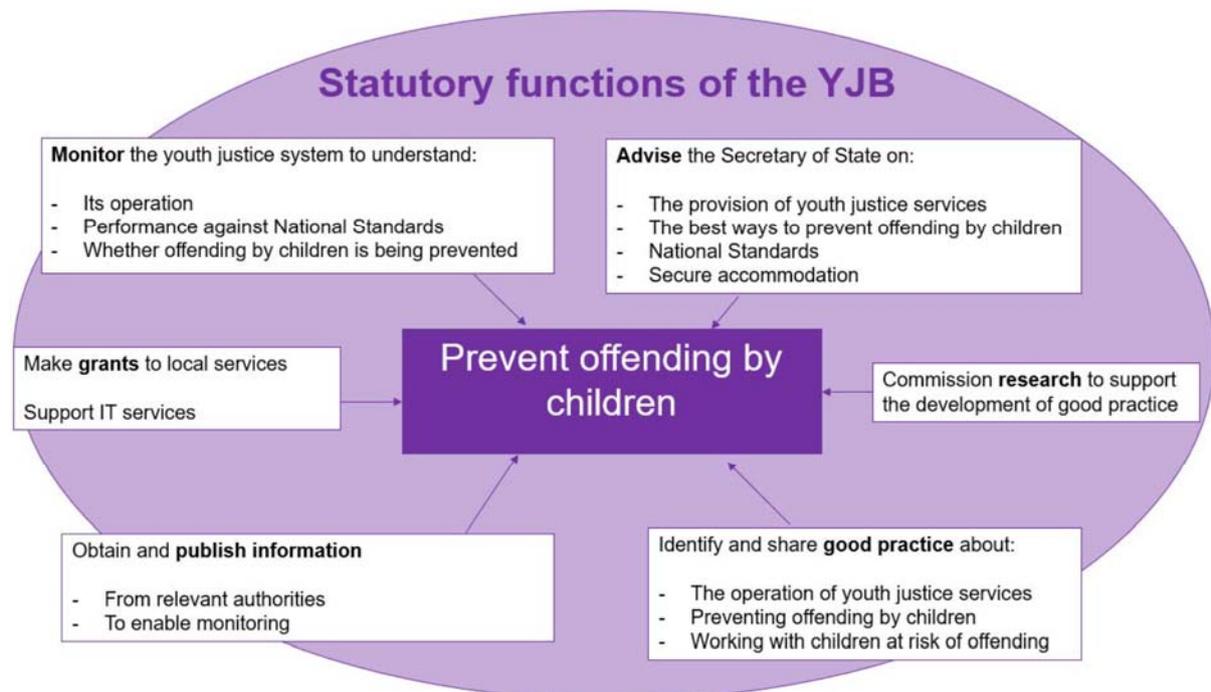
We are an independent public body¹³ appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice. We have experience in areas that are vital for effective youth justice: children's services, education, health, youth offending teams (YOTs), policing and academia.

Our vision is:

A youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. This will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims.

Our independence from government and parliament is central to our work and means we are able to provide objective evidence-based advice to ministers, drawing on all of our statutory functions (identified below), to achieve our vision.

The YJB is the only official body to have oversight of the whole youth justice system and so is uniquely placed to guide and advise on the provision of youth justice services.



