

## **Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda  
Item No.**

**Date: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022**

**7**

**Title of the Report: Youth Justice HMIP Assurance Project**

**Ward(s):** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr T Wilson - Children's Services Social Care

### **1. Aim and purpose**

- 1.1 The aim of the YJS review is to provide the Walsall YJS Performance and Partnership Board with assurance that the response to key inspection findings (HMIP Inspection 2019) have been robust and that the changes made as a result (for example to ways of working and practice) have been sustained so that the Board can confidently sign off on the issues raised by HMIP.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide scrutiny with an overview of the findings of a review of progress against Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) recommendations for Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS), commissioned by the Youth Justice Partnership.

### **2. Recommendations**

1. To note the findings and assurance provided by the review
2. To support the future priorities and areas for development identified

### **3. Report detail: know**

#### **Context and scope**

- 3.1 In 2019, an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) of Walsall Youth Justice Service (YJS), and the partnership responsible for it, resulted in a judgement of 'Requires Improvement'.
- 3.2 Since then, and against the challenging backdrop and disruption of Covid-19, a programme of improvement activity has taken place to address the recommendations made by the Inspectorate.
- 3.3 In 2021, the partnership commissioned an independent specialist Youth Justice practitioner, experienced in undertaking peer reviews, to carry out a review of improvement activity, progress made, and critical areas of development to be addressed before the next round of inspection. In keeping with the peer review ethos, the review was evidence based upon desktop analysis and review of key documentation. In order to test and validate the written evidence, a programme of meetings and focus groups took place involving service managers, YJS

practitioners and partnership staff and additional triangulation of evidence was provided through an analysis of a small number of case records in person at Walsall Civic Centre.

- 3.4 The review aimed to provide the YJS Board with assurance that the response to the inspection findings had been robust and that the changes made as a result have been sustained so that the Board can confidently sign off on the issues raised by HMIP. The Partnership Board agreed the scope to focus on four specific aspects of the service where key recommendations had been made in the inspection report, specifically those relating to:
- Out of Court Disposals (OOCd)
  - Management of risk of harm
  - The offer to victims and restorative activity
  - Use of performance information and Board engagement
- 3.5 Interim findings, summarised below, were presented to the YJS Performance and Partnership Board in November 2021 and will form the basis of a Board strategic planning event in January 2022.

### **Summary of Findings: Out of Court Disposals (OOCd)**

- 3.6 In summary, the key findings of the 2019 HMIP Inspection included a lack of joint decision making, assessments were not always completed prior to decisions on outcomes and gaps in representation at the panel from children's social care.
- 3.7 The 2021 review concluded all issues raised by HMIP in relation to OOCd have been successfully addressed and practice adjusted, ensuring a more robust and sustainable approach to OOCd. Minor adjustments are required to reflect updated inspection standards and the partnership board should continue to monitor the operation of the OOCd process to ensure it remains a joint process. The next round of strategic planning is an opportunity to build on the progress made to date.
- 3.8 The review identified particular areas of strength including clear guidance documentation articulating the use of an approved assessment prior to decision, an effective and well attended partnership panel including the recent inclusion of Early Help, capacity and capability of the workforce has improved.
- 3.9 Specific areas for development to be incorporated in future plans were a review of the YJS strategy document to incorporate new inspection criteria which would include a review of the assessment tool used for young people subject to OOCds.

### **Summary of findings: Management of Risk of Harm**

- 3.10 In summary, the key findings of the 2019 HMIP inspection included that risk of harm to others was not identified, assessed, planned for or responded to well enough.
- 3.11 The 2021 review concluded that the main issues relating to practice highlighted by HMIP have been successfully addressed through training and ongoing quality assurance arrangements. Partnership commitment to working with high-risk cases requires refreshing to take into account the range of structures in place to manage multi-agency engagement with this group of children
- 3.12 The review identified particular strengths including significant improvements in assessment of risk. Clearer guidance on analysis and recording has been

implemented across the service through training and the YJS risk panel was maintained through the pandemic with expert chairing. There was good evidence of oversight of the improvements to management of risk by the Partnership Board.

