

Youth Crime Action Plan (CSN)

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Overview

The Youth Crime Action Plan is a comprehensive, cross government analysis of what the Government thinks is needed to tackle youth crime. It plans to use a 'triple track' approach to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour, which includes enforcement; support and challenge; and prevention. The Plan came out for consultation in July and responses are sought by 17 October 2008 from local authorities and other interested parties.

Although, overall rates of crimes committed by juvenile offenders have held steady, each year around 100,000 people between the ages of 10 and 17 enter the criminal justice system for the first time. The new action plan aims to reduce this rate by one-fifth by 2020. The Government expects to accomplish this through a comprehensive package of tough enforcement and intensive prevention measures, as well as more support for parents.

The role of Children's Trusts and local authorities

Earlier Government proposals to strengthen Children's Trusts (see 'Related briefings') are intended to lead to greater integration of children's services, which in turn is expected to help to prevent crime and trigger earlier intervention. Local authorities are identified as having a key role in implementing the Youth Crime Action Plans. Better information sharing is also key to integrated working and this too is set out in the Children's Plan (see 'Related briefings'). An important milestone will be the implementation of Targeted Youth Support arrangements in local authorities by December 2008 which will see integrated services targeting children and young people who are at risk more effectively.

The plan calls for local authorities to fund and commission the education of young offenders in custody and to help support a more comprehensive package of support for young people leaving custody, as well as facilitating access to suitable accommodation and health services for all young offenders leaving custody.

This briefing will be of particular interest to councillors, officers and others in local authorities with responsibility for community safety; schools; and youth services. Other partners of Children's Trusts will find it relevant as well as third sector organisations working with children's services.

Briefing in full

Chapter 1: Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The Government plans to use a 'triple track' approach to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour, which includes enforcement; support and challenge; and prevention. Plans for the future of policing have been released in a separate Green Paper (see 'Related links'), but in the short term the Government is introducing a range of strategies to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

Immediate strategies

Tackle peer-driven delinquent behaviour by ensuring the police and local partners use their existing powers to maximum effect to include:

- more searches and search equipment to help take weapons of the streets and prosecutions more likely for those carrying a knife
- using Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABCs) and Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)
- confiscation of alcohol from under-18s in public places
- expelling over-16s from a place for up to 48 hours
- extending the use of restorative approaches that brings perpetrator and victim together to apologise and agree on next steps with a view to nipping anti-social behaviour in the bud.

Using street-based teams of youth workers and ex-gang members to provide positive influences and deter young people who are 'peer offenders' involved in criminal and anti-social behaviour, rather than serious offenders. Local authorities are encouraged to offer this outreach in partnership with police.

Expanding Operation Staysafe which involves police removing children and young people from the street late at night to a safe place. Wider guidance for Local Safeguarding Children's Boards will be consulted on later in the year.

Basing Youth Offending Team (YOT) Workers in police stations to take action quickly at the time of arrest.

Using after school police patrols to help address anti-social behaviour and facilitating information sharing between the Youth Taskforce, police, local authorities and schools to identify trouble-spots.

Cross agency working to identify prolific young offenders to identify those most at risk of re-offending.

Using the 'prevent and deter' approach to prevent young people from offending in the first instance and to deter others from re-offending. A greater focus on the 'deter' group will be supported by the upcoming Youth Justice Board/Communities and Local Government Counting Rules 2008/09.

Chapter 2: Intervening early

Around one in twenty youth offenders become prolific and serious offenders that commit half of all youth crime. Some children are particularly vulnerable and consequently are at greater risk of offending. Factors such as child maltreatment, IQ of the mother, IQ of the child, parent convicted of crime, ADHD diagnosis of the child and low socio-economic status are all risk factors that significantly differentiate high rate from infrequent offenders. Early intervention is therefore essential in order to prevent children from becoming high-rate offenders in the future.

The Government intends to provide funding and expert support for all of the 110,000 families with children at high risk of becoming prolific offenders. This will require closer partnership between children's and adult service providers, who should 'think family' and specifically target primary school aged children (see the second 'Think Family' briefing in 'Related briefings').

Children's Trusts

The Children's Plan, Dec 2007, (see 'Related Briefings') has already emphasised the need for Children's Trusts, partnerships between local authorities and key public agencies such as police, health, schools, YOTs and third sector organisations to forge integrated services which use early intervention and prevention. The proposals to strengthen Children's Trusts (see 'Related Briefings') will lead them to play a key role in implementing the Youth Crime Action Plan.

Robust information sharing

Information sharing is key to integrated working and the Children's Plan set a goal for every Children's Trust to have in place by 2010 high quality arrangements to provide assessment under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). An important milestone will be the implementation of Targeted Youth Support arrangements in local authorities by December 2008 which will see integrated services following these principles and targeting children and young people who are risk more effectively.

