

Stakeholder Engagement 2 Youth Justice Board (YJB) Lord McNally and Lin Hinnigan

Background on YJB

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is an executive non-departmental public body. Its board members are appointed by the Justice Secretary.

The duties of the YJB include:

- Overseeing the youth justice system in England and Wales
- Working to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people under the age of 18
- Ensuring that custody for them is safe, secure, and addresses the causes of their offending behaviour.

IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING VULNERABILITY AMONG 18-24 YEAR OLDS

Maturity is a significant issue among young people and developmental maturity is not reached when a person turns 18. There is a challenge of meeting the distinct needs of some less mature young adults when they are held within the wider adult system.

There are lessons and effective practice from the youth estate that could be applied to 18-24 year olds, however, the legislative framework and policy environment can make this challenging.

Much of the success in reducing numbers in the YP estate is due to the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). Any scope to extend the remit of YOTs beyond 18 would require legislative change.

More research is needed to identify what interventions are effective with the cohort of young people with more complex needs who are now in the youth estate.

EFFECTIVE INFORMATION TRANSFER

Information relating to risk factors including mental health problems is often not transferred efficiently between different parts of the Criminal Justice System. Following a self inflicted death in custody, information sharing has repeatedly been identified as an issue. eAsset has been developed to improve information sharing across the youth justice system but it is challenging to get this to link effectively with systems in the adult estate.

EFFECTIVE USE OF ACCT

Strong leadership is needed for effective implementation of ACCT, which should be supported by training, governance, and quality assurance processes. Leadership is needed to embed learning and ensure processes are followed.

The level of a young person's maturity should determine how the ACCT is implemented. In the youth estate there is a Service Assurance Module (preventing Harm and Violence) that monitors the use of ACCT, HMIP also check documents when they visit. Institutions will be notified when YJB monitors are visiting but they visit jointly with NOMS staff and together should be able to gain an accurate understanding of how ACCT is operating in the institution.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

There are a lot of untreated or under treated mental health problems. Information regarding mental health is not transferred within CJS efficiently and there are gaps.

YJB asserted that good health and mental health should have a central role in custody and be a driver for other interventions. Learning difficulties and communication difficulties can be particularly inhibiting and need addressing with holistic approach. The YOI reform strand of Transforming Youth Custody is working closely with NHS England to develop a holistic case management approach for young offenders with mental health and learning disabilities.

Clinical Commissioning Groups are responsible for commissioning mental health provision in the community. There needs to be sufficient provision for effective liaison and diversion.

The young offender's Youth Offending Team (YOT) will complete the Comprehensive Health Assessment Tool (CHAT). All health of the child is assessed and recorded electronically and this record could be transferred to the adult estate in the future.

TRANSFORMING YOUTH CUSTODY

New contracts to provide more education in the youth estate are expected to be in place by 2015. It is imperative the young offender can access the education and is not obstructed by health or mental health issues. There should be a broader definition of education embedded that includes young offenders acquiring skills that would be useful in the community.

There is a strong commitment to support young offenders when they leave custody and YOTs are engaging with local partners to ensure they are supported as soon as they are released.

Security, safety and support for the child are all areas that will need to be balanced in the new Secure Colleges. The YJB believes the larger size of the secure colleges need not be a negative thing if the quality of service it provides is of the desired level and differentiated to meet the needs of different groups of young people, eg in accommodation units of different sizes.

STAFF TRAINING

The YJB understands that values based assessments are part of the recruitment process to work with young people. Low recruitment levels and a reduction in the number of NOMS staff has meant there are not many new staff coming into the system. Embedding an awareness of young offenders' needs, and the new senior post in NOMS with responsibility for young people should drive good practice. The placements teams need to be aware of the needs of the individual.

FAMILY CONTACT

Young offenders often come from dysfunctional families and these problems should be addressed further upstream, before custody. Maintaining family contact is crucial, and good access to telephones can help this. For example, in-cell telephony, such as at Cookham Wood, can support this. The Assisted Prisons Visit Scheme can also be used to support families to visit.

Institutions should ensure families can alert them to concerns about a young offender, using the Family Liaison Officer and other points of contact.

Processes, particularly the wait for an inquest following a death in custody, are far too slow and place a further burden on the bereaved family. There are too many organisations involved in the process, which can cause delays. It was suggested that the Chief Coroner might have ideas about what could be done to make the process swifter.