

Youth justice plans

YJB practice guidance

March 2023

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Context and legal framework

Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services¹. Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership's responsibilities in producing a plan. It states that it is the duty of each local authority, after consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan, setting out how youth justice services in their area are to be provided and funded, how they will operate, and what functions will be carried out.

The plan should equally address the functions assigned to a youth justice service, including how services will prevent offending behaviour and reduce reoffending².

Whilst these statutory requirements state the minimum information required within the youth justice plan, this guidance sets out further considerations for partnerships on both the content and structure of your youth justice plan; and asks for reflection on how the service takes a strength-based approach towards delivering a Child First justice system.

Annual youth justice plans are an opportunity to review performance and developments over a single year period and plan for the next year. This allows services to be able to respond to any changes that have taken place in the previous year, including new legislation, demographic changes, delivery of key performance indicators, and developments in service delivery. The planning and production of a youth justice plan is beneficial to partnership working and service delivery to ensure the best outcomes for children.

The YJB recommends that partnerships engage their YJB leads in reviewing the content of plans and seek timely feedback before formal submission.

Youth justice plans for 2023/24 should be submitted using the headings set out in the '[Youth Justice Plan Structure](#)' section below. The data and information contained within the plan is used by the YJB as an intelligence source to provide support to the sector through our oversight function. Analysis of the information identifies good performance and can provide focus on regional and national themes.

We recognise that local areas will have their own governance arrangements in place. We encourage the practice for plans to be developed in consultation with children and their families, staff and volunteers, statutory and non-statutory partnership organisations and board members.

¹ The statutory definition of a local youth justice service is contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In statute these are known as youth offending teams. However, as services have evolved, they have become known by different names. We use the term youth justice services (YJSs) to acknowledge the evolution of services in all their guises and to move away from the stigmatising language of 'offending'.

² [Crime and Disorder Act 1998, \(Section 40\)](#) (3)(a)(b).

The plan must be submitted to the YJB by **30 June 2023** to ensure timely payment of your Youth Justice Grant 2023/24, you can submit prior to this date if you wish. Please e-mail your plan to CBU@yjb.gov.uk, copying in your YJB lead.

Youth justice plans, in England only, must be signed off by the full council in accordance with Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'. This regulation does not apply to Wales.

If you have not been able to achieve full sign off by the 30 June 2023, your plan can be submitted with the approval of the Board Chair with confirmation of full sign off submitted at a later date. The 'sign off' by the Chair is an indication that the wider management board have approved the submitted plan and **all sections outlined in the [Youth Justice Plan Structure](#) have been covered.**

There is a requirement on youth justice services to publish their youth justice plan³.

At the end of this document is a [summary outline of grant requirements against terms and conditions](#) to support services understanding of minimum compliances.

³ [The requirement is set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 \(section 40\) \(4\).](#)

Child First

You will be aware that the Youth Justice Board's (YJB) vision is of a Child First youth justice system, which we define as a system where all services:

- Prioritise the best interests of children and recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets responsibilities towards children.
- Promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.
- Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.
- Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

We are satisfied that the evidence supports this as the best approach to achieve better child outcomes. [A guide to Child First](#), alongside further information and tools, is available within the [Youth Justice Resource Hub](#).

The content of plans should reflect your activity in working to achieve the above vision.

How to produce your plan

Your [youth justice management board](#) should govern and own the process of producing the local youth justice plan; it is their opportunity to collectively shape the direction of the delivery of youth justice so that it best meets the needs of the locality, children, families, victims and communities. Opportunities for wider participation, significantly where children and their families can themselves shape and influence the delivery of your service, are also strongly encouraged.

Youth justice planning process – what might it include?

The management board (led by the Chair) should take the lead for planning and should include the following:

Reflect and plan

- Look back and learn from the past to recognise achievements and consider plans based on what is known now as well as looking to the future.
- Consider current performance, including performance data against local and national indicators over the previous 12 months, self-assessment against the [standards for children in the youth justice system](#) and other existing improvement plans.
- Identify and understand the needs of children in the justice system and the priorities needed to support good outcomes.
- Consider the key risks, issues and challenges, as well as key milestones.
- Involve input from children, their families and carers, enabling the voice of the child and user feedback and participation.
- Consult with staff and volunteers, particularly regarding improvements to service delivery and identifying learning and development needs of the workforce to support performance improvement and better outcomes.

