

Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



Reading
Borough Council
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09 June 2025

Title	Reading Youth Justice Service annual plan 2026/27
Purpose of the report	To summarise the Youth Justice plan
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Lara Patel, Executive Director Children's Services
Report author	Ollie Foxell, Service Manager, Youth Justice and Extra Familial Harm
Lead Councillor	Cllr Wendy Griffith, Lead Councillor for Children
Corporate priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote more equal communities in Reading Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
Recommendations	That the Committee notes the progress of the 2025/26 Youth Justice Service annual plan and timeframes for completion and approves the strategic priorities for 2026-27

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on the Local Authority to produce an annual Youth Justice Plan. The production of a plan is also a condition of the Youth Justice Board Grant. Once agreed the Plan will be published on the Reading Borough Council website.
- 1.2. The production and sign-off of the plan is overseen by the multi-agency Youth Justice Partnership through the Youth Justice Management Board which is independently chaired. The structure of the Plan complies with the expectations set out by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Annual Youth Justice Plan is a statutory requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, requiring the local authority to publish a plan on an annual basis. The plan contributes to the strategic theme of promoting more equal communities in Reading and safeguarding and supporting the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children, as set out in the Corporate Plan.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. This year's Youth Justice Plan has been completed in draft ahead of the deadline of 30th June for submission to the Youth Justice Board, before which it will be agreed and signed off at the Youth Justice Management Board on 23rd June.
- 3.2. Performance across the Youth Justice Service continues to improve, with clear evidence of positive outcomes for children, families, and victims. Notable progress has been made in reducing first-time entrants to the Youth Justice System and lowering reoffending rates. These improvements reflect sustained focus on developing evidence-based practice, partnership delivery, and diversionary interventions. Below is a summary of areas of improved performance, followed by areas of challenge:

Reduction in First Time Entrants (FTEs)

- 25 children entered the youth justice system for the first time in 2025–26, a **10% reduction** from 28 in the previous year.
- This follows a **27% reduction** the year prior, demonstrating sustained improvement.
- The FTE rate is now **below the national average**, though still above comparator groups.

Drivers of improvement:

- Joint Decision-Making Panel for Out of Court Disposals
- Turnaround programme
- Diversionary initiatives and **Youth Diversionary Disposals**, including deferred outcomes

Reduction in Reoffending

- **21.9% reoffending rate** (12 months to June 2024), a **6.2% decrease** from the previous year
- 14 out of 64 children reoffended
- The rate is now **below all comparator groups**
- The frequency of reoffending per child who reoffended increased slightly:
- From 2.63 to 3.79 offences per child
- However, this remains **below comparator averages**

Drivers of improvement:

- Post-inspection improvement activity (2024)
- Embedding of:
 - Child First principles
 - Trauma-informed practice
 - Identity development approaches

3.2 However, challenges remain—most notably in relation to custody rates, serious youth violence, and ongoing disproportionality. These areas will require continued strategic focus in 2026–27.

Custody and Remand

- 2 custodial sentences recorded (following zero the previous year)
- 1 remand to Youth Detention Accommodation
- The custody rate is now **above comparator groups**

3.3 Although small cohort sizes can disproportionately affect rates, this indicates need to strengthen alternatives to custody as well as further address serious youth violence.

Serious Youth Violence (SYV)

- 17 offences leading to a substantive outcome (year ending Dec 2025)
- Rate of **10.1 per 10,000**, above:
 - YJS Family
 - Southeast
 - National averages and comparator groups

3.4 As well as the continued delivery of initiatives such as the Act Now project, the YJS is receiving additional funding in 2025-26 to deliver the focused diversion programme. Work will also be delivered in collaboration with Thames Valley Police to strengthen the delivery of Focused Deterrence, learning from models of good practice in other areas of the country.

3.5 **Disproportionality**

3.6 Children from Global Majority backgrounds remain **over-represented**, particularly those of mixed ethnicity. This remains a key priority for the YJS and partnership and further work is required to achieve demonstrable and sustained impact

3.7 Practice and Workforce Strengths

3.8 Audit and assurance activity confirms that the quality