

Youth Justice Board for England and Wales Strategic Plan 2015–18

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1. Foreword

It is now 15 years since the first multi-agency youth justice services were introduced thereby laying the foundations for the youth justice system we have today. I am immensely proud of the achievements of the youth justice system since then and the statistics speak for themselves. The number of first-time entrants has reduced 75% in the last decade. Similarly, the number of young people in custody has reduced 56% over the same time period. Reoffending has also fallen dramatically; the overall recorded number of proven offences by young people has reduced by 68% since 2003/04 with fewer young people reoffending, and fewer victims as a result. The 12 month reoffending rate has proven more stubborn remaining at about 35% for several years.

These achievements have been hard won. The youth offending team (YOT) model based on multi-agency teams overseen locally have been fundamental in achieving these successes. This approach is based on the clear principle that offending and re-offending by children and young people cannot be solved by one agency alone, and that strong partnerships across a number of statutory health, social care and justice agencies locally are a pre-requisite.

The YJB itself has helped to lead this system, and continues to oversee and monitor youth justice services in the community and custody. This national leadership has brought a stability and coherence to the system that was hitherto absent.

The challenges ahead, however, are plentiful. We know that public resources will continue to be scarce, and that we will have to deliver additional savings. This must be done in a way that does not jeopardise the successes of the system.

These financial pressures come at a time when the cohort and profile of those in the justice system have changed. While the number of young people who reoffend has fallen, those who reoffend have on average longer criminal histories, and more young people in the system display a range of complex health, emotional and safeguarding needs.

Within the overall reduction in numbers in the youth justice system, we still see significant over-representation of black and minority ethnic groups – particularly in custody and on remand. In addition, we know that children who are – or have previously been – looked-after are over-represented in the youth justice system when compared to their peers.

Increasingly, young people in the youth justice system are affiliated to gangs which, in turn, is linked to other crimes such as sexual exploitation, drug offences and organised crime. When these young people are held together in custodial settings they can present particular challenges and levels of violence in some establishments are worryingly high. Sadly, many young people caught up in these negative cycles have been victims themselves.

We will only be able to address future challenges if services concentrate their efforts 'upstream' to address needs at an early stage and prevent children and young people being drawn into the system in the first place. There is, in addition, a clear need for upskilling staff to deliver more intensive and targeted work to address the underlying causes of entrenched offending behaviour.

The YJB's strategic plan outlines how the YJB will support the youth justice system to continue to work effectively with young people in trouble with the law. The development of a new vision and mission statement with the child at its centre provides a focussed framework to prioritise the YJB's efforts.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who works with children and young people to try to prevent offending and reoffending. Please feel assured that the YJB will continue to support your endeavours.

Lin Hinnigan

Chief Executive

Youth Justice Board

April 2015

2. Understanding the Youth Justice Board

1.1 Who we are and what we stand for

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is a non-departmental public body,¹ created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to lead and support the operation of the youth justice system. The Act defines the principal aim of the youth justice system as being to prevent offending by children and young people. Our starting point is that every child in England and Wales should be able to live a life free from the impact of crime – whether as a victim or perpetrator.

Vision statement

Every child and young person lives a safe and crime-free life, and makes a positive contribution to society.

Our vision has children and young people at its heart. Our work contributes to preventing children and young people becoming offenders or victims of crime, and to mitigating the impact of crime on families, communities and victims. Our statutory powers, outlined in Table 1 below, enable us to lead the youth justice system, as well as to oversee and monitor its operation.

We receive the majority of our funding from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ),² which is responsible for setting our budget and formulating the overall youth justice policy framework within which we operate.

Our Board members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice. The Board has corporate responsibility for setting the YJB's strategic objectives, which are agreed with the Secretary of State for Justice. It also has responsibility for ensuring that we deliver our agreed objectives and for promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources.

Our Board members are drawn from a variety of backgrounds, and have a diverse range of experience and knowledge in areas relevant to youth justice. This includes first-hand experience of service delivery in local authority, voluntary sector and other youth services, as well as policing, judiciary, education and health services. Our Board provides us with unique access to partner organisations and opportunities to work collaboratively to improve service delivery.

¹ A non-departmental public body is defined as a “body which has a role in the processes of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm’s length from ministers”. See: <https://www.gov.uk/public-bodies-reform>.

² We also receive a small amount of funding from the Home Office and the Welsh Government (for Wales-specific activities).

