

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 11th September 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director for Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Youth Justice Plan (annual update)

WARD(S) All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report will brief Halton Executive Board on the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan for the sub-regional Youth Justice Service. Halton Council are core members of the statutory youth justice partnership along with the three other local authorities within the Cheshire Constabulary footprint. The National Probation Service, the NHS, Cheshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Cheshire Constabulary are the other statutory partners. The Youth Justice Plan requires formal approval and sign off in compliance with National Youth Justice Board (Ministry of Justice) Guidance and Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000'.
- 1.2 Given there is requirement for all Councils to approve and sign off their local areas Youth Justice Plan this (pan cheshire) plan will also be presented for approval at Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Councils during Autumn 2025.
- 1.3 Note the Youth Justice Service produced a three-year (2024-27) strategic plan for the sub-region, but the national guidance and legislation referred to in 1.1 above requires annual plans – or updates on multi-year plans as is the case with Cheshire's - to be approved by Cabinet and published on an annual basis.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The Executive Board notes the update on performance and progress made against priority areas during the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 set out in the refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire (attached at Appendix 1).**
- 2) Approves the content of the 2025-2026 refreshed and updated Youth Justice Strategic Plan for Cheshire and**

agrees to it being presented for approval.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan relating to their provision of youth justice services (YJS). Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 sets out the youth justice partnership 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 a youth justice plan, setting out priorities for youth justice services in their area, how they will be provided and funded and how they are performing against a range of national measures.
- 3.2 There is provision within the national guidance for the Chair of the Youth Justice Management Board to be given delegated authority to approve the Youth Justice Plan on behalf of the local authority and for formal approval and sign-off of the Plan to then be sought retrospectively from Full Council. Given the timelines and complexity of doing this within and across four councils this was the approach previously agreed by all four Local Authorities and is recommended for the annual refresh of the Youth Justice Plan again this year.
- 3.3 Halton have a shared service arrangement for Youth Justice Services with the other three Local Authorities in the sub-region and as such the Governance arrangements for Youth Justice are overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. In line with the legislative requirement the Youth Justice Service have updated the comprehensive three-year strategic plan for (for the period 2024-27) with this refreshed and updated 2025-26 version (see Appendix 1). It includes comprehensive performance data updated for the 2024-25 financial year and was produced in partnership with Cheshire Police and other statutory partners following consultation with service users. It was unanimously approved by Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on the 24th of June 2025 and submitted to the national Youth Justice Board on 30th June 2025. It now needs to be formally approved by cabinet and then signed off by Halton Council (as is also being done in the other three councils between September and November).

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Plan has been produced in accordance with national Youth Justice Board guidance and follows their prescribed template to include: foreword from the Chair of the Management Board (current chair is Amanda Perraton – Executive Director of Children and Families at Cheshire West Council), Vision and Strategy, Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements, Progress on previous years, Resources and services, Performance against National key performance indicators, Priorities, Information on

Children from groups which are over-represented, Prevention, Diversion, Education, Restorative approaches and victims, Serious violence and exploitation, Detention in police custody, Remands, Use of custody, Standards for children in the justice system, Workforce Development, Evidence-based practice and innovation, Service Development, Challenges, risks and issues.

- 4.2 Performance figures show that Cheshire YJS continue to achieve good levels of performance against the three main performance indicators: First Time Entrants to the criminal justice system (FTEs), Custody rates and re-offending (all detailed within the updated YJ Plan).
- 4.3 In 2024-25 there were only 21 Halton children who became “first time entrants” to the justice system (i.e. were cautioned by police or sentenced by the courts for the first time) which is well below regional and national averages and is in part at least attributable to the successful youth diversion scheme operated by the YJS in partnership with Cheshire Constabulary. A continued partnership commitment to reducing the unnecessary criminalisation of cared for children means very few cared for children or care leavers are prosecuted with most now receiving out of court disposals in recognition their offending behaviour is often symptomatic of vulnerability or exploitation and rarely presents a risk of harm to the general public. Rates of Serious Youth Violence in this sub-region were also well below the national average at 3.4 offences per 10,000 children compared to a Northwest regional average of 7.2 and national average of 6.2.
- 4.4 The priorities for Youth Justice in Halton and the rest of the sub-region over the next 12 months are described fully in the YJ Plan but include; 1) Continuing to develop participation and amplifying the voice and influence of children, families and victims 2) Enhance the offer to victims of youth crime, ensuring the youth justice service partnership is compliant with the new Victim and Prisoners Act and 3) Undertake comprehensive quality assurance audits in the following areas of practice; custody and resettlement, the quality and impact of education, training and employment support to justice involved children and work with children subject to out of court disposals.
- 4.5 The Youth Justice Service have consulted with children, parents, carers, and stakeholders in the development of the plan.
- 4.6 If cabinet approves this updated Youth Justice Plan for publication the next annual refresh will also be presented to cabinet in the Autumn of 2026 in line with national guidance.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications for the production and publication of the Youth Justice Plan.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

The Youth Justice Service works collaboratively with both the Integrated Care Board and health providers to support children to get the right help for what are often quite complex needs and avoid unnecessary criminalisation where possible. Children in the justice system are disproportionately impacted by health inequalities and the multi-disciplinary youth justice service includes access to mental health service and speech and language support.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The service supports young people and encourages them to be part of the local economy, reach their full potential and get the best start in life which aligns with these council priorities.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

As above and the service supports children services and police to safeguard children from exploitation.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Children in and on the cusp of the justice system are among the most vulnerable in Halton. The Youth Justice Service is a multi-disciplinary service that works in a child first, trauma informed and relational way to support this marginalised cohort of children and support them to desist from crime and enjoy a safe transition into adulthood.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Not applicable.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The Youth Justice Service promotes community participation through restorative justice and reparation. Enabling children who have offended to contribute positively in their community while also ensuring any risk they present to vulnerable people in the community is assessed and managed.

7.0 Risk Analysis

- 7.1 There are no risks identified, the Youth Justice Plan has been produced in compliance with national guidance and is submitted for formal approval at council in line with the legislative requirement to produce, approve and then publish a Youth Justice Plan.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The strategic plan provides data relating to the proportion of children in the criminal justice system from different ethnic backgrounds because historically children from ethnic backgrounds are over-represented in the criminal justice system. Note data shows that (unlike most regions) children from Black or dual heritage backgrounds are not over-represented in the criminal justice system. Similarly, the plan provides data relating to the number of cared for children in the justice system and highlights the positive impact of diversionary partnership activity to minimise the criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no climate change implications identified.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’