

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 40

Ymateb gan : Bwrdd Cyfiawnder Ieuencid Cymru

Response from : Youth Justice Board Cymru

**Subject: Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee
(Youth Justice)**

We are writing on behalf of the Youth Justice Board to draw your attention to the current performance of youth justice in Wales. We would like to point out the successes and the difficulties now faced by Youth Offending Teams across Wales. Furthermore, we would like to outline the innovative trauma led approach we are taking to address the complex needs of some of the most traumatised and difficult to reach young people in the sector and would like to call for the support of the Committee in raising awareness of these issues, helping to ensure Youth Offending Teams are no longer at the centre of funding cuts and also helping in the continued pilot of the trauma led approach to youth justice in Wales.

As you may be aware, the YJB works to prevent offending and reoffending by children and young people and to ensure custody for them is safe and secure. The youth justice system in Wales is provided by both devolved and non-devolved services. The Welsh Government and the YJB work in partnership to improve services for children and young people from Wales who are in, or at risk of entering, the youth justice system. This shared vision is underpinned by our joint strategy *Children and Young People First* which sets out a holistic approach to end-to-end youth justice in Wales and is based on our belief that prevention is better than cure and that young people should be treated as children first and offenders second.

Youth Offending Teams

The Welsh Government does not have responsibility for the youth justice system in Wales. However, policies such as education, housing, substance misuse, health, and social services and the needs of looked after children are all devolved to Welsh Ministers and they have a significant impact on the delivery of youth justice services. At the centre of the sector is the Youth Offending Team (YOT), a multi-agency team including practitioners from the aforementioned policy areas, youth workers, the police and the third sector. YOTs are uniquely positioned to bring together the key skills and agencies required to balance the rights and needs of young people with the rights of their past and potential victims.

Through this partnership approach highly effective regional and national structures have emerged. In Wales there is a shared conviction at all levels that the young people in the youth justice system are children first, offender second. This unified, strategic approach, overseen by the Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel brings coherence to the system in Wales. For example, through our national strategic approach all 15 YOTs in Wales deliver targeted youth crime prevention services and services that work with the police to divert first time offenders into non-criminalising restorative justice.

The level of success achieved by working together with a shared vision has delivered staggering results. In Wales, between 2008 and 2015 we have seen a 84% reduction in first time entrants to the justice system and a 75% reduction in the use of custody. We doubt any other public service could demonstrate a similar level of success and yet, this is under significant threat from continued budget cuts.

It should be noted that the level of joint partnership working, with a national strategic approach sets Wales apart from England, with fewer young people entering the youth justice system and a closer, more collaborative working relationship between youth justice services and national governance.

The success and strength of the youth justice system in Wales is built upon the work of the YOTs. It is a harsh reality of the times that we must all do more with less, but as a multi-agency model, the YOT is often threatened by budget reduction on a number of fronts at the same time. When their share of funding from devolved policy areas reduces in parallel with reductions to non-devolved areas such as policing, probation and regrettably our own Ministry of Justice sourced grant, the effect on the YOT is magnified. This places success under threat as YOTs, faced with ever reducing budgets and resource, may have to reduce their focus on prevention and diversion work to concentrate on statutory commitments. Although this may realise short term savings, there may be a far greater cost created further down the line. Without effective early intervention, prevention and diversion work many more young people may reoffend and the use of custody increase.

We therefore encourage the Committee to examine current arrangements for the funding of prevention work and the extent to which these support the wellbeing of future generations; including the threat to wellbeing that involvement in the criminal justice system brings.. YOTs have a proven track record of success in preventing offending but they can only continue to do this if wider prevention and children's services work with them to address the kinds of challenging behaviours often displayed by our most vulnerable young people.

A trauma-led workforce in Wales

As outlined above, the youth justice system has been highly successful in reducing the number of first time entrants to the system; however, we now face different challenges because of this success. While there are now fewer young people in the youth justice system, those left are the most vulnerable with the most complex needs.