¹³ The YJB was established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

What we stand for

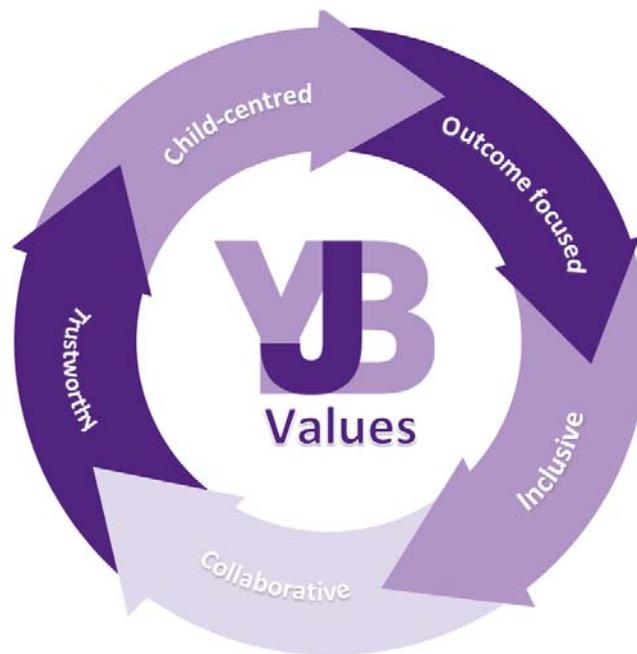
The YJB is committed to building a youth justice system that sees those in it as children first and offenders second. Since the YJB was created, our understanding of how to prevent offending, has moved beyond a focus on managing the risk posed by children who offend. We now understand the criminogenic effects of children's involvement in the justice system and the damage that this can cause. We recognise that treating children as children, rather than as potential offenders, is the best way to achieve sustained desistance. We are committed to looking beyond just the need to stop a child offending, working constructively to help children make positive contributions to society. This approach is needed now more than ever, as the system deals with increased child criminal exploitation and serious violence.

A *child first, offender second* approach means that all youth justice services:

1. Prioritise the best interests of children, recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential. All work is child-focused and developmentally informed.
2. Promote children's individual strengths and capacities as a means of developing their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.
3. Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work promotes desistance through co-creation with children.
4. Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

This is a positive approach and the Board is clear that this ethos sits at the heart of everything we do, from publishing guidance to advising ministers on how the youth justice system can respond to challenges by prioritising children's best interests.

YJB values



The YJB is

Child-centred – we make every effort to champion the needs of children wherever they are in the youth justice system and ensure we give them a voice. We strongly believe that children can, and should be given every opportunity to make positive changes.

Outcome focused – we provide leadership and expertise and promote effective practice across the youth justice workforce to maximise positive outcomes for children, their families and victims.

Inclusive – we strive to challenge discrimination and promote equality, and we work with others to try to eliminate bias in the youth justice system.

Collaborative – we actively encourage, facilitate and engage in partnership working to help meet the needs of children, their victims and their communities.

Trustworthy – we endeavour to act with integrity in everything we do.

Our strategic approach

Vision

A youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. This will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims.

Youth Justice System Aims

- Reduce the number of children in the youth justice system
- Reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system
- Improve the safety and wellbeing of children in the youth justice system
- Improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system

Work to achieve the Youth Justice System Aims and our priorities

- Advising Ministers
- Leading and overseeing the youth justice system
- Promoting innovation
- Supporting and influencing the delivery of services
- Establishing an evidence base
- Organisational effectiveness

Priorities

1. Improving Local Practice
2. Resettlement & Transitions
3. Safety & Education in Custody
4. BAME Disproportionality
5. Reducing Serious Youth Violence
6. Secure Schools



Youth Justice System Aims

To deliver our vision, we must work towards the following aims:

- reduce the number of children in the youth justice system
- reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system
- improve the safety and wellbeing of children in the youth justice system
- improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system.

Recognising that the solutions to reducing children offending do not lie within the justice system alone is key to delivering these aims. To transform the lives of children who are in contact with the system, there must be recognition of the many complex needs that some will have. These include learning and mental health difficulties. Many of these children will also have been victims of crime themselves. In order to address these needs, it is essential that close and effective collaboration between HM Government departments, Welsh Government, local government and services takes place.

The YJB convenes the Youth Justice System Oversight Group (YJSOG) on a quarterly basis, bringing together the Ministry of Justice, the Youth Custody Service (within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service), other Government Departments in England and the Welsh Government. The YJSOG scrutinises the youth justice system's progress against the Youth Justice System Aims to assess performance and recommend improvements, enhance opportunities for join-up between services and ensure that there are better outcomes for children that come into contact with their services.