Engage wider strategic partnerships

- Consider the regional and national context in which the partnership is operating. For example, 'what is the strategy and vision of key stakeholders within which the youth justice plan will 'sit'?'
- Take on board relevant wider strategic plans, (including perhaps your Police and Crime Plan, local authority plans (Children and Young People Plan for example), Violence Reduction Unit/Community Safety Partnership/Local Criminal Justice Board/Public Health Plans).
- Share with wider strategic partners who have not been involved in the development of the plan for feedback and amendments.

Youth justice services (YJSs) are asked to ensure that the information contained is clear and succinct so it is accessible to local residents and children.

Plans will cover both strategic and operational elements. The wider strategic picture should be captured, whilst also outlining the key business activities that will be undertaken by services to achieve wider strategic aims.

The plan should seek to include all services that contribute to the prevention of offending behaviour of children in their local area, as well as describing how the YJS itself operates and what functions it will carry out. This can be achieved through descriptions of operational partnership approaches across a local area, and the strategic links that underpin them.

The youth justice plan should set out the direction and strategy of youth justice services, describing how in particular, quality services will be provided to ensure positive outcomes for children and improvements in performance.

It is important to understand the needs and diversity of the local children's population, to devise and deliver appropriate individual and personalised services. The youth justice plan should contain information on the needs of children in the local area, including:

- an overview of offences by children, including a breakdown by sex, age, ethnicity, looked after status, types of offences
- how the needs of your cohort have been assessed to inform delivery decisions.

When sharing information, it is important to be mindful of the legal requirements of data sharing and ensure that no children are identifiable by the information that is being provided.

Youth justice plan structure

To aid youth justice partnerships in the production of the youth justice plan, commentary against the structure has been provided below.

Please use this structure as your template, ensuring each section is covered in your plan.

Introduction, vision and strategy

A foreword or statement introducing the plan from the Chair, or a senior representative of the local authority, confirming that the plan has been developed and agreed with youth justice partners and offers evidence of governance of the plan.

You may wish to provide information about the local context of both the service and local delivery environment. This can include information about the known demographics of the local population or any issues and concerns that impact on children in maximising their potential such as ethnicity, poverty and social deprivation, and children who have experienced care.

Child First

The YJB is committed to ensuring that we understand and promote across the youth justice system what the evidence tells us works best with children. Our focus on the principle of [Child First](#) is routed in this commitment. This section should be used to demonstrate how the partnership has achieved implementing the four tenets of the Child First principles into practical service delivery. However, the principle of Child First is not limited to this section and the plan should also demonstrate how this ethos is woven throughout other elements of service delivery. You may wish to use case examples.

Voice of the child⁴

The youth justice plan should include information on how the partnership works collaboratively with the child and how their voice is heard. This section should include:

- what has been done with that information or feedback
- any tangible examples of how feedback from children has been used to make changes in service delivery
- information about the process undertaken to gather the feedback, and how that is analysed for service development.

⁴ [Participation in Practice and Co-creation Project - Peer Power Project \(July 2021\) - Youth Justice Resource Hub \(yjresourcehub.uk\)](#)

You may wish to include individual quotes from children and their families and carers.

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

This section should provide an overview of how the partnership is meeting statutory requirements for the oversight of youth justice services.

An account of the local governance arrangements for youth justice services (YJSs) should be included, outlining how the youth justice management board links in with other partnership and local governance arrangements with relevant oversight responsibilities and shared aims.

A description of the partnership arrangements, at both an operational and strategic level, that contribute to support for children in the justice system should be outlined. As a multi-agency partnership, YJSs must contain specialists, or access to specialist provision for children being supervised, this includes the police, health, education, social work and probation as a minimum. A description of operational partnerships should include confirmation that this is the case. This should also include details of the relevant partnership provision, in staffing, financial contribution and how those arrangements work in practice, in addition to describing the workforce available to deliver statutory youth justice work. This section should include information on:

- Where the service is located within the local authority, or otherwise, and the rationale.
- The seniority of the YJS Head of Service role, including any other lead responsibilities.
- The full staffing structure showing details of the staff roles in the YJS and the reporting arrangements for the Head of Service should be included as an appendix within the plan. A separate table should also be included as an appendix recording the ethnicity, sex and known disability of staff.

