

REPORT OF THE CABINET

A. YOUTH JUSTICE STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 TO 2027

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's approval for the Leicestershire Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-27. The Plan is attached as Appendix A to this report.
2. The County Council has a statutory duty under section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to produce a Youth Justice Plan which reflects on the progress of the previous plan (2023-26) and sets the strategic priorities for the forthcoming period.

Background

3. There is a statutory requirement under 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.
4. The Youth Justice Strategic Plan has previously covered a 3-year period. In March 2026, the Ministry of Justice announced the first of a number of reforms to the youth justice sector over the coming year and it felt appropriate to understand the impact of these prior to considering a further multi-year plan. This can be considered from 2027.

Youth Justice Partnership Board

5. Guidance stipulates that the Youth and Justice Partnership Board should govern and own the process of producing the Youth Justice Plan. The Board, which meets quarterly, is the statutory body which oversees the performance of the Service as defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Members include officers from the Council, Probation Service, Leicestershire Police, the Integrated Care Board, and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Board is accountable for the performance and delivery of Youth Justice provision across Leicestershire.
6. 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

7. The new Youth Justice Strategic Plan is a one-year plan due to a number of changes expected, for example -

- Several Youth Justice reforms are due to be announced during 2026 by the Government. In February 2026 it was announced that several statutory functions would move from the Youth Justice Board into the Ministry of Justice.
- An announcement in March 2026 by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Jake Richards, which focused on reforms to keep children out of prison. An opportunity for partnership work with neighbouring Youth Justice Services to strengthen the offer of alternatives to custody has been presented; this is in its infancy and will be managed through the Youth and Justice Partnership Board.
- Further tightening to crime-related legislation are expected to be announced over the coming year, details of which are awaited. Knife Crime legislation introduced on 1 April 2026 places greater responsibility on Youth Justice Services to identify/manage knife related risks, strengthen prevention and diversion activity, and work with partners to reduce access to weapons and prevent serious violence.
- The impact of Local Government Reorganisation is unknown.

The Youth Justice Plan 2026-27

8. 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.
9. 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. Delivery against these priorities will be coordinated through the Youth and Justice Partnership Board with performance monitored through agreed partnership measures and regular reporting.
10. 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 1 April 2026.
11. 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.

Consultation

12. There is a requirement that the Plan be agreed by the statutory partners of the Youth and Justice Partnership. The Chair of the Youth and Justice Management Board is the only signatory required on the Plan. Consultation with Youth and Justice Management Board members commenced on 2 December 2025 to identify the key priorities and concluded when the Plan was ratified by the Board on 6 March 2026.
13. There is no formal requirement for children to be consulted on the Youth Justice Plan due to its strategic nature. However, the workforce, children, parents and carers have contributed to the development of this plan.
14. There is no requirement for a public consultation exercise.

Comments of the Scrutiny Commission

15. The Scrutiny Commission, in its capacity as the designated Crime and Disorder Committee, considered the Youth Justice Strategic Plan at its meeting on 22 April 2026. Arising from discussion the following points were made:
 - i) The Plan was a statutory requirement, supported by longstanding partnership arrangements in Leicestershire and Rutland including oversight by Youth and Justice Partnership Board.
 - ii) The Plan was underpinned by a 'child first' approach, recognising that those who came into contact with the youth justice system were often children with unmet needs, vulnerabilities, and safeguarding concerns.
 - iii) Continued emphasis was placed on prevention, early intervention, diversion and safeguarding, alongside strengthening work to improve outcomes for victims, reduce unnecessary escalation/criminalisation, and ensure a coordinated partnership response.
 - iv) Uncertainty around national reforms had resulted in a single-year Plan, allowing for further review. Funding, which at present was stable, was unaffected by this approach.
 - v) Members raised concerns about the lack of clear performance and benchmarking information and suggested the inclusion of more detailed data. The Director advised that Leicestershire had very low numbers of first-time entrants and remands, and that there were challenges with national data definitions and reporting systems, which gave mixed data that was not entirely helpful. Local cohort tracking work was seeking to improve insight and would feature in the next report to the Commission.
 - vi) Members asked about action to address the racial disproportionality of those entering the youth justice system, noting this was a national issue that required a multi-agency approach. The Director advised that partnership work was underway to address this. The useful role of local

leisure/community facilities and threats to these due to lack of funding was also raised by members.

- vii) The use of a deferred prosecution approach in some instances was noted. This enabled assessment and targeted intervention, such as mental health support, avoiding disproportionate, long-term consequences.
- viii) Strengthened links with SEND leadership and wider Early Help and Inclusion services were noted, including specific work such as speech and language therapy now being offered.
- ix) Members commented on the importance of earlier support, notably for primary-aged children and their families. The Director said that the Youth Justice Service was required to target children aged 10 (the age of criminal responsibility) to 19 but linked closely with the Council's local youth work offer and family support/ Early Help teams. The Service dealt primarily with those aged around 14 years.

16. The Commission noted the Plan and resolved that its comments be submitted for consideration by the Cabinet and Council.

Resource Implications

17. The Youth Justice Service is funded through the Youth Justice Grant, of which the Youth Justice Plan is a condition for release of the finances, along with a partnership pooled budget.
18. The financial position of the Youth Justice Service is managed through the Youth and Justice Partnership Board through quarterly reporting which is overseen by a Business Partner.
19. The core Youth Justice Grant is released in conjunction with oversight from the Director of Corporate Resources.
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 is shown in the table below.

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 its 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 Ministry of Justice (previously the Youth Justice Board) 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.
23. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Equality Implications

24. 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 to support this Plan and is attached as Appendix B. The Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-27 sets out its intentions to address inequalities for children.

Human Rights Implications

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

Consideration by the Cabinet

26. The Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April 2026 considered the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026 to 2027 together with comments from the Scrutiny Commission and resolved:
 - a) That the comments of the Scrutiny Commission be noted;
 - b) That the County Council at its meeting on 13 May 2026 be recommended to approve the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-2027.

(Motion to be moved:-

That the Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-2027 be approved.)

28 April 2026

**Mr. D. Harrison CC
Leader of the Council**

Background Papers

Report to the Scrutiny Commission on 22 April 2026 "Draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-2027" -

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=8538>

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2022-2026

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

Appendices

Appendix A - Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-27

Appendix B - Equalities Impact Assessment