

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	20 th June 2021
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Service Area	Youth Offending Service
Committee Date	7 th September 2021

To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) 2020/21 - Update

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work of the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) for 2020/21. This includes a summarised response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and to inform members of future service challenges/risks.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The content of this report be discussed and noted.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

3.1 Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service is a statutory partnership legislated by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and provides services across two local authority areas, namely Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. The local authority YOS areas merged to form Cwm Taf YOS in August 2014. The aim of the service is to prevent the offending and re-offending of children and young people. The statutory partners are: South Wales Police; Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board; HM Prison and Probation Service; and the local authority areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. These partners provide financial and staffing contributions to the Youth Offending Service. The Youth Offending Service also attracts external grant funding from the Youth Justice Board, Welsh Government and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

- 3.2 Overall governance is facilitated by the Regional Cwm Taf Offender Management Board (OMB) which meets quarterly to hold the service to account, examine performance, and to monitor the delivery of the service.
- 3.3 In addition to the scrutiny provided via the Offender Management Board, the Youth Offending Service also reports its performance on a quarterly basis to the Youth Justice Board (YJB), and to the Welsh Government in relation to its prevention work. The YOS is also subject to an inspection regime carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).
- 3.4 As a result of Covid 19, the YOS were not required to provide an annual Youth Justice Plan for the financial year 2020/21. However, the Youth Justice Board instead requested that YOS complete a self assessment and action plan in relation to a new set of National Standards for Youth Justice. This work had begun in September 2019. The National Standards work is linked to the Structure and Governance of the service and will be overseen by the Offender Management Board. The YOS has sought operational and strategic 'buy in' from partner agencies represented on the Board and this work is ongoing. This year, the YOS is required to submit a Youth Justice Plan for 2021/22, some of the content of which is summarised in this report.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 Alongside partner agencies, for much of 2020/21, some YOS staff have undertaken their day-to-day tasks remotely. This has meant reduced face to face contact with young people and families whilst adjusting to working in a more agile way from home. Initially, this created some difficulties with the normal day to day business and many staff experienced problems, mainly related to technology in order to undertake tasks in an efficient manner.
- 4.2 However, during this time, YOS staff continued to support young people who appeared in the law courts (including a Remand court based in Cardiff), who required an appropriate adult (AA) at the police station when arrested, or who agreed to attend for interview on a voluntary basis. Face to face contact with young people assessed as 'high risk' or subject to 'intensive supervision and surveillance' also continued during this time and the input of experienced sessional workers ensured that contact with this cohort took place during evenings and weekends as necessary. Importantly, since May last year, the YOS has continued to work with a skeleton staff from its office base in the Merthyr Tydfil Law Courts and this arrangement provided invaluable managerial and peer support for those who most required it. The numbers of staff available to offer physical one to one support has fluctuated as Covid restrictions have been eased and then reimposed during this time, yet it is pleasing that the core/critical business of the service has been maintained.
- 4.3 YOS staff are all equipped with the resources to function more effectively at the present time and most staff can see the benefits of working in a more flexible and agile manner. However, the onset of Covid has also brought challenges in relation to managing risks both to the public and to the children known to our service.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 The YOS is currently in the process of restructuring the service in order to meet the demands of Early Intervention and Prevention work which now accounts for the majority of our workload. As such, two area-based prevention/early intervention teams in Merthyr Tydfil and RCT will be created to enhance the quality of prevention services for those most at risk of anti-social and/or offending behaviour. Prevention activity within YOS is increasingly involved in the management of more complex cases, and subsequently these teams will include social work and senior practitioner oversight to ensure children and families receive the right support at the right time. In addition, this aspect of the service will also be allocated more management capacity across the Cwm Taf region. It is anticipated that the restructure of the service will be completed and ready for implementation by August 1st this year.
- 5.2 To some degree, the restructure of the service is a response to a review of the youth justice system across England and Wales. The YJB was asked to advise Welsh Government on the development of a 'Blueprint for Youth Justice for Wales' and a Blueprint Implementation Plan has now been drafted to take this work forward. Early Intervention and Prevention and a trauma informed, child focussed approach is central to the contents of the Blueprint, and a Project Board, incorporating several workstreams is taking this work forward. However, Cwm Taf YOS has already begun to embed a trauma informed, relationship-based approach within current practice to better meet the needs of young people who enter into the youth justice system and who have experienced a number of adverse childhood experiences (ACE's).
- 5.3 The YOS utilises the Welsh Government's Children and Communities Grant to develop, deliver and coordinate prevention services across the Cwm Taf area. Some of this work is coordinated alongside the Team around the Family in Merthyr Tydfil and ensures that the Cwm Taf YOS Prevention Service can provide a swift and proportionate response to anti-social behaviour (ASB), Restorative Justice Street Disposals (YRD's) and respond quickly to crisis referrals from the Children's Services Department. Outreach work engaging with young people in identified hotspot areas resumed in July last year and this work continues alongside our police colleagues. Recent night-time operations in Merthyr Tydfil have taken place at the Skate Park, Gurnos, Dowlais, Abercanaid and town centre areas.
- 5.4 The YOS continues to expand its use of a Viewpoint data feedback system to ensure the voice of service users is heard and which will inform the future development of the service. The YOS currently completes a specific online questionnaire with children who offend and a separate restorative justice survey for victims of youth crime.
- 5.5 The YOS education training and employment (ETE) team has continued to support young people through the past 10 months and have trained a group of community volunteers to engage with individuals (remotely and face to face) to help them to achieve their potential. Furthermore, the YOS has continued its reparation work with young people in the community in a safe manner, whilst contributing, alongside the YOS police officers to facilitate face to face mediation in care homes where some children have experienced difficulties, many of which are linked to Covid restrictions.