Table 1: Summary of the YJB’s statutory functions

Lead the youth justice system	Monitor and oversee the youth justice system
<p>Advise the Secretary of State on the operation of the youth justice system, including setting National Standards.</p> <p>Commission the secure estate and secure escort services for young people.³</p> <p>Identify, make known and promote good practice in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the operation of the youth justice system and the provision of youth justice services• the prevention of offending by children and young people• working with children and young people who have offended or are at risk of offending. <p>Commission research and publish information on youth justice issues.</p>	<p>Monitor the operation of the youth justice system and the provision of youth justice services both in the community and in secure establishments.</p> <p>Monitor the extent to which the aims of the youth justice system are being achieved, and compliance with National Standards.</p> <p>Make grants, with the approval of the Secretary of State, to local authorities or other bodies for them to develop good practice.</p> <p>Determine in which secure accommodation a young person is to serve their period of detention (placement function).⁴</p>

1.2 What do we do?

The creation of the YJB was a response to growing dissatisfaction at the dysfunctional and uncoordinated approach to youth offending at both local and national levels. As a result of the reforms introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and in particular the establishment of the YJB as a non-departmental public body, we are uniquely placed to provide leadership and coherence to the complex and previously fragmented youth justice system in England and Wales. Our wide-ranging statutory functions and the wide skill-set of our Board enable us to support the youth justice system to meet the specific needs of children and young people and to protect the public.

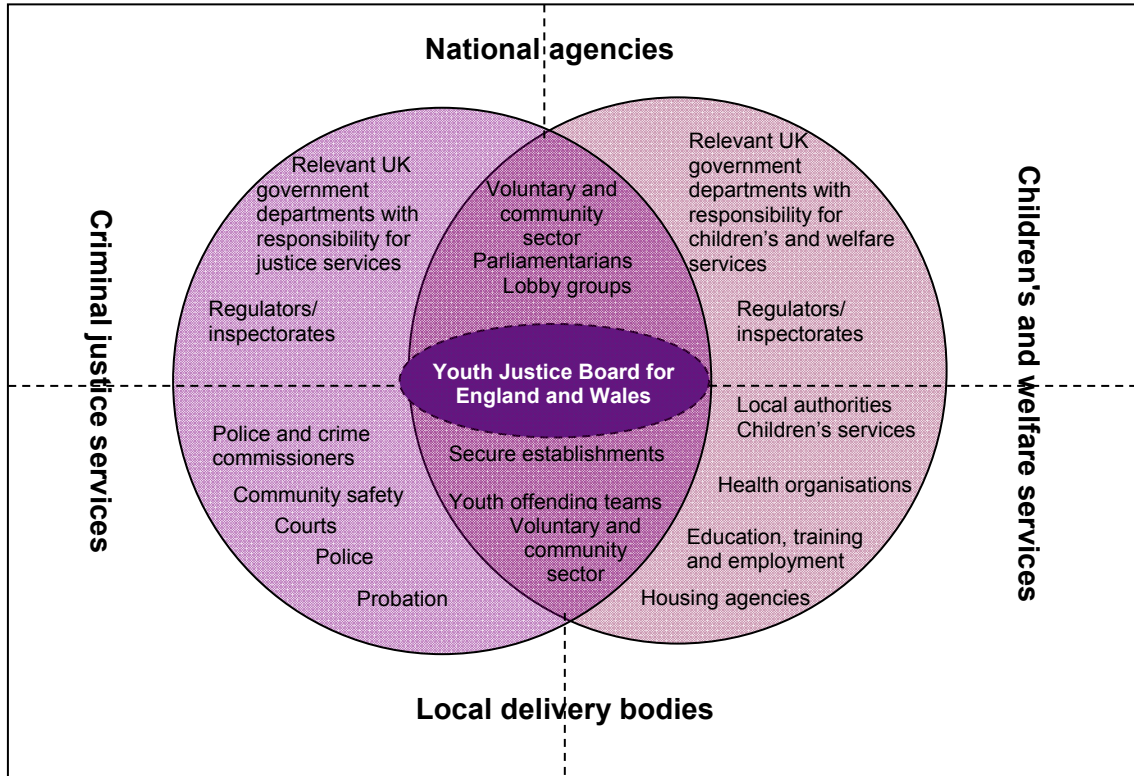
We provide funding directly to youth justice services in the community (via our grant-making function) in order to shape and develop good practice. Our commissioning powers for secure services enable us to take a direct role in shaping the provision of services for young people in custody. We also provide advice and support to national agencies with specific responsibilities for justice as well as wider responsibilities for children’s services.

³ Outlined in the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales Order 2000.

⁴ Also outlined in the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales Order 2000.

In addition, we work directly with local delivery bodies with responsibilities for youth justice (for example youth offending teams (YOTs)) and children’s welfare (for example directors of children’s services). Our ability to engage with local areas enables us to maintain a focus on the continuous performance improvement of youth justice services in the community and the secure estate.

Figure 1: The youth justice delivery landscape



2. The YJB's role in tackling offending by children and young people

In response to the successes of the youth justice system, especially the stark reduction in the number of young people in the system, we have reviewed our strategic priorities for the next three years. In addition to developing a vision statement, we have also developed a new mission statement. Our mission statement outlines how we will achieve our vision.

YJB mission statement

Developing and championing a **child-centred and distinct youth justice system**, in which a designated youth justice service keeps children and young people safe and addresses the age-specific needs of the child, to the benefit of the community.

Developing a '**centre of excellence approach**' in youth justice which will support innovation by using and interpreting available evidence to support the delivery of youth justice services in custody and the community. Also more effectively drawing on the contribution of academic institutions and other relevant bodies.