Priorities Programme

The Priorities Programme will focus on areas identified by the Board where we want to deliver against the Youth Justice System Aims and achieve better outcomes for children. The YJB intends to address its priorities through a programme of work which:

- demonstrates tangible, sustainable improvement
- is guided by our *child first, offender second* principle
- engages with partners in scoping and delivering projects
- influences system improvement and innovation at both strategic and operational level.

The Board has identified the following as priorities:

- improving local practice
- resettlement and transitions
- safety and education in custody
- BAME disproportionality
- reducing serious youth violence
- Secure Schools.

Improving local practice

Why does it matter?

Children's experience of youth justice is primarily through locally delivered services and requires the effective co-operation of agencies, including:

- youth offending teams (YOTs)
- health
- education
- local authorities
- policing
- probation
- youth custodial services
- wider children's services.

The YJB aims to create an environment that enables youth justice services to:

- prioritise children's best interests
- constructively promote children's potential
- support positive desistance and be strengths-based
- encourage children's active engagement
- minimise damage to children that contact with the criminal justice system can often cause.

Our work in this area will focus improvement of the following aspects of practice:

- out-of-court disposals
- trauma informed practice
- sector-led improvement
- assessment and information sharing

How will we achieve it?

Out-of-court disposals

We have completed a review of out-of-court Disposals (OOCs), including a review of current, sector-facing guidance, to identify opportunities for improvement. Our approach is three-fold:

- improve the flow of information between police and local authorities
- support the improvement of practice and the consistency of local authorities' offer for children receiving OOCs
- improve our understanding and oversight of this part of the system so that we have a clear picture of the volumes and types of activity underway to support OOC.

In terms of improving practice, we intend to provide guidance on screening and how assessment should be conducted.

Trauma informed practice

We are supporting the implementation of Enhanced Case Management (ECM), which is a form of trauma informed practice, in South West England and Wales. We will evaluate this practice and consider its suitability for further roll out. We are also reviewing trauma informed practice in use across local areas and will use this knowledge along with existing evidence and our learning from ECM to identify what further steps we can take to support the expansion of this practice. In particular, we are considering how existing approaches to trauma-informed practice align with and promote the YJB's *child first, offender second principle* and our priorities programme.

Sector-led improvement

We intend to build on existing sector-led improvement by introducing Pathfinder local authorities to develop and promote good practice and innovation across the system

either focussed on strong local service delivery or on good practice in respect to our priorities.

Assessment and information sharing

AssetPlus is the YJB's approved assessment and planning framework. It promotes consistency in practice across the youth justice system and provides enhanced connectivity: YOT to YOT; and YOT to secure estate. We intend to review the efficacy of AssetPlus and facilitate the exploration of complementary and/or alternative assessment models with a view to confirming or amending the approach to assessment and information sharing within the youth justice system.

What does success look like?

Out-of-court disposals

Information flow between police and YOTs will be secure, complete and timely, and the quality of sector practice will be enhanced. This means children will receive a consistent OOCd offer which responds to individual needs.

Trauma informed practice

Child first, offender second trauma informed practice will be evident in local services and will:

- improve children's resilience to trauma
- improve social outcomes e.g. relations with others, engagement with services and activities
- reduce offending and reoffending
- reduce incidences of non-engagement and breach
- reduce entry to custody
- improve resettlement outcomes
- improve transitions from youth to adult services
- strengthen multi agency working

Sector-led improvement

Innovative approaches from Pathfinder local authorities will inform and influence the development and delivery of practice across both England and Wales, thus improving the offer to children at local level.

Assessment and information sharing

We will either have confirmed the existing approach to assessment and information sharing or published an alternative approach that ensures the right people have the right information to support, understand and make the best decisions for children.

Resettlement and transitions

Why does it matter?

By the very definition and nature of custody, children within the secure estate are some of the most vulnerable in our society. The behaviour of these children often holds greatest impact for the communities in which they live.