- 5.6 The YOS has recently negotiated CAMHS provision with Senior Health Managers to provide increased support for staff dealing with young people who present with more complex wellbeing issues, and work continues in order to strengthen links with psychology, neuro development and speech and language provision. Health services to YOS was an issue for concern by the HMIP inspectorate in 2017, and so this provision is being monitored by the Offender Management Board and is retained as a priority for this financial year within the Youth Justice Plan.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 During early 2021 the service was dealing with staffing issues that weren't quite as apparent during the first lockdown period in the spring of last year. These included increased sickness rates, the care of vulnerable family members and home schooling/childcare issues as a result of school closures. Overall, the situation has improved but anxieties may be further increased by the uncertainties of the restructure of the service and future accommodation for YOS staff in the medium to longer term. It should be recognised that YOS business is very much linked into local authority recovery and delivery plans for this year, and future arrangements whereby staff can meet safely with children, families and partner agencies in a range of community venues/offices, is one of the main priorities going forward.
- 6.2 The potential impact of future Covid restrictions, service changes and the risks associated with potential changes to (yet unconfirmed) grant funding will need to be monitored closely to ensure that Cwm Taf YOS can, alongside its key partners, properly meet the demands, aims and objectives ahead and to deliver better outcomes for young people who offend or who are at risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 The most immediate priority is the completion of the restructure of the service in order that the YOS can respond effectively to the demands of early intervention and prevention and complete this work by 1st August 2021.
- 7.2 Further priorities include securing the necessary health provision for the YOS to ensure the service can maintain and build upon embedding trauma informed practice into its day-to-day business. This is currently being negotiated.
- 7.3 As mentioned in 3.4, monitoring of the National Standards for Youth Justice in Wales alongside our partners will be central to the future effectiveness and governance of the service, and improve accountability for offending across the partnership.
- 7.4 The priorities set out in this year's plan will allow us to improve our understanding of the needs of the cohort and contribute to better outcomes.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

8.1 The overall work of the Youth Offending Service contributes to the Developing Safer Communities Wellbeing Objective.

LISA CURTIS JONES
CHIEF OFFICER (SOCIAL SERVICES)

COUNCILLOR CHRIS DAVIES
**CABINET MEMBER FOR SOCIAL
SERVICES AND DEPUTY LEADER**

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No