Driving continuous improvement in youth justice services delivered in custody and the community through our robust monitoring system and by identifying and promoting best practice.

2.1 Measuring our success

We measure the performance of the youth justice system against three main outcomes: first-time entrants to the criminal justice system, rate of reoffending, and the use of custody. Supporting youth justice services to improve delivery in these three areas is the starting point for planning our activities.

2.2 Delivering our mission statement

Our mission statement provides a helpful framework to structure and prioritise our work. The strategic objectives outlined below describe the immediate actions we will take to fulfil our mission and achieve our vision.

Championing a child-centred and distinct youth justice system

Why is this a focus area?

Reducing offending by children and young people requires approaches which address age-specific needs and characteristics. This is underpinned by obligations under the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to which the UK Government has due regard and which requires the operation of a youth justice system which is distinct from that for adults.

In Wales, the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 strengthened and built on the rights-based approach of the Welsh Government. It placed a duty on all Welsh ministers to have due regard to the substantive rights and obligations within the UNCRC and its optional protocols.

What do we want to achieve?

Over the course of the next three years, a small number of strategic objectives will allow us to continue our efforts to effectively develop and oversee a youth justice system that is child-centred in its focus and distinct from adult services.

Strategic objective 1 (2015–18)

Oversee the delivery of distinct youth justice services which deliver against the three youth justice outcomes (first-time entrants to the criminal justice system, rate of reoffending, and the use of custody), as well as ensuring the safety of children and young people.

Strategic objective 2 (2015–18)

Maximise our influence on the work of key partners nationally and locally to contribute to the effective delivery of distinct youth justice services in the community and the secure estate.

Strategic objective 3 (2015–18)

Work with the Welsh Government to adapt the youth justice system to reflect the policy context of a devolved government and the commitments outlined in our joint strategy '[Children and Young People First](#)'.

Developing a centre of excellence approach

Why is this a focus area?

To act as an effective leader of the youth justice system, we need to speak authoritatively about the existing evidence base and to find ways of embedding good practice in frontline services. This will maximise positive outcomes for young people who come into contact with the justice system.

What do we want to achieve?

We believe there is scope to improve the way in which we exercise our statutory functions to commission research and to identify, make known, and promote good practice. We want to use evidence and our understanding of good practice to support frontline practitioners and services to improve the way they work with young people in trouble with the law.

We also want to draw on the available evidence base to determine our own actions and priorities. This will enable us to speak authoritatively on the key issues facing young people in the justice system.

Strategic objective 4 (2015–18)

Develop a more holistic and responsive approach to the way in which we exercise our statutory functions to commission research and promote good practice, and improve our capability to build, translate and disseminate the evidence base across the sector.

Driving continuous improvement

Why is this a focus area?

Youth justice services in the community and the secure estate have already achieved remarkable successes. The number of first-time entrants to the youth justice system and the number of children and young people sentenced or remanded to custody have reduced significantly in recent years. The number of first-time entrants has fallen by 81% since its peak level in the 12 months to March 2007.⁵ The number of young people in custody has fallen by 68.7% since the peak custody figure in October 2002.⁶

The YJB has supported the delivery of these achievements by monitoring the performance of youth justice services and using its statutory powers to support youth justice services that under-perform. We need to find ways to sustain and improve on these successes in the context of continuing budgetary pressures.

In contrast to the significant reductions in first-time entrants and numbers in custody, reoffending rates have remained broadly static, with an increase of 4.0 percentage points since 2002.⁷ It is imperative that we find ways to address reoffending by children and young people. We also need to establish and sustain cross-departmental alliances in areas such as mental health, looked-after children, troubled families, employment and resettlement.

What do we want to achieve?

Over the course of the next three years, a small number of strategic objectives will enable us to continue our drive for performance improvement across youth justice services in the community and the secure estate.

⁵ See *Criminal Justice Statistics* for the 12 months to March 2015, available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-march-2015>.

⁶ In July 2015, the number of young people under the age of 18 in custody was 1,003, down by 68.7% since the peak custody figure of 3,200 in October 2002. See *Youth Custody Report: July 2015*, available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-custody-data.

⁷ During the same period, the number of reoffenders has fallen by 62% and the number of reoffences by 65%. See *Proven Re-offending Statistics Quarterly Bulletin: October 2012 to September 2013, England and Wales* (Ministry of Justice Statistics Bulletin), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449514/proven-reoffending-oct12-sep13.pdf

Strategic objective 5 (2015–18)

Make better use of our systems of data collection and analysis to inform the continuous improvement of youth justice services, with a specific focus on reducing reoffending. The YJB will continue to press for more efficient and effective transfer of data so that those making decisions about a child's welfare have the fullest and most up-to-date information on which to base those decisions.

Strategic objective 6 (2015–18)

Make better use of existing statutory powers to improve the performance of youth justice services in the community and the secure estate, with a specific focus on reducing reoffending. As part of this objective, we will ensure that the facts and statistics about reoffending are clearly published and fully understood by decision makers.