



SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 22ND APRIL 2026

DRAFT YOUTH JUSTICE STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 TO 2027

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Scrutiny Commission (as the County Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee) on the draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026 to 2027, attached as Appendix A to this report. The draft Plan will be presented to the Cabinet on 28th April 2026 alongside any comments of the Commission and thereafter presented to full Council for approval on 13th May 2026. This is in accordance with Regulation 4 of the 'Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000.'

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. There is a statutory requirement in section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for the County Council to produce a Youth Justice Plan which is linked to releasing the Youth Justice Grant from the Ministry of Justice.
3. In relation to Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026, the Youth Justice Plan and the work of the Youth and Justice Service contribute to the following strategic objectives:
 - a. Clean and Green – through direct and indirect education and reparation with children linked to the environment and green spaces. An example of this is the Nature4Nurture Project which is a gardening wellbeing project which is ran across three County Council sites, County Hall being one of them.
 - b. Great communities – the service is supported by a pool of committed volunteers who engage with children and support re-engagement within communities by being a trusted adult. The Service has since introduced "young volunteers" who are children who volunteer with the service as an exit-strategy from support and contribute to developing the service, the recruitment of staff, and voice and influence work.
 - c. Improved outcomes – The service remains committed to ensuring that the children who access the service have access to the relevant support and advocacy to ensure that their needs are met and risks are managed. The service has developed a strong offer of support for victim to ensure that they are heard, supported and can engage in restorative justice approaches.

- d. Safe and Well – The service remains committed to identifying and supporting children and victims where safeguarding approaches are required both inside and outside of the home.

Background

- 4. Youth Justice Services (formally Youth Offending Teams) were introduced nationally in 2002. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for overseeing the youth justice system in England and Wales. It has provided the framework for the Youth Justice Plan nationally, and states that it is the duty of each local authority, in consultation with the partner agencies, to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan, setting out and reviewing the priorities of the Service in that local authority area.
- 5. Leicestershire Youth Justice is commissioned by Rutland Council to deliver youth justice and prevention work. The current commission is being refreshed and is likely to be procured for a three-year period.

Youth and Justice Partnership Board

- 6. The guidance stipulates that the Youth and Justice Partnership Board should govern and own the process of producing the Youth Justice Plan so that it best meets the needs of the locality, children, families, victims and communities.
- 7. The Youth and Justice Partnership Board is the statutory body which oversees the performance of the Service as defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The statutory members of this Board are officers from the County Council for Children's Social Care and Education, Probation Service, Leicestershire Police, Integrated Care Board, and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Board has accountability for the performance and delivery of Youth Justice provision across Leicestershire. The Board is chaired by the Director of Children and Family Services and the Vice-Chair is the Head of Leicestershire Probation.
- 8. The Youth and Justice Partnership Board meets quarterly. The Board is provided with a full suite of performance data and other associated reports to help discharge its statutory responsibilities. This approach enables the Board to be agile around its scrutiny of data, identifying trends and emerging themes and responding to them. The Youth Justice Plan provides strategic direction to the Service and Partnership and a partnership action plan will set out how priorities will be achieved. The papers for the Youth and Justice Partnership Board are not publicly available.
- 9. The quality of services delivered to children and victims and the strength of the Youth and Justice Partnership Board are independently scrutinised by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.

Changes to Youth Justice

10. The existing Youth Justice Plan covered the period 2023-2026. The new Plan is however a one-year plan as the Youth Justice landscape is in flux and a number of details remain to be clarified, namely:
 - a. There are several Youth Justice reforms due to be announced during 2026 by Central Government. In February 2026 it was announced that several statutory functions would move from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) into the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The relationship between Youth Justice Services, the YJB, and the MOJ has not yet been defined, and it is expected to take a year for that to be designed. The YJB will be performing a role in supporting the development of practice across Youth Justice services.
 - b. A first announcement was made in March 2026 by Minister Jake Richards which focused on reforms to keep children out of prison. An opportunity was presented by the Minister to Youth Justice Services (YJS) to work in partnership with neighbouring YJS Services, across judiciary areas to strengthen the offer available to children as alternatives to custody. An expression of interest been submitted to the Ministry of Justice by Northamptonshire Children's Trust who are taking the lead for work across a proposed partnership between Leicestershire, Leicester City and Northamptonshire Youth Justice Services This work is in its infancy and will be managed through the Youth and Justice Partnership Board.
 - c. Further tightening to crime-related legislation are expected to be announced over the coming year, details of this have not yet been shared. The Knife Crime legislation being the first to be introduced on 1st April 2026 which places greater responsibility on Youth Justice Services to identify and manage knife-related risks, strengthen prevention and diversion work with children and young people, and work closely with police and partners to reduce access to weapons and prevent serious violence
 - d. The impact of Local Government Review/Reorganisation as it affects Leicestershire is not yet known.
11. It is unclear how the above will affect the strategic direction of Youth Justice Services at the current time. The opportunity to have a multi-year Plan remains available and will be considered for 2027 onwards.

Consultation/Engagement

12. Co-design of the Youth Justice Plan commenced on 5th December 2025 at the Youth and Justice Partnership Board, where Board Members commenced work on reviewing the progress of the service over the last year and identifying priorities for the year ahead. Meetings were held between Board Members, and the Head of Youth Justice throughout January and February 2026, following which a draft of the Youth Justice Plan was submitted to the Youth and Justice Board on 6th March 2026 for final approval by all statutory partners. This is in line with the statutory guidance on Youth Justice Plans.

13. The workforce was consulted in January 2026 for their contributions to the Plan and children, parents and carers contributed to the Plan through the post-intervention evaluation surveys.
14. There is no requirement for a public consultation exercise.

The Draft Youth Justice Plan

15. The Youth and Justice Service in Leicestershire has continued to perform strongly, with a low level of First Time Entrants compared with regional and national comparators, low longer-term reoffending, and very low use of remand and custody, whilst remaining compliant with all statutory returns to the Youth Justice Board.
16. Over 2025/26, achievements included strengthening Child First practice (guiding principles for the youth justice system; child-focused and based on the best contemporary evidence available) through targeted training for managers, practitioners and volunteers, and ongoing quality assurance activity to improve the consistency and impact of assessments and interventions. Health has been a priority area; progressing children's health outcomes through the Youth Justice Health Lead (the post is funded by Public Health) and wellbeing developments including Nature4Nurture and new trauma-informed groupwork offer for boys and girls separately, alongside work to secure speech and language therapy commissioning. There are some key notable developments which include strengthening links with the Council's SEND services, enhancing support for victims through investment in a Restorative Approaches Team, a clearer victim offer and referral pathways with a child victim pathway, and expanding out-of-court and diversion work with Leicestershire Police to develop pathways of support for children through Deferred Caution Schemes. A particular success has been 'Project Brake' which supports children to develop education around the road safety when they have been charged with a low-level motoring offence which has reduced the criminalisation of children following the successful engagement in interventions.
17. In 2026/27, the Youth and Justice Partnership will focus on five priorities: improving education, employment and training outcomes, strengthening children's health and wellbeing, improving support for victims, strengthening prevention pathways for children at risk of entering the criminal justice system, and ensuring a coordinated response for children at the highest risk of harm, exploitation and/or serious violence.
18. Statutory responsibilities have been placed upon Youth Justice Services and the Police in relation to new knife-crime legislation and the Partnership is fully compliant with these in line with the implementation date of 1st April 2026.
19. Across all priorities, the Youth and Justice Partnership Board will maintain a commitment on reducing groups of children who are disproportionately represented within the youth justice system such as looked after children, girls, Black, Asian and multi-ethnic children for example. This is achieved by sharing partnership data and appropriate challenging agencies and their approaches.

Resource Implications

20. The financial position of the core Youth Justice funding has been stable with the Service managing within its budget. The Youth and Justice Partnership Board receives a full financial report on the position of the pooled budget each quarter. The budget for 2025-26 was:

Agency	Staffing Costs	Payments in kind	Other delegated funds	Total
Youth Justice Board			604,659	604,659
Local Authority			1,032,461	1,032,461
Police				0
Police and Crime Commissioner	91,847		77,934	169,781
Probation	73,764		37,806	111,570
Health	70,945		47,588	118,533
Welsh Government				0
Other			75,645	75,645
Total	236,556	0	1,876,093	2,112,649

21. The strategic partnership also provides staffing in-kind as part of their contribution and this equates to a full-time seconded Probation Officer, two warranted Police Constables and access to an Adverse Childhood Experiences Team from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Public Health supports a Youth Justice Health Lead post. The Team is further supported by a young people's substance misuse offer from Turning Point. All these specialist workers are fully embedded within the Service and support the direct delivery of interventions with children whilst retaining positive relationships with their parent organisation.
22. In terms of the 2026-27 budget, the MOJ (previously the YJB) has yet to confirm the grant allocation, and this is expected to be announced in late April. Heads of Youth Justice have been advised that the grant will be a three-year settlement, for the first time. Confirmation has also been received of additional three-year funding for prevention work, but the amount is not yet confirmed. Partner contributions remain the same. The budget should remain relatively similar to 2025-26. A multi-year settlement does provide the opportunity to plan the service and establishment better.

Timetable for Decisions

23. The draft Plan will be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 28th April 2026, prior to submission to the YJB in advance of 30th June 2026.
24. The final Plan will be considered by the County Council on 13th May 2026.

Background Papers

Report to the Scrutiny Commission on 12 April 2023 "Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2023-2026

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=137&MIId=7100&Ver=>

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-2026

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/LCC-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Equality Implications

25. Inequality is inherent within in the criminal justice system and there is substantive research to support this. To this end, an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and attached as Appendix B.

Human Rights Implications

26. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-27
Appendix B: Equalities Impact Assessment