

**TABLED
AGENDA ITEM 14**

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 12 JULY 2018

**REFERENCE FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10
JULY 2018**

Youth Justice Plan 2018-19

The Committee received a report setting out the draft Youth Justice Plan for 2018-19 and inviting comments before its consideration at Cabinet and full Council. Councillor Christine Robson, the Portfolio Holder for Young People and Schools, introduced the report, explaining that this was an annual requirement as part of a framework established nationally by the Youth Justice Board. The draft report outlined the work of the local Youth Offending Team and its plans for the future; priority objectives included reducing the number of first-time offenders and addressing the increase in serious violent crime affecting young people, particularly knife crime. The plan also sought to address the complex needs of some young people involved in the criminal justice system.

The Interim Corporate Director, People Services underlined that he welcomed the Committee's comments on the draft plan as meaningful consultation with scrutiny councillors was important before the full Council considered the formal adoption of its proposals. He referred to comments and questions received in advance of the meeting which would be addressed in updates to the draft plan along with the comments to be made at the meeting.

The Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service then gave a detailed explanation of the key aspects of the plan, referring in particular to the executive summary of the plan (Page 15 of the agenda); he highlighted the principal priorities as reduction in the number of first-time offenders, responding to the increase in serious violent crime affecting young people (including knife crime), tackling the involvement of young people in drug-related crime, both the use and supply of drugs, and addressing the longer term needs of young people affected by criminality. He underlined the alignment of the draft plan with the Community Safety and Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy, and the reliance on effective partnership with a range of other organisations; the input of Harrow Youth Parliament and the Young Harrow Foundation was an important element in developing meaningful proposals for action. The Head of Service was pleased to report that there was now a stable staff group in place in the Youth Offending Team; they had the skills and abilities to deliver high quality services to young people. The service was nevertheless keen to seek improvements and to this end, an independent auditor had been commissioned to review its work and

effectiveness. A tool called Asset Plus was also available to help identify and manage risks and vulnerabilities. The Head of Service concluded by underlining the importance of local community action groups in delivering locally-focused services.

A Member raised concerns about the age of data in the plan, some of which dated back to March 2017. He questioned whether, in the light of the changing circumstances of youth crime recently, the plans developed on the basis of that data would be effective. He was also concerned about the apparent contradictions in some of the data. The Head of Business Intelligence explained that the Youth Justice Board template was used and this meant that some of the data referred to offences originally committed in 2016-17; there would always be a lag of some kind given the time associated with court processes. However, he accepted that more could be done to ensure that this was clearer in the presentation of the information in the plan.

The Member referred to information on caseloads at Page 18 of the agenda which indicated these were increasing while a reduction in entrants to the criminal justice system had been reported. The Head of Business Intelligence advised that this related to the complexity of many cases which meant interventions would take longer and therefore impact on caseload figures.

Another Member referred to some arithmetical inaccuracies he had identified which could be checked and, if confirmed, could be corrected outside the meeting. He asked whether the data in the “Intensity” tables at Page 20 of the agenda could be reconciled with the suggestion that cases were becoming more complicated. The Head of Business Intelligence advised that the increase in knife crimes had occurred in 2016 and the level had been maintained since. The risk and vulnerability scores should reflect this trend and he acknowledged that this could be clarified.

A Member asked about the growing problem of the coercion of young people as part of the “county lines” approach of London gangs. The Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service acknowledged the issue and referred to elements of the Community Safety and Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy which sought to address it. He gave the example of “mental toughness” courses offered to young people to strengthen resistance to being drawn into these practices. Support was also offered to schools and could be provided on a one-to-one basis. The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning reported that the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) had top-sliced funding to create a project led by Brent Council to tackle this problem. The emphasis was on improved coordination and information-sharing across authorities and agencies.

A Member referred to a missing graph in the draft plan (Page 36 of the agenda).

The representative of the Harrow Youth Parliament encouraged the Council to use its members as a valuable resource in planning relevant services. She asked whether courses were tailored for the different circumstances and backgrounds of young people. The Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service confirmed that he was keen to involve the Harrow Youth

Parliament in developing the delivery plan for implementation of the Youth Justice Plan once it was approved. With regard to tailored courses, he suggested that a specialist offer of some courses could be made to schools, for example, if a school reported concerns about any vulnerable students. A pilot programme was running at Canons High School and this was seen as successful.