For these very reasons resettlement of children from custody is a priority, to ensure they and their communities are given the very best chance of a positive future and do not reoffend.

Despite several resettlement support initiatives, outcomes for children leaving custody remain relatively poor. Inspectors have highlighted that these children are generally not being provided with what they need to achieve positive outcomes and lead crime free lives.

However, there is now an established evidence base for effective resettlement support. The YJB will work with youth justice partners, both locally and centrally, to translate the evidence base for effective resettlement into both policy and practice. If we can unblock barriers and improve understanding in local and national government of good resettlement, we will support the development of better policy and practice. This will improve outcomes for children and the communities in which they live.

How will we achieve it?

The YJB has published [How to make resettlement constructive](#) which outlines a new evidence-based approach called “Constructive Resettlement”. Within this approach, the clear overall role for all agencies (in policy and in practice) is to work collaboratively with a child to build on his or her strengths and goals to help them shift their identity from pro-offending to pro-social. The framework to facilitate the child’s identity shift involves both personal support to guide the shift and structural support to enable the shift. The approach also involves five evidence-based principles for effective resettlement support:

1. Constructive – strengths based, and future-focused on identity shift and empowering positive choices.
2. Co-created – inclusive of the child, their family and supporters at every stage.
3. Customised – individualised wraparound support, incorporating diversity.
4. Consistent – all agencies focused on resettlement from the start, enabling seamless transitions.
5. Co-ordinated – managed widespread partnership across agencies and sectors.

Our aim is that this approach to resettlement is routinely taken for children in every secure establishment in England and Wales. To achieve this aim, the following workstreams have been established:

- ensure appropriate measures to monitor progress in resettlement
- ensure policy approaches consistent with Constructive Resettlement
- embed practice aligned to Constructive Resettlement

- identify and address structural issues that act as barriers to the implementation of Constructive Resettlement.
- addressing barriers to resettlement and transitions for specific groups

What does success look like?

We will have succeeded when Constructive Resettlement is being routinely provided for children who have been in custody, both during their time in custody and following release. We will consider it routine when the majority of children resettling from custody have experienced an approach consistent with Constructive Resettlement. This means children's resettlement will be prioritised from the point of entry into custody in a consistent and coordinated way across services. Children will co-create their customised resettlement plans, which will build upon their strengths and they will be provided with the individualised personal and structural support to develop their pro-social identity and achieve positive outcomes.

Safety and education in custody

Why does it matter?

The secure estate accommodates a high proportion of children with complex needs and difficult behaviours. This has presented a number of challenges within the secure estate, including increasing levels of violence and self-harm. Furthermore, the safety of children in the estate has been the focus of recent public debate and scrutiny. For example, in February 2017, the Chief Inspector of Prisons wrote to ministers to highlight that in his view *'there was not a single establishment...in England and Wales in which it was safe to hold children and young people'*.

This opinion was shared by the Youth Custody Improvement Board who had expressed similar views, stating that they considered the secure estate was on the *'edge of coping'*.

We share these concerns, and while the YJB is not accountable for the day-to-day management of the secure estate, it has a role to have oversight of the youth justice system, provide advice to ministers and promote good practice. Furthermore, the YJB is committed to supporting improvements to the safety and wellbeing of children within the youth justice system, which is also one of the youth justice system aims.

Our aim is to see an overall improvement in the safety and education of children within the secure estate.

How will we achieve it?

We will ensure our oversight of the system, including the secure estate is fit for purpose and that we understand emerging issues, strategic themes and areas of best practice. We will use this to inform our engagement with the Youth Custody Service (YCS) and, ultimately, our advice to ministers.

We will use our Board's expertise to support improvements in outcomes for children in secure settings and to provide advice to ministers on how outcomes for children in the secure estate can be improved.

Additionally, the YJB will offer its expertise and advice to key partners, including the YCS and Ministry of Justice (MoJ), to help enable improvements in safety and education in custody to be achieved.

What does success look like?