Existing initiatives

These include:

- the new duty on local authorities to ensure that young people can engage in positive activities in their areas (for the Aiming High Strategy briefing see 'Related briefings')
- giving young people power to design and plan these activities
- investment through the Myplace programme to improve youth facilities.

Further developments

- The Safer Schools Partnerships (SSPs) will be expanded and every school will have a named police contact.
- Parenting interventions will be increased and the aim is for all parents who need support to get it. Intensive family interventions will be targeted on those children and families most at risk.

- The Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) aims to support successful third sector organisations to expand their work with at risk children and young people. An invitation for bids will be issued soon.
- More Family Nurse Partnerships to support vulnerable families in the early years, which are currently being piloted across ten sites in the UK.
- Permanent exclusion is a major factor in many children becoming prolific criminals. It is essential therefore that those who are excluded from school receive the services they need to allow them to reshape their futures. Permanent exclusion from school will become an automatic trigger for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which will enable this to happen. The quality of alternative provision education, such as that delivered through Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) is to be improved (see the Back on Track briefing in ‘Related briefings’).

Chapter 3: Supporting young victims

Young people are more likely than adults to be victims of crime - usually crimes committed by other young people - but are much less likely than adults to report crime to the police. Fifteen per cent of adults are victims of personal crime, over 30 per cent of young people aged 16-25, and over 35 per cent of young people aged 10-15. But while 35 per cent of adults report thefts to police, only 4 per cent of young people do so.

The Government aims to make young people:

- feel safer and understand that crime is not acceptable or just part of growing up
- know how to get help if they need it
- reject turning to crime as a response to being a victim
- have a local voice to influence decisions that affect them.

The Government has immediate plans to:

- test innovative ways of supporting young victims
- improve support for young witnesses
- provide young people and parents with information about dangers and risks
- be more responsible and accountable to young people and the wider community and improve the relationship between young people and the police by setting up youth forums to engage young people with local police and policy makers.

Chapter 4: Sentencing and custody

The plan sets out some clear principles around sentencing and custody of young people. It states that the public are entitled to expect young people who are dangerous will be put into custody as well as those who offend persistently and have not responded to community penalties. It also states that there must be positive development of young people in custody ensuring that their local authority is involved in developing their skills and opportunities for work and for resettlement after release.

Tackling public perceptions

The Plan makes it clear that most young offenders can be punished effectively in the community and so it is essential that the public is confident that non-custodial sentences do help to change offending behaviour. Perceptions that the youth justice system is too lenient

can be tackled by improving the delivery of community sentences, providing more accurate information about these sentences and involving the public in what types of reparation are appropriate. The Government specifically commits to:

- the public being given the chance to identify what reparation work they would like young people on community sentences to carry out so they can see it is challenging and constructive, for example, expanding reparation into offenders' leisure time
- promoting alternatives to custody for intensive fostering
- ensuring young people have things to do and youth centres staying open at weekends
- a set of principles for the use of custody.

Chapter 5: Breaking the cycle of offending

To reduce re-offending the Government will:

- improve education and training for offenders so that it is tailored to meet their individual needs and to place new duties on local authorities to fund and commission this provision in juvenile custody
- ensure access to health services for all young offenders
- reinforce the role of Children's Services in overseeing resettlement
- develop a more comprehensive package of support for young people leaving custody, backed in the future, through legislation
- expand resettlement and after care provision
- explore with employers how to improve the employability of young people with criminal records
- ensure suitable accommodation for all young offenders leaving custody.

Chapter 6: Making it happen

The role of Children's Trusts

All agencies need to work together to reduce youth crime and this will be strengthened by enhancing the role of Children's Trusts. This will include:

- ensuring services and agencies take a joined-up approach to individual children, young people and their families and that there are robust mechanisms in place to improve the performance of local areas in reducing youth offending
- consultation with local authorities on new measures to strengthen their role in prevention of offending
- ensuring that the entire children's workforce, including those working in the youth justice system, have the capacity and skills to help prevent youth offending.

Children's Trusts will also be required to ensure that their Children and Young People's Plans (CYPP) include details of the agreed local system to provide early identification. The consultation seeks views on whether pooling budgets would help support prevention work. In addition it is proposed that YOTs are strengthened by representation from housing authorities.

The Think Family approach will also help to support families with offending children and the targeted Youth Support reforms will promote sharing of information about children and

families at risk. The assessment procedures used in the Youth Justice System will be aligned with the CAF.

