

Background

1. The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Board met on 1 March 2021 to consider the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection and Local Government Association Peer Review of the Torbay Youth Offending Team.
2. The Board heard from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Law, and Director of Children's Services, Nancy Meehan, who highlighted the key points arising from the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection and Local Government Association Peer Review of the Youth Offending Team (YOT) as set out in the submitted documents. The HMIP report covered three areas:

Domain one: organisational delivery:

Governance and leadership: inadequate – governance arrangements were not robust enough and seniority of board members not at the right level. Challenges had been identified by the Local Government Association (LGA) prior to the inspection but were not able to be addressed due to Covid-19 and the building where the Team was located being closed and the challenges of staff working from home. The YOT Board has been replaced by a Senior Partnership Board who have met to put together a vision for the next 18 months, with an operational Board sitting below to drive forward the changes to the partnership.

Domain two: court disposals:

Outstanding: this needs to be reviewed as it is not right that a child's outcome was better through a court disposal rather than out of court options.

Domain three: out-of-court disposals:

Inadequate: this was due to not being able to evidence the difference it would make to young people or how it would impact on the victims of crime and a lack of a quality assurance framework. It was proposed to take a more restorative approach rather than making use of formal cautions and court processes and to work more closely with the victims to support them in achieving satisfactory outcomes.

It was noted that overall the Youth Offending Team Service was judged as 'requires improvement' although it was acknowledged that the Youth Offending Team was a great and committed Team.

Members asked questions in relation to the following:

- concern that a large number of children and young people involved with the YOT were our children in care or who were not in education, employment or training (NEETs) – there were 24 children and young people who were being supported by the team and they all should be in education, employment and training;
- previously the YOT was highly regarded – the service had not been inspected for a while and when examined in detail there were a number of issues identified;
- different terminology e.g. out-of-court disposal – a glossary of terms to be provided in future reports to help understand the different actions available;
- how the YOT was working with the voluntary and community sector and Torbay Youth Trust to help provide wrap around support and using community provision more effectively – partnership working was a challenge identified by the review, this would be picked up by the Senior Partnership Board who were responsible for the funding;
- how would the lack of feedback be addressed – a quality assurance framework was being put in place to work with the young people, their families and victims which will help shape future provision;
- a third of the children were being educated in alternative provision, Pupil Referral Units can be linked to exclusion what action was being taken to address this – a panel has been established identifying the number of children who were being excluded or put into alternative provision, working with the Local Education Board to see how we can maintain these children in school without adversely impacting on the wider school. Rachael Williams, Assistant Director for Education sits on the YOT Senior Partnership Board and was looking at patterns and trends for elected home education to see if it was done out of choice;
- would the Kickstart programme help some of the young people and if the Youth Cautions would come back – the YOT were exploring options on how best to engage with the young person as options such as Youth Cautions form part of a criminal record but do not enforce engagement with the YOT, a preferred option would be a Youth Conditional Order, a caution given through a Panel and has a condition attached that the young person must work with the YOT;
- has the second YOT manager been found – the manager was in post but was working elsewhere at the time of the inspection with another manager picking up the role;
- number of first time entrants to the YOT being higher than the national average and lack of awareness of activities of the Board and communication of Youth Justice Plan and Business Continuity Plan – the new Senior Partnership Board was communicating to the Operational Board who in turn cascade this to front line staff. The previous Youth Justice Plan had been written by team managers at the time without the wider YOT management board inputting. There has been a slight reduction in new entrants but the data was not up to date due to how it was collated and it would be investigated to see if this was as a result of lockdown;
- the lack of qualified detached youth workers on the street, the guidelines state it should be 2 full time workers per secondary school

and Torbay has 2 full time workers for the whole area – it was suggested that some of the underspend in the overall Children’s Services budget may be used to help support the YOT; and

- overall members were disappointed with the report.

3. The Board resolved unanimously that the Cabinet be recommended:

- (i) to review the underspend in the Children’s Services revenue budget for 2020/2021 and consider investing some of this money in supporting youth services to address some of the issues identified in the Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) Inspection and Local Government Association Peer Review reports and action plan;
- (ii) to ensure the Youth Offending Team continues to work with community and voluntary sector partners, such as Imagine This and the Torbay Youth Trust to ensure positive outcomes for young people who are going through the Youth Offending Service; and
- (iii) to support the appointment of a dedicated Youth Offending Team Manager.