We will have succeeded when the levels of assault, self-harm and the number of restrictive physical interventions have reduced. There will be improved relationships between children and adults in the secure estate. Children will report feeling safer in custodial settings, and their views will be consistently identified, listened to and positively acted upon.

BAME disproportionality

Why does it matter?

The Lammy Review¹⁴ identified that when it came to the treatment of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals in the criminal justice system, the youth justice system was the area of biggest concern. More must be done to tackle this issue. We want to reduce the overall representation of BAME children in the youth justice system.

The YJB aims to:

1. **improve trustworthiness** in the youth justice system, increase trust from the BAME community for the criminal justice system
2. develop effective **prevention and diversion**
3. improve **positive outcomes** for BAME children

BAME children are disproportionately represented in almost every part of the youth justice system, and that disproportionality continues throughout the system where it is highest for children in custody. This is a critical concern to the YJB suggesting that children may not be receiving equal treatment due to their ethnicity.

We expect that our work will have beneficial impact on all areas of disproportionality, such as that experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

How we will achieve it?

While we will support system wide change where opportunities are available, we will focus our effort on the first point of contact with police and the entry points to the youth justice system up to and including stop and search, arrest, charge, etc.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf

The Lammy Review recommended that each agency identify disproportionality within their system and either ‘explain’ why that disproportionality exists ‘or reform’ to address it. We will use our Journey of the Child to highlight disproportionality within the system and will consider publishing annually each agency’s response to that disproportionality.

We will apply a pathfinder concept to develop and disseminate practice that can help reduce disproportionality at key decision points affecting children. Our toolkits are being used to help YOTs identify and address disproportionality, and we will review the use of these toolkits and implement improvements.

Disproportionality starts earlier than children’s first contact with the criminal justice system and therefore we will seek to influence issues such as employability, and the place of sport as a means of building on the strengths of black children to help them to desist from harmful behaviour.

What does success look like?

The Relative Rate Index¹⁵ at key decision points in the Journey of the Child will be consistently narrowing.

Reducing serious youth violence

Why does it matter?

The harm caused to communities and victims because of serious violence is extreme and so, taking account of this harm and the proportionate increase in serious violence the YJB has decided to prioritise serious youth violence. Children are being killed, seriously injured, exploited and traumatised, and as a result, are not able to realise their full potential. This is a complex issue with county lines, serious organised crime, children’s vulnerability and their exploitation all having a bearing on the levels of offending.

The YJB’s aim is to see a sustainable reduction in serious youth violence in the cohort of local authorities in the top quartile of serious youth violence for at least three of four periods, and a reduction in the number of children being exploited through involvement with county lines.

How will we achieve it?

We have instituted a reference group of 13 YOTs drawn from this cohort and supported them in their practice, we intend to work closely with them to learn what is effective. We will produce good practice information, drawn from:

- YJB knowledge of good practice
- analyses of information relevant to serious violence
- work with a reference group of YOTs

¹⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663385/technical-guide-statistics-race-cjs-2017.pdf

- expertise of third sector organisations

There are characteristics of serious youth violence that are dynamic and rapidly changing. We are reviewing how we will share information as we believe that some of it needs to be rapidly communicated so that practitioners can adapt their approach. We will ensure that we have a communication approach that meets this need.

We will develop and share a toolkit designed to help YOTs address serious youth violence, this is likely to be in two steps with interim good practice guidance and information completed in 2019 and then refined for the following year to produce a toolkit. As we develop the toolkit, we will share our findings so they can be accessed more widely by local authorities.

Serious violence and county lines are cross government concerns and we will strengthen our working with agencies such as the National Crime Agency to ensure we have as much impact as possible.

What does success look like?

Serious youth violence will have reduced in the cohort of local authorities assessed by the YJB in 2018 to have the highest persistent serious youth violence, and a reduction in the number of children being exploited through involvement with county lines.

Secure Schools

Why does it matter?