A Member queried apparent inconsistencies between the caseload data and the reported reduction in cases. The Head of Business Intelligence advised that the reducing number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system was only part of the picture as staff were increasingly dealing with longer, more complex cases; this in part reflected the continuing high levels of violence affecting young people and repeat offending.

A Member sought information on the ethnicity of young people involved in stop and search cases; the Head of Business Intelligence would check what data was available on this. The Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service confirmed that these cases involved a disproportionate number of black young men, and this was repeated in other data, such as in the numbers of those given custodial sentences as opposed to other sanctions.

In response to a Member's query about the data on the gender of offenders given in the table at Page 24 of the agenda, it was confirmed that this related to young people in the Borough. The Member also referred to inconsistencies in the report about whether crime levels were increasing or not, and to the fact that one of the bullet points on Page 35 of the agenda contained an incomplete sentence. She also considered that the font used in the report should be standardised to improve the presentation and that the structure could be revised to make it easier to find information. She suggested that a list of stakeholders and partners be added to the plan and that the language, tone and content of the introduction be revisited, as she considered that it did not highlight the Youth Offending Team.

The Member queried the 75% target for those not in education, employment and training (NEET). The Head of Business Intelligence advised that the Borough had one of the lowest rates of NEET young people amongst the general population in the country at less than 2% and aspires to close the gap for young offenders, who have a significantly higher. Efforts were made to ensure that young offenders were in education, training or employment; he would check the position in relation to nearest neighbour authorities.

Referring to the initiatives outlined towards the end of the plan, a Member suggested that there should be clearer evidence, either from local or national experience, of the impact of interventions with young people. While pleased to hear about the stability of the staff team, he wondered whether there was detail of how the service planned to maintain this and manage workforce risks. The Interim Corporate Director, People Services confirmed that the staff team had moved from very challenging circumstances to the present much improved position offering a high quality skill set; he invited members of the Committee to visit the team to observe this at first hand. He underlined the strengths of the relationships with young people and the use of many

innovative programmes; the quality of the service had been reflected in feedback from young people. More information on this could be added to the report.

A Member asked again about the complexity of caseloads, suggesting that it could be that young people were not classed as re-offending if the committed different types of crime. The Head of Business Intelligence confirmed that this was not the case and that, irrespective of the type of crime, new offences by the same person were classed as re-offending. This was part of a national framework of reporting through a type of central clearing house and through which the Council were held to account for their reporting. The performance indicators in this area of work were complicated and detailed analysis of individual young people's records would serve to reconcile the various aggregated data. In response to a related question from another Member about the categorisation of cases where individuals were charged with multiple offences, the Head of Business Intelligence explained the way these were recorded, involving the number of re-offences per offender as opposed to "binary re-offenders". He clarified that it made no difference if the penalties were custodial or not.

The Member also asked about whether the report's comments on Asset Plus suggested that there were difficulties with it. The Head of Business Intelligence confirmed that the nationally-promoted programme was extensive and relatively bureaucratic, and therefore posed challenges in implementation. However, it did offer very thorough assessments.

Referring to the data on the ethnicity of offenders at Page 23 of the agenda, a Member pointed to the differences between White British offenders and Black British offenders, asking for an explanation of these. The Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service agreed that these differences were significant, but could not offer a ready explanation. The Head of Business Intelligence confirmed that the Council was continuing to analyse the relevant data and to learn from other research such as the Lammy Report. He added that there had been some variability over the years and that, in the context of the youth offending figures for Harrow, the absolute numbers involved were relatively low.

In response to a Member's question about the age of those offered courses, the Head of Service, Early Support and Youth Offending Service advised that children as young as 9 could be offered courses if this was recommended in the circumstances. Youth Offending Team courses were offered to those aged 10 and over. It was intended to consider information provided by the Young Harrow Foundation and this might lead to the development of programmes for primary schools.

The Divisional Director, Strategic Commissioning confirmed that further work would be done to address the comments made by members of the Committee to inform consideration of the draft plan at Cabinet and full Council.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to note the comments made in relation to the draft Youth Justice Plan 2018-19.

Background Documents:

Agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 10 July 2018: Report on the Youth Justice Plan 2018-19.

Contact Officer:

Frankie Belloli, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Tel: 020 8424 1263