Board development

The YJB expects local management boards to take responsibility for all aspects of youth justice service governance; to lead strategically across relevant partners and to ensure a high-quality service is provided to all children. In 2021 the YJB provided updated guidance on [youth justice service governance and leadership](#) to support this. Your youth justice plan should set out what are the plans for partnership improvements and board development.

Progress on previous plan

This section should include a commentary on performance on the key activities identified in the previous plan. Information should be provided on what activities and objectives were achieved in the preceding year. Progress should be reported on those actions that are still outstanding, or partially achieved. Any barriers to the successful completion of activities should be identified, and if still appropriate, what actions are planned to mitigate or overcome any barriers to achievement.

Resources and services

Your youth justice plan will need to provide assurance that the youth justice core grant will be used appropriately (as described in the Terms and Condition of Grant).

In this section you are required to include details of:

- how the youth justice core grant will be used
- partnership resources that contribute to the aims and expected outcomes of the plan, adding Table B5: Budget Costs and Contributions 2023/24 as an appendix if available (please refer to the [YJB Data Recording Requirements for Youth Justice Services in England and Wales 2023/2024](#)).

A description of effective and efficient use of resources should be linked to performance and outcome measures set out in the plan. e.g.

'we use our grant, partner contributions and available resources to deliver these services and we believe they produce the following benefits and outcomes. Our performance will be improved in 2023/24 by.....'

Performance

This section should contain a summary of key performance targets, describing what current performance looks like, what has contributed to good or poor performance, and what the partnership is aiming for in the future.

National key performance indicators:

Performance against the nationally measured targets should be captured in the plan (please refer to the [YJB Data Recording Requirements for Youth Justice Services in England and Wales 2023/2024](#)).

Existing key performance indicators:

Please provide a narrative on each of the indicators, providing supporting data, and demonstrate how the service are reducing:

- binary reoffending rate
- frequency of reoffending
- first time entrants
- use of custody.

Welsh YJSs should include their performance in relation to the Welsh Key Performance Indicators in this section and also include any information, and data if available, relating to the Welsh Blueprint.

Additional Key Performance Indicators (from April 2023):

It is a requirement of the service to report on the following [new key performance indicators](#) from April 2023, with the first submission due July 2023. We understand this information may not be obtainable at the time of submitting your plan but where possible please provide a narrative on each of the new indicators explaining the current position, any foreseen risks and challenges

and what actions are planned to address performance. Include any supporting data if available:

- suitable accommodation
- education, training and employment
- special educational needs and disabilities/additional learning needs
- mental health care and emotional wellbeing
- substance misuse
- out-of-court disposals
- links to wider services
- management board attendance
- serious violence
- victims.

Local performance

Local performance targets are encouraged, and local data to measure these targets are also welcomed as a useful way of overcoming the challenges to delays in national data. This can include any local targets that aim to improve the outcomes for children.

Priorities

We would be keen to understand how your youth justice plan addresses the following priorities:

Children from groups which are over-represented

Children from a range of backgrounds are over-represented in the youth justice system. Your youth justice plan should offer commentary on any data or intelligence you have about children who may be over-represented in the youth justice system in your area.

Nationally it is known that Black and Mixed ethnicity boys are over-represented and the recent [HMIP thematic report](#) made a number of recommendations for local authorities, YJS partnerships and YJS managers in relation to these children. Commentary on how the service has responded to these recommendations can be included here.

However, it is not only Black and Mixed ethnicity children that are over-represented, and the YJS should know and respond to any local concerns about all children from over-represented groups. This includes but is not limited to children known to social care services, children excluded from school and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

There should be an analysis of any data that identifies all children from over-represented groups, and an outline of what plans are in place to address this, and what has been delivered for these children. Tackling over-representation should be a concern across the partnership, therefore this should not be limited to the activities of the YJS and can include wider activities led by other partners.

If there is no data to indicate any groups of children are over-represented, this should be acknowledged.

Whilst there are fewer girls in the youth justice system, they do have a specific set of needs, and services should be adapted to meet the needs of the girls supervised by the service. If there are specific services or programmes that have been developed for girls, this should be included in this section.

Prevention⁵

Many partnerships are delivering early and/or targeted prevention work with children (together with their families/carers) who may be displaying behaviours associated with offending, antisocial behaviour, or vulnerability in order to safeguard children and promote positive outcomes to stop them entering the justice system.

