

# Youth Offending Team

## Scrutiny Spotlight Review



**County Councillor Gina Dowding, Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**For further information about this report please contact**

**Wendy Broadley**

**Principal Overview & Scrutiny Officer**

**07825 584684**

**[wendy.broadley@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:wendy.broadley@lancashire.gov.uk)**

## **Executive Summary**

Barbara Bath, Head of Service Adoption, Fostering and Residential Youth Offending Team provided the Committee with an overview of YOT at its meeting on 20 April at which three key areas of work were identified for the Committee to consider as a focus for the sub group.

The three areas of work highlighted related to the three national targets for YOT:

- To reduce first time entrants to the criminal justice system
- To reduce re offending
- To reduce the number of young people in custodial settings

It was agreed that further scrutiny should be undertaken to determine what the County Council can do to prevent offending behaviour with a particular focus on considering if there are robust links between the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and preventative services and how they are co-ordinated.

The Committee was made aware that there has been good progress in reducing the number of first time offenders. Previously the YOT had received grant funding for a prevention service but now this element of the service must be sought through partner agencies. Members were advised that there is a need to identify a more consistent process with good links directly into relevant services to help shape and influence.

### **A summary of the recommendations made by the sub-group are:**

1. The Police be asked to use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as the universal consistent approach, via a recommendation to the Police & Crime Commissioner
2. CAF Champion training to include information on how indicators of risk of offending can be identified, via recommendation to the Lancashire Safeguarding Children's Board
3. Areas where potential links and complementary work between the Youth Offending Team and Wellbeing, Prevention & Early Help (WPEH) services were identified should be further explored, such as in providing specific support for certain issues (e.g. football hooliganism, knife crime etc.). The YOT could help with direct prevention activity and the pooling of resources may free up capacity within both teams.
4. The Heads of Service of the YOT, and WPEH, to look at ways in which this could be embedded.
5. There are links between the YOT and Police Early Action Teams (PEAT), however not every area has a PEAT so engagement can be a bit hit and miss. The Police Early Action Governance Board be asked to address this issue.
6. The Director of Public Health in his role as chair of the 'Digital Board', (which is looking at how technology can provide new ways of working alongside the overall service transformations), be asked to look at examples from other LAs in terms of digital services for young people.
7. The Children & Young People Partnership Board be asked to consider a smaller multi-agency group to create sustainable models of service delivery
8. The Lancashire County Council commissioning team be asked to map the services currently commissioned by the council including information of the provider organisations, relating to the prevention of youth offending

9. The YOT to undertake a review to establish the characteristics of an effective programme of activity
10. The YOT and WPEH to co-produce a comprehensive analysis of the evidence available to measure outcomes of service delivery
11. The YOT and WPEH to lead a review of how services are communicated amongst partners and stakeholders.
12. The Corporate Parenting Board be asked to specifically look at measures for decreasing the risk of first time offending behaviour amongst looked-after children.

## **Background and methodology**

Following the meeting on 20 April a sub-group of the Committee was formed to consider the scope of the review and it was agreed that the following three areas would be investigated:-

1. How can the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) be used to identify risk of first time offending behaviour
2. How can the expertise from the YOT service contribute to service planning in the Wellbeing Prevention and Early Help Service (WPEH) and identify where there are risk factors
3. What services are currently in place for young people to divert them from offending

Members sought information from a number of documents and websites in addition to speaking to officers from the service. These included:

- Copy of Common Assessment Framework  
<http://www.lancashirechildrenstrust.org.uk/resources/?siteid=6274&pageid=45056>  
 The CAF is a tool used in the early identification of children, young people and families who may experience problems or who are vulnerable to poor outcomes
- Continuum of Need – provides help and guidance to practitioners to identify levels of need and risk. It also supports practitioners to determine how their service can best support and work alongside children, young people and their families.
- Recently published report from the Prison Reform Trust highlighting the state of affairs of Children Looked After in the Criminal Justice System.
- Criminalisation of Children in Care- Lancaster University research video clip  
<https://www.facebook.com/lancasteruniversity/videos/10153443627937827/>
- Breakdown of what crimes or disorders are predominant in first time offending

