

## **Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: Wednesday 21 September 2011**

Agenda item: 15

Wards: All

Subject: **Youth Offending Service Post-Inspection Scrutiny Briefing**

Lead officer: Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Maxi Martin

Forward Plan reference number:

Contact officer: Keith Shipman, Youth Inclusion Manager

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### **Reason for urgency:**

The legal requirements for Access to Information have not been met. The Chair has approved the urgent submission of this item, as the Panel wish to receive a timely update on the action plan, following the recent inspection of the Youth Justice Casework inspection.

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. That Panel note the findings of the Youth Justice Casework inspection and that an action plan is being developed with statutory partners.
  - B. That Panel agree to receive progress updates at future meetings.
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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Youth Offending Services are statutory partnerships accountable to the partners who contribute to the service. The key accountabilities are to the Local Authority, Police, Probation and the Primary Care Group. In Merton this function is carried out by the Youth Justice Executive Board chaired by the Director of Children's Services, but with representatives of all partners.
- 1.2 Her Majesty's Inspectors of Probation (HMIP) are inspecting all YOTs nationally and have just started the London inspections. Merton's Youth Offending Team was inspected by HMIP (Probation) in July 2011. Merton was the second London borough to undergo this inspection. The inspection is very specific and focuses on a narrow aspect of the YOT therefore does not include prevention work or giving great weight to outcome measures for the young people. It only looks at the case work that the team undertake once a young person has been sentenced. This is highly regulated with standard procedures, time scales and assessment tools. The inspection does not judge the wider work of the team such as prevention of crime, court work, reparations, victim support, etc. It does not consider areas which are a strength in Merton such as our falling first time entry figures or high levels of offenders in training or education.

## **2 DETAILS**

- 2.1 This Inspection had a disappointing result for Merton. The judging criteria range from requiring drastic improvement through substantial, moderate and minimal. Our results were:
- Safeguarding – substantial improvement required
  - Public protection risk of harm – substantial improvement required
  - Public protection likelihood of reoffending – moderate improvement required.
- 2.2 Scores across London are coming out below those nationally. HIMP are looking at what might be the contextual factors that affect this emerging pattern.
- 2.3 The Executive Board had identified in Dec 2010, prior to the inspection, that improvements were required in case work recording, quality assurance and management oversight of cases.
- 2.4 An audit was undertaken and all case workers were trained based on that audit. Additionally changes were made in operational management – restructuring to increase managerial supervision of the case work. Through this supervision staff were moved on and managers noted improvements in more recent cases. The inspection recognised improvements made during the last 6 months, by judging our capacity to improve as “promising”, however this was not enough to boost our numerical scores against which the judgements are made as the majority of cases chosen for inspection were over 6 months old.
- 2.5 The inspection highlighted 3 areas of good practise:
- The identification of speech and language needs and actions to help communication that aids reduction of offending.
  - Good broad assessments involving schools and partners to develop a good all round understanding of need of a young person that led to a more effective action plan
  - Flexibility and sensitivity of staff to see offenders in the community to aid engagement and attain better outcomes.
- 2.6 Feedback from young offenders supported by the team was good with over 80% satisfaction levels – with several young people commenting how the YOT had helped them to stop offending, stop drinking and act more safely. Additionally In each area the report picks our strengths and weaknesses. It is important to state that the Inspection did not find evidence of children or young people at risk of significant harm that had not been dealt with appropriately. This judgement reflects more a cohort of young people who did not reach the highest levels of risk, where our recorded action planning, management oversight and quality assurance was not sufficiently robust. For example reviews of the planning for the young person did not always result in a changed written assessment or plan.
- 2.7 The written recommendations from the report:

- (1) a timely and good quality assessment and plan, using Asset, is completed when the case starts (YJS Manager)
- (2) specifically, a timely and good quality assessment of the individual's vulnerability and *Risk of Harm to others* is completed at the start, as appropriate to the specific case (YJS Manager)
- (3) as a consequence of the assessment, the record of the intervention plan is specific about what will now be done in order to safeguard the child or young person from harm, to make them less likely to reoffend, and to minimise any identified *Risk of Harm to others* (YJS Manager)
- (4) the plan of work with the case is regularly reviewed and correctly recorded in Asset with a frequency consistent with national standards for youth offending services (YJS Manager)
- (5) there is timely review of assessments and, as applicable, plans following receipt of significant new information, intelligence and reports of harmful behaviour or the commission of new offences (YJS Manager)
- (6) specifically, *Risk of Harm to others* is regularly reviewed, with changes anticipated where possible, recognised when they occur and responded to appropriately (YJS Manager)
- (7) sufficient attention is given to the safety of victims throughout the course of the sentence (YJS Manager).
- (8) management oversight is effective in ensuring the quality of assessment and plans to manage vulnerability and *Risk of Harm to others*, and ensures that planned actions are delivered (YJS Manager)

2.8 We immediately set up a project group to address the recommendations. This is chaired by the Head of Social Care and Youth Inclusion. In August we:

- Briefed all case managers on the issues highlighted in the report;
- Changed the management structure within the team to give greater capacity for managerial supervision of cases to address managerial sign off;
- Set up a new screening process where new offenders see a range of agencies for screening in one visit that should speed up initial assessments and improve quality and timeliness;
- Improved our recording of risk assessment panel meetings so that the agreed actions are properly recorded on the case file providing evidence of the judgement of risk and its sign off;

2.9 From September the Youth Justice Manager will be quality assuring weekly, using the HIMP inspection tool to evaluate improvements in the case work.

2.10 We are required to produce an improvement Action Plan for HMIP by October 3<sup>rd</sup> and this will be signed off by the Youth Justice Executive Board. The action plan will address each recommendation precisely based on increased training, supervision and quality assurance. Progress against this action plan will be monitored by the Executive and the National Youth Justice Board.

- 2.11 This is also an opportunity to consider how the Youth Offending Team may operate in the future as there are a number of suggested changes coming out of the Youth Justice Board (Ministry of Justice) which will impact how we carry out the work. For example it is proposed that all young people remanded into custody will automatically become children in care, a change that will increase our care population and place significant additional demands on our services. It is also proposed that the cost of custodial places will be shifted to local authorities again with a significant and serious impact potentially on current placement budgets. This leads onto consideration of whether our current structures and understanding of tasks and processes needs revision to anticipate and effectively manage future change.
- 2.12 The YOT Improvement Project Board has met and agreed some scoping of this wider action plan to include revision of the YOT staffing structure, management and leadership, staffing capacity and skill sets, process mapping using “Lean” to identify areas to improve, our approach to safeguarding including quality assurance and management oversight, and our use of assessment tools. We have also agreed to contact and visit some YOT’s who have achieved well in this inspection to understand their approach to team structure and tasks.
- 2.3 This project will report to the CSF Continuous Improvement Board through the Head of Social Care and Youth Inclusion which will oversee the implementation of the YOT Inspection Action Plan.

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