This section can be used to set out the strategy and processes in place for prevention across the partnership. It should include how children are identified for prevention, how the service is delivered, by whom and how success is evaluated. Please provide practice examples and supporting data where available.

Diversion⁵

Many partnerships are delivering diversion work with children (together with their families/carers) who have committed an offence(s) to support them to avoid a criminal record and escalation into the justice system.

This section can be used to set out the strategy and processes in place for diversion. If not already provided within the key performance section, please include how children are identified for diversion, how the service is delivered, by whom, how success is evaluated and what scrutiny is in place. Please provide any practice examples and additional supporting data.

In both prevention and diversion, it is recognised that some of this work may be delivered outside the YJS; this activity should be included in these sections.

Education

From April 2023, YJSs will be required to submit performance data on:

- education, training and employment
- special educational needs and disabilities/additional learning needs.

If not previously covered, please provide further details of how the partnership is working to ensure all children known to the service are having their education needs met. This should include information of the education staffing provision in the service, and how this links with other partnership arrangements, such as voluntary sector organisations, academy trusts and the local authority and links to education representation on the board.

⁵ [Final Report: Prevention and Diversion Project – Youth Justice Board for England and Wales \(February 2023\) - Youth Justice Resource Hub \(yjresourcehub.uk\)](#)

Please provide supporting information for children who are not receiving their education entitlement, how many are excluded, on part time timetables or electively home educated. This data should be analysed to identify any disproportionality and care status of the child.

Restorative approaches and victims

Restorative approaches empower victims and gives them a voice in the criminal justice process, helping them to move on with their lives. Victims should be considered when planning for their safety and there should also be consideration of the child's past experience of being a victim and any potential future concern. Restorative approaches can also help children move forwards and draw a line under past events.

From April 2023, 'Victims' will become a key performance indicator. In this section please provide any supporting information that has not included in the Key Performance Indicator section above.

Serious violence and exploitation

Services are invited to provide a local picture on serious violence and exploitation according to the [Home Office Serious Violence Duty](#) (December 2022). This should include any strategic links to wider partnership arrangements and learnings from past [serious incidents](#).

Please comment on partnership work to address child criminal exploitation, including the service's interaction with the National Referral Mechanism or equivalent local arrangements. Any work being completed as a result of, or to prevent, radicalisation or extremist activity should be included in this section.

Whilst not applicable to all children who are subject to release under investigation (RUI) arrangements, a number of these investigations will relate to serious violence. This section should address what work is being completed across the partnership in relation to children subject to RUI.

Detention in police custody

Please provide information on children who are detained in custody, including how the service have addressed any local challenges, compliance with the [Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 \(PACE\)](#) and any examples of good practice. Include information around appropriate adult arrangements in your area, such as who provides the service, any local processes and the support of the Emergency Duty Team.

Remands

Children subject to remands to local authority accommodation and children subject to remands to 'Youth Detention Accommodation' should be covered in this section, and if data is available this should be included. Information should be included on any strategic plans being delivered across the partnership to reduce the use of remands.

Use of custody

The use of custody has decreased significantly over the past ten years and this is rightly a success in the youth justice system. When children do go to custody it can have a damaging effect on their lives, disrupting education and straining family relationships. Children in custody are likely to be amongst the most

complex and vulnerable children in society. Therefore, even in services where custody rates are low, reference should be made to strategic planning, including work across the partnership for these children and any analysis completed on their needs.

Constructive resettlement

Children leaving custody often face particular challenges in relation to suitable accommodation and this section can include what work the partnership has achieved in implementing the principles of constructive resettlement in practice, maximising where possible the use of temporary release and how they plan to implement the constructive resettlement approach in the future. Case examples can be included.

Standards for children in the justice system

Your youth justice plan should include Information on:

- the findings from your most recent [standards](#) for children in justice self-assessments
- actions completed to address gaps found in internal audits
- progress to date against your standards for children in justice action plan
- planned activity for the coming year.

Workforce Development

Please provide information on what activity will take place for workforce in 2023/24. Include an analysis of the workforce development needs of the staff in the service and the plans to deliver training and development over the next year. Provide details on any training or development that have been delivered in the past year and how this has impacted on service delivery.

Identify ways in which the workforce is supported, providing specific examples for promotion of the resilience and wellbeing for staff such as clinical supervision, peer to peer mentoring, etc.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

The purpose of evidence-based practice and innovation is to promote effective practices which achieve positive outcomes for children. This includes systems, ways of working or specific interventions which are based on the best available research, are child focused and developmentally informed.