- 3.13 Specific areas for development to be incorporated in future plans were that although the evidence indicates that although the High Risk Panel is valued, is well led and seen as an effective vehicle for multi-agency management of high-risk cases, the current system is not sustainable due to the level of demand and therefore the risk procedures need a review. There is also scope to develop young person plans to improve the use of external controls to keep others safe.

### **Summary of findings: Victims and restorative practice**

- 3.14 In summary, the key findings of the 2019 HMIP inspection included that the service had lost focus on public protection issues and the lack of a lead worker for victim issues has resulted in an inconsistent service and lack of priority.
- 3.15 The 2021 review concluded arrangements put in place following HMIP findings, had not delivered the improvements required for victims of youth crime but endorsed the very recent change of approach involving the creation of a dedicated Victim Officer post within the YJS, approved by the Board in November 2021.
- 3.16 The review identified particular strengths including that the service managers responded quickly after the HMIP report was published and implement a new Victim Model which addressed issues identified by HMIP. In addition, the reviewer found that the YJS Board maintained strategic oversight of the model through regular reports and audits and should be commended for its efforts to improve services for victims.
- 3.17 Despite swift actions to respond to the HMIP findings, it has become clear that the arrangements put in place have not delivered the improvements required. The service deserves credit for keeping this topic under close review and taking steps to try to resolve issues before finally agreeing that a change of approach is needed. In November 2021, the YJS Board agreed to create a dedicated Victim post within the YJS to ensure compliance with HMIP and the Youth Justice Board requirements.

### **Summary of findings: Use of performance information and YJS Board engagement**

- 3.18 In summary, the key findings of the 2019 HMIP Inspection included that the YJS Board did not have sufficient information about practice or the evidence base that supports effective work.
- 3.19 The 2021 review concluded the Board has responded decisively to many of the areas identified in inspection and reached a stage where it can press ahead with its positive agenda by making best use of the strategic position it holds; strengthening links with wider strategies, identifying opportunities to collaborate and seek cross cutting solutions, including mobilising resources where possible.
- 3.20 The review identified particular strengths including that the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for is well written and provides a good framework for youth justice activity. Of particular note is the work carried out to analyse and respond to disproportionality. The reviewer concluded that the diagnostic activity initially undertaken during 2020

has the potential to influence policy and practice and should help to shape the next strategic plan. The concern about insufficient information being provided to the Board has been largely resolved.

- 3.21 Specific areas for development to be incorporated in future plans were that there is further work to do to ensure that the totality of crime diversion work is visible to the Board. The reviewer also suggested that the YJS Board may wish to review if it has the full range of services needed to respond to the complex needs of the cohort of children.

#### **4. *Financial information***

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

#### **5. *Reducing Inequalities***

The provision of Youth Justice Services to young people aims to support those at risk of harm and who need safeguarding. This includes young people from protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion. We are aware that there is overrepresentation of black and mixed heritage young people within the justice system in Walsall at this time and our wider plans will seek to improve outcomes for this group and others.

#### **6. *Decide***

The Youth Justice Performance and Partnership Board is due to meet in February 2022 to fully consider the findings of the 2021 assurance review and will utilise the information to determine our priorities for the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

#### **7. *Respond***

Cabinet will consider the Youth Justice Strategic Plan in May 2022 and refer to full Council for approval. It is a statutory requirement in the Youth Justice Effective Practice Grant to submit the approved plan to the Youth Justice Board in June 2022.

#### **8. *Review***

- 8.1 Progress against the priorities and the delivery plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the YJS Performance and Partnership Board.
- 8.2 Progress against the priorities set out in the Youth Justice Strategic Plan, together with a review of achievements will be completed in the planning schedule for 2023.

### **Background papers**

'An Inspection of Youth Offending Services in Walsall' HMIP report published 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019

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