Charlie Taylor's review of the youth justice system championed placing education at the heart of youth custody through the creation of Secure Schools. Secure Schools are envisaged to be smaller custodial establishments of up to 60-70 places located in the regions that they serve. Such schools would bring together essential services (education, health and offender desistance programmes) to support the rehabilitation of children in custody.

In responding to the report, the government endorsed the vision for Secure Schools and committed to piloting the approach through the development of two secure schools in strategic locations: one in the North West of England; and one in the South East using existing free schools' legislation. The YJB believes that Secure Schools are essential to obtain a step change in the effectiveness of custody and therefore is prioritising Secure Schools with the aim of supporting the Ministry of Justice to successfully deliver the first Secure School in 2020.

How will we achieve it?

The YJB will use its influence with stakeholders and ministers and lend its knowledge and expertise to support YCS, MoJ and colleagues deliver the pilot.

What does success look like?

The first Secure School will be successfully operating at its intended capacity, and lead the way for a network of schools. Children will be viewed as children first, offenders second and supported in their journey towards a positive future. Children

will receive enhanced services whilst in custody and following release to secure the best outcomes.

The YJB Business Plan 19/20 sets out in detail the activity we will take forward under each of these priorities in the coming year.

We will continue to horizon-scan the youth justice landscape, engage with key partners at both operational and strategic level and take into account the views of children. Where necessary, we will develop our priorities on the basis of this information to respond to emerging issues and opportunities.

How we achieve our priorities and the Youth Justice System Aims

Through the activity set out below, we work to deliver our priorities and the system aims.

Advising ministers

We will use our unique independent statutory position to advise ministers on the operation of the youth justice system, ranging from advice on the current state of the system and future strategic direction to a focus on innovative practice or the performance of individual parts of the system. Our advice will enable ministers to use their influence and cross-government levers to improve performance across the system, recognising that to bring about real change for children requires a multi-agency approach both locally and strategically.

Our advice will be based upon sound evidence, and informed by our knowledge of the wider sector. It will be guided by our *child first, offender second* principle, and will set out the likely impact on children. Wherever possible, it will be informed by their views.

Overseeing the youth justice system

We will maintain our revised data-led, outcome focused oversight arrangements, enhancing our scrutiny to ensure children are provided with the right support to change their lives around. This means examining the performance of individual services, through our Performance Oversight Board, and the system as a whole, through the Youth Justice System Oversight Group.

We will continue to horizon-scan the youth justice landscape and use our intelligence and expertise to provide advice to ministers on emerging challenges and opportunities.

Supporting and influencing the delivery of services

Promoting innovation

Promoting innovation is essential to enabling the youth justice system to evolve and address both existing and emerging challenges. We have a renewed focus on supporting innovation and will work to identify and share examples of good practice developed by the sector through mechanisms such as the annual Youth Justice Convention, the Youth Justice Resource Hub, Youth Justice Sector Improvement Programme and Effective Practice Fora.

Improving performance

Where data and other information suggests that a service's performance is deteriorating, we will work with strategic leads for local services to escalate concerns about performance so that they can take action to improve. We will provide

additional support for those services unable to demonstrate the capacity for self-improvement and we will work with strategic partners who may also be involved in supporting improvements to wider services.

Through our oversight of the system, we will identify how poor performance can be learned from and will work with others to put measures in place to prevent such situations from reoccurring.

We will use our grant provision to support the delivery of frontline services.

Establishing an evidence base

We will establish a sound evidence base for our work by collecting, analysing and making intelligent use of data and other sources of information about how the system is operating. We will continue to provide transparency of the youth justice system through the publication of annual statistics and quarterly performance data, and to commission research to enrich our understanding of the system and our priorities.

We will work with local services to increase links between local youth justice services and academic and research bodies, so that the evidence base for good practice in youth justice can be stimulated and increased and shared by those providing services, for those providing services.

Organisational effectiveness

Our work must be underpinned and supported by excellent corporate functions, including: finance; organisational development; communications; engagement; and risk and assurance. We will develop these functions to ensure we are able to maximise our impact, and, ultimately, improve outcomes for children.