## Findings and conclusions

There has been good progress in Lancashire in reducing the number of first time offenders over recent years. The impact of financial challenge to the authority and reducing budget over the years to the YOT has and will bring significant challenges to service delivery, in particular parenting support, and prevention of offending. The YOT will rely on external services for this provision, previously grant funding enabled these services to be delivered in house

There is a need to identify a more consistent process with good links directly to relevant services to help shape and influence prevention of first time offending services. The challenge remains in developing an effective and consistent pathway to LCC's Wellbeing, Prevention and Early Help service.

### **How can the Common Assessment Framework be used to identify risk of first time offending behaviour?**

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is an assessment tool that should be completed by any professional (or indeed individual) who is concerned that the needs of an individual or family who require some support from an agency such as, for example, a Children's Centre worker, a health professional or a voluntary organisation.

Key areas identified throughout the review included:

- Organisations have CAF Champions who receive training to support colleagues completing CAFs
- CAF Champion training has recently been relaunched;
- CAFs are often viewed as just a referral form but could provide valuable information about potential first time offenders based on risk indicators:
- CAFs are held on County database (just unique reference numbers held – not the detail of the assessment);
- Lancashire Police do not complete CAFs but instead use a 'family star' tool.

### Immediate actions identified by the review

Debbie Duffell, Head of Service for WPEH said that the WPEH team are working with partner agencies to improve the implementation of the CAF and that they are planning to liaise with the Police in respect of them doing the same

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The Police be asked to use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as the universal consistent approach, via a recommendation to the Police & Crime Commissioner
2. CAF Champion training to include information on how indicators of risk of offending can be identified, via recommendation to the Lancashire Safeguarding Children's Board

## **How can the expertise from the YOT service contribute to service planning in the Wellbeing Prevention and Early Help Service (WPEH) and identify where there are risk factors?**

The current transformation within LCC to a full Wellbeing, Prevention and Early Help Services for 0-19 year olds means there will be a more targeted approach of intervention with individuals and families and offers for opportunities for the WPEH service to help to co-ordinate first time offending prevention. The WPEH team will have a strengthened relationship with children's social work teams, as well as the Troubled Families programme (which sits with WPEH team) regards the challenges to be met and developing an action plan on how to achieve outcomes.

Digital and online services potentially offer opportunities for better and targeted intervention. 'Talk Zone' is a service currently provided through the Young People's Service however it was clear that several members were unaware of the service and questions were raised about whether the service could be enhanced through for example a 'live chat' system would have the potential to enable young people to seek advice 24/7 through an app or website – maybe this is an opportunity to do something radically different, subject to identification of resources.

### Immediate actions identified by the review

- Service Heads to look at how a potential future service model may work in terms of links between YOT and WPEH
- An analysis of families the service works with for the future – to determine the level of success on interventions. I think this is where we were saying that the LA collect lots of 'number' data but very little 'impact or distance travelled' detail.
- WPEH are now collating new information and data which will contribute to assessing performance against the agreed multi agency indicators (more qualitative rather than the current quantitative) – WPEH need to share this information with the YOT team

### **Recommendations**

3. Areas where potential links and complementary work between the Youth Offending Team and Wellbeing, Prevention & Early Help (WPEH) services were identified should be further explored, such as in providing specific support for certain issues (e.g. football hooliganism, knife crime etc.). The YOT could help with direct prevention activity and the pooling of resources may free up capacity within both teams.
4. The Heads of Service of the YOT, and WPEH, to look at ways in which this could be embedded.
5. There are links between the YOT and Police Early Action Teams (PEAT), however not every area has a PEAT so engagement can be a bit hit and miss. The Police Early Action Governance Board be asked to address this issue.
6. The Director of Public Health in his role as chair of the 'Digital Board', (which is looking at how technology can provide new ways of working alongside the overall service transformations), be asked to look at examples from other LAs in terms of digital

### **What services are currently in place for young people to divert them from offending?**

The YOT commissions a 'Triage' service to identify opportunities for diversionary activity. The service is delivered by Child Action North West. Young people are dealt with in specialist custody suites once an offence has occurred and officers work with the individual and partners to determine if suitable different options for dealing with the situation can be implemented as opposed to them being charged with an offence.