National performance indicators

There are six national performance indicators on youth crime and youth justice available for inclusion for Local Area Agreements (LAAs) where these are an agreed priority for the local level. These indicators will be reported annually through the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Local partnerships will need to oversee performance on the national indicators which also form part of the evidence base for the CAA. In addition, the capacity and capability of YOTs will be monitored by the Youth Justice Board with regional teams.

Local authorities

There will also be further consultation with local authorities on new measures to support their contribution to preventing offending. This will include making local authorities responsible for:

- the full cost of court-ordered secure remand (currently they pay one third of these costs)
- developing a formal review process for children who go into custody in order to learn how earlier intervention might have helped avoid this outcome
- ensuring that the workforce has the capacity to deliver positive outcomes by having the right skills and knowledge to prevent youth offending.

The Youth Taskforce will drive delivery of these new approaches at local level via work with children's centres, extended schools and targeted Youth Support services. The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) and the Government Offices will also support this work and other actions proposed in the plan. The combination of activities will be determined locally but the plans will need to be submitted to Chair of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the Director of Children's Services.

Wales

The Government will work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government via the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy to implement those aspects of the Action Plan which apply both in England and Wales and to discuss equitable funding arrangements. The consultation on accountability arrangements and improving the resettlement of offenders will be taken forward jointly with the Welsh Department for Social Justice and Government and the wider Welsh Assembly. Those measures which are aimed at preventing young people committing crimes, intervening early through the involvement of other agencies and improving the education of Young Offenders will apply only in England as these are devolved matters. Similarly the support the Youth Taskforce will offer local authorities will only be available in England. The Welsh Assembly will continue to implement their own strategy which shares many of the same aims and principles as the Action Plan but is tailored to the situation in Wales.

Consultation questions

Annex 4 includes all the questions for consultation which are due by 17 October 2008 and should be sent to the Home Office.

Comment

The Youth Crime Action Plan sets out clearly the challenges and proposals for the youth justice system and its partners. Given that the findings of an independent audit report in June 2008 on ten years of youth justice reforms found "mixed" outcomes for the extra resources spent, this Plan is timely and needed (see 'Additional information' for more details).

The Plan states that custodial sentences are needed for only a minority of young offenders and it suggests that ways must be found to increase the public's confidence in community sentences. It also recognises that youth crime anti-social behaviour can only be tackled by local solutions. It emphasises that the key to this is more joint working between councils, the police and the courts and also between services and agencies at local level.

The Plan looks to Children's Trusts to ensure that this joint planning is undertaken by all their partners: local authority, police, health, schools, YOTs and third sector organisations. It recognises the strategic leadership role that councils can play in preventing offending as well as supporting young offenders. In particular, it is proposed that councils have responsibility for commissioning education and training for those in juvenile custody as well as supporting their access to housing and employment on their release. The consultation asks for affirmation that this is the way forward and local authorities can take this opportunity to say what will help them carry out this role. It specifically asks about whether local authorities should have a senior official responsible for overseeing resettlement of offenders and hopefully local authorities will respond with their views on this (see Annex 4 for full list of questions).

Prevention work will require effective co-operation and commitment by all local partners, in particular, schools, PRUs and Sixth Form Colleges. Their active involvement (more likely now that the duty to co-operate within Children's Trusts has been proposed) will support earlier identification and referral of vulnerable young people as well as better reintegration into education, training and employment. The proposal to involve housing authorities in YOT management boards also looks helpful and on this too comments are sought.

The Plan also tackles how to change public perceptions about the Youth Justice System and the need to improve the public's understanding of the value of community sentences. It proposes that the public is involved in identifying what reparation work they would like young people on community sentences to carry out. Local authorities and their partners may want to suggest ways in which this could be done.

The Plan sets out the principles around custodial provisions and the need for earlier intervention. This will help establish a consensus among all those involved in bringing about a reduction in youth crime and in anti-social behaviour.

It will be important for the Government to listen carefully to the responses from local authorities and others and to find ways to best support the local response. It will also be important that the Government links its other plans and strategies with the Youth Crime Plan, for example its Aiming High for Young People Strategy (see 'Related briefings').

Additional Information

Lauren Damme helped to prepare this briefing.

CSN has issued a number of briefings around the issue of youth justice. These include the following

A briefing on *Ten years of youth justice reforms* (06.06.08) summarising the findings of this audit report by The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. This report looked at whether the youth justice system has met its targets as well as attempting an analysis of whether significant additional resources have resulted in better outcomes for the relevant children and young people. The report concludes that results of youth justice reform are at best "mixed".

A briefing on *Tackling Gangs*, (17.06.08) on new guidance issued by the Home Office.

A briefing on *Gangs and group offending guidance for schools* (06.06.08) issued by the DCSF

See also CSN Round-up for April 2008 for a short report on the Youth Taskforce Action Plan published in March 2008.

Covers

- Education
- Children's services