In addition, examples where there is *emerging practice or innovation* should be included in this section. This can include practice that has been developed in response to the specific needs of a group of children, for example younger children, children with refugee experience, or practice in response to a theme, need or behaviour. This could include responses to support prevention and diversion, build strengths, re-engaging children in services, or systems approaches to ensure good communication.

Evaluation

In this section examples of practice should be included that meet the definition of evidence-based practice. If there has been any evaluation, either in-house, or externally validated, this should also be included.

Examples of practice can include small changes, as well as larger projects.

Service development plan

It is important during the preparation of your youth justice plan that you consider and capture detail around the following:

Service development

What key activities and outcomes for children are needed and how they will be delivered. You should consider:

- What benefits will be delivered and what success will look like?
- What support is needed?
- Will [sector support](#) be used?
- How the [YJB Strategic Plan 2021-24](#) will influence your local plan?

As part of this consideration, your youth justice plan must present progress against key findings from any relevant local inspection action plans, HMI Probation thematics, serious incident review or learning exercises that have taken place in the last 18 months.

Challenges, risks and issues

This section should include:

- an outline of current challenges, risks and issues to local youth justice services
- what actions are being taken to address existing issues and challenges
- what proposed action may be needed to address potential risks should they emerge.

Sign off, submission and approval

Youth justice plans can be submitted to the YJB at any point, but we request that approved plans are submitted by **30 June 2023** at the latest.

Youth justice plans, in England only, must be signed off by the full council in accordance with 'Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'. This regulation does not apply to Wales.

If you have not been able to achieve full sign off by the 30 June 2023, your plan can be submitted with the approval of the Board Chair with confirmation of full sign off submitted at a later date. The 'sign off' by the Chair is an indication that the wider management board have approved the submitted plan and **all sections outlined in the [Youth Justice Plan Structure](#) have been covered.**

To submit your youth justice plan you should e-mail CBU@yjb.gov.uk and copy in your YJB lead.

The YJB lead covering your region/Wales are available to review and consult on locally approved plans. Should feedback from them be sought, we advise consultation on a draft version take place as early as possible and before formal submission.

While the YJB provides grant to local areas, it is neither a signatory to the plan nor directly responsible for its contents. Consequently, neither the YJB nor the Ministry of Justice logo should appear on the document.

Appendix 1: Staffing Structure

The full staffing structure showing details of the staff roles in the YJS and the reporting arrangements for the Head of Service should be included as an appendix within the plan. A separate table should also be included as an appendix recording the ethnicity, sex and known disability of staff.

Appendix 2: Budget Costs and Contributions 2023/24

Budget Costs and Contributions 2023/24 as an appendix if available (please refer to the [YJB Data Recording Requirements for Youth Justice Services in England and Wales 2023/2024](#))

Summary outline of grant compliances

The below replicates Annex 3 within the youth justice core grant terms and conditions. Grant payment is made to the local authority as one lump sum when all the compliances set out below have been met. Payment will be made on condition that the following information will be provided by the timescale indicated. A failure to provide this information could result in the YJB on behalf of the Secretary of State for Justice requiring that the grant payment be returned.

If youth justice services are experiencing delay/difficulties with any of the below, contact with their relevant YJB lead is essential.

| Date | Activity | Contact |
|---|--|--|
| 31 May 2023 | Submission of the signed audit certificate for the previous year's 2022/23 Youth Justice Grant | Send to: YJBGrants@yjb.gov.uk |
| 30 June 2023 | Youth justice plan | Send to: CBU@yjb.gov.uk and copied to your relevant YJB lead |
| 30 June 2023 | Submission of a signed agreement of Conditions of Grant (e-signatures are now acceptable) – an email submission to the YJB must be copied to other signatories and state explicitly that the other signatories have agreed to the conditions | Send to: YJBGrants@yjb.gov.uk |
| 31 July 2023 | Submission of the planned overall income and workforce data for the youth justice service through the youth justice application framework | Contact: InformationandAnalysis@yjb.gov.uk |
| As per Data Recording Requirements (DRR) ⁵ | Submission of quarterly case management and AssetPlus data via Connectivity | Contact: InformationandAnalysis@yjb.gov.uk |