There is no shortage of preventative services and diversionary activities across Lancashire. It was noted that there are a range of commissioners of services, and providers of services and ideally it would be useful if the full range of both could be mapped in order to increase awareness, communication and good practice.

It is extremely difficult to measure the success of prevention of first times offending: we can measure the reduction in the number of first time offenders and compare this data to national figures but it is difficult to determine exactly what has made the difference. However diversionary activities can contribute positively to outcomes. It would also be extremely challenging to provide a coherent approach due to the multiple ways in how services are commissioned and delivered. Because of the mixed market of providers which continually changes and fluctuates a potential way to address the issue is for the YOT and WPEH to share their knowledge of local provision and the future co-location of services should contribute to improved communication.

There is a lack of data to evidence the impact of the work carried out – Complex cases are easier to evaluate due to the individual nature of the intervention but softer activities such as attending school assemblies is almost impossible to prove that a young person didn't engage in offending behaviour because of that

It was acknowledged that undertaking a review to establish the characteristics of effective programmes of activity could help to determine what services are most likely to produce positive outcomes

The way in which the availability of services and how they are accessed is communicated both across different service areas within Lancashire County Council and between partner organisations is inconsistent. The sub-group discovered that there is often a variation of how services are described between partners and this has the potential to create confusion amongst officers.

The national review of youth justice services may inform what the future of local services may look like (and where organisationally they will sit). The primary focus of YOT is to deliver statutory services which are to deal with those who have offended and therefore reduced resources are available for prevention work.

There is concern about the sustainability of effective ways of working as many examples of good work done are only short-term funded and often only in small local areas. (For example the pilot project work funded through the crime tender at the beginning of 2016 (Serious Organised Crime/Prevention commissioned by Blackburn with Darwen and delivered by Action for Children)

covers Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Pendle and Hyndburn. Intervention proven to work should be rolled out across the county and embedded county wide.

There was also a perception that children are being unnecessarily criminalised – felt that often the young person is 'blamed' for the offence rather than finding out what are the underlying reasons for their behaviour. It was concurred that young people shouldn't be criminalised for making a mistake.

### **Recommendations**

7. The Children & Young People Partnership Board be asked to consider a smaller multi-agency group to create sustainable models of service delivery
8. The Lancashire County Council commissioning team be asked to map the services currently commissioned by the council including information of the provider organisations, relating to the prevention of youth offending
9. The YOT to undertake a review to establish the characteristics of an effective programme of activity
10. The YOT and WPEH to co-produce a comprehensive analysis of the evidence available to measure outcomes of service delivery
11. The YOT and WPEH to lead a review of how services are communicated amongst partners and stakeholders.

**Children looked after (CLA) are disproportionately represented in the cohort of young offenders although the numbers are small.**

Many of the issues raised related disproportionately on Children Looked After and it was felt that the Corporate Parenting Board had the expertise to address the issues identified

**Recommendation**

12. The Corporate Parenting Board be asked to specifically look at measures for decreasing the risk of first time offending behaviour amongst looked-after children.



## Acknowledgements

Members of the sub-group

- CC Gina Dowding (Chair)
- CC Lorraine Beavers
- CC Graham Gooch
- CC Sue Pryn
- Micah Bimson
- Terry Hacking
- Elaine Shinks

We would like to thank the officers who have contributed to the report and who will be responsible for taking this work further

- Barbara Bath - Head of Service Adoption, Fostering & Residential YOT
- Debbie Duffell - Head of Service, Wellbeing, Prevention & Early Help
- Lee Kerns – Quality & Review Officer
- Shirley Johnson – YOT Team Manager
- Rebecca Fisher – YOT worker
- Brian Wood – County Lead for Youth Work Strategy