



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 22 APRIL 2026

MINUTE EXTRACT

YOUTH JUSTICE STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 - 2027

The Commission, acting in its capacity as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee, considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented the draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan for 2026–2027 for comment. A copy of the report marked ‘Agenda Item11’ is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were made:

- (i) Members noted the statutory basis of the Plan and the longstanding partnership governance arrangements put in place to support this across Leicestershire and Rutland which included oversight through the Youth and Justice Partnership Board. The Board brought together senior leaders from all local authorities, the Police, Probation Service, Health and Education.
- (ii) The principle underpinning the Plan continued to be a ‘child first’ approach, recognising that most who came into contact with the youth justice system were not fully grown adults making well-informed, well-thought through decisions, but often children with unmet needs, vulnerabilities and safeguarding concerns.
- (iii) The Plan continued to place emphasis on prevention, early intervention, diversion and safeguarding alongside strengthening work to improve outcomes for victims, reducing unnecessary escalation and criminalization and ensuring a coordinated partnership response to support children at the highest risk of harm, exploitation and serious violence.
- (iv) Members were advised of national reform uncertainty affecting youth justice structures and reporting requirements. For this reason, a single year plan had been prepared. This would allow for a further review to be undertaken in a years’ time to respond to further changes on the horizon, for example, regarding SEND and Social Care reforms which impact on Youth Justice. The Director confirmed that, at present funding for the service remained stable and that this would not be affected by the one year plan approach.

- (v) Members raised concerns about the lack of clear performance data and benchmarking information within the report. Members suggested that the inclusion of baseline information and targets relating to matters such as reoffending rates, the number of first-time entrants, remands and custody and how these compared to neighbouring authorities would be helpful to understand how effective the previous Plan had been and to help identify areas for future improvement. The Director advised that Leicestershire experienced very low numbers of first-time entrants and remands, and explained challenges regarding national data definitions, police reporting systems and recent reporting changes introduced by the Government, all of which had resulted in mixed data being available that was not entirely helpful. The Director assured members that local cohort tracking work was being developed to improve insight and this would feature in the next report to the Commission in a year's time.
- (vi) Members asked what actions were being taken to address the racial disproportionality of those caught in the youth justice system. It was acknowledged that this was a national issue that required a multi-agency approach. The Director advised that work was underway to develop a partnership plan on this issue, with planned focus sessions to be held by the Board to strengthen accountability and response. Members highlighted the role of local leisure/community facilities in diversion and asked whether the Council could support protection of such provisions which due to lack of funding were now being threatened. Officers advised that preventative provision was important in keeping children out of the system as they provided useful points for children to meet and engage with adults they trusted who could provide additional means of support outside the family.
- (vii) It was noted that the deferred prosecution approach was used in limited circumstances around low-level motoring offences to enable assessment and targeted intervention without the need to face disproportionate long-term consequences in adult motoring court. It was noted that, for example, a child seeking to harm themselves, if found in possession of a knife would have to be arrested is now an opportunity under knife crime legislation. However, the deferred prosecution approach provided an opportunity to support that children, for example, by providing mental health support, rather than pushing them automatically through the criminal justice system.
- (viii) Members asked what work was underway to reduce the risk of children with SEND entering the youth justice system. The Director described strengthened links with SEND leadership and wider early help and inclusion services, highlighting specific work such as commissioning speech and language therapy support that was now being undertaken.
- (ix) Members emphasised the importance of earlier support particularly for primary-aged children and their families who might also be struggling. The Director advised that the Youth Justice Service was required to target children aged 10 (the age of criminal responsibility) up

to the age of 19. However, it was closely linked with the Council's youth work offer which was based out in localities and worked closely with local action and support groups and district councils. The Service also worked closely with the Council's family support/early help team which targeted younger children and their families but helped to identify those coming of age that might get caught in the system and so required additional preventative support. Members noted, however that the Youth Justice Service primarily dealt with those aged around 14 years.

RESOLVED:

That the Commission's comments on the draft Youth Justice Plan be submitted for consideration by Cabinet and Full Council, and that the Plan be noted.

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