Our research into the most prolific reoffending cohort of young people has shown that they are a very troubled and troublesome group; vulnerable with a high degree of complexity. It is clear that without addressing the deep rooted issues that these children carry, we will make limited impact on their offending behaviour.

In response to this we have adapted a psychology-led way of working with complex young people in youth offending teams. The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) was developed in a secure children's home in Wales and we are testing how a similar approach works in three Welsh YOTs.

Research shows that young people must move through a number of stages before they are ready for interventions that challenge offending behaviour. The first step is to introduce the kind of structure and routine often lacking at home. Next, a trusting relationship needs to be built with workers. This is based on practitioner reliability and an ability to maintain trust, often while dealing with anger and rejection from the young person.

It's not until a safe and trusting relationship is built that young people feel they can talk about the problems that underlie their behaviour. At this point, therapeutic input from practitioners and other specialists can be introduced. This leads to the young person reaching self-awareness and realising the harm they have done to others. Self-awareness is the platform for young people to plan change in their own behaviour and, eventually, to move on from offending.

Work with young people in any setting begins with assessment. This generally focuses on the here-and now issues like living conditions, parenting style, educational provision, physical and mental health problems. This kind of approach helps us to get a snapshot of the current problems facing the child or family. The Enhanced Case Management (ECM) approach builds on this kind of assessment. It goes further and looks in detail at the life history of the young person and their family.

So, the essential difference between normal assessments and ECM case formulation is the focus on the developmental causes which have given rise to the current problems. Case formulation is a complex clinical process that requires qualified psychological leadership to ensure safety and rigour throughout.

Young people referred to the ECM Project have complex histories and the formulation model explains how chronic, underlying and unresolved trauma can impact on behaviour during childhood and adolescence.

Interventions based on case formulation seek to undo the causes that have led to current behaviours and difficulties and move forward developmentally from there. This approach, which focusses more on underlying causes than on the presenting problems, is extremely effective in helping such children recover lost ground through dealing with the real issues that lie underneath. We believe that this approach shows great promise, not only for benefitting children and young people involved in the youth justice system but all children impacted by trauma, neglect or other adverse childhood experiences such as those in the care system.

This innovative approach puts youth justice in Wales at the forefront of global practice.

The initial phase of our test of this approach pilot will conclude in November but an interim evaluation and case studies of young people involved in the ECM project provide a compelling case for continuation of the approach. The final independent evaluation report will provide a more formal examination of the pilot but we are already planning a wider trial of the approach.

YJB Cymru is working to engage with Welsh Government, Police and Crime Commissioners and others in the Youth Justice Sector to obtain support for introducing ECM in more YOTs. We are also working to introduce the model in HMP Parc Young Offender Institute. Our vision is to have a trauma-led Youth Justice workforce, both in the community and in custody.

Introducing the ECM across YOTs in Wales will require the participation of all partners and we would welcome the Committee's support of this work. We are sure you will agree that helping the most traumatised and complex young people in the youth justice sector is essential if we are to break the cycle of reoffending.

Conclusion

It is imperative that we ensure agencies and services work together to give children and young people the services they need in order to prevent them from offending or reoffending and we would therefore recommend that the Committee include the following two items in its forward plan of work:

- investigation of the trauma-led approach we are taking in the Enhanced Case Management project. The Committee's aid is vital in raising the profile of this work and ensuring Government support for the further roll out of the approach across YOTs and in the longer term other work with complex young people in Wales.
- a review of national arrangements for funding of wider prevention services; and
- support for the maintenance of the current strong structures for collaborative multi-agency youth justice delivery in Wales.

If the Committee would like further evidence we would welcome a discussion with you given your interest in youth justice. We would be happy to present to the Committee an overview of Youth Justice in Wales and the importance of continuing to protect children and young people from the damaging consequences of criminality. We would also be willing to share the results of the evaluation of the Enhanced Case Management project which we anticipate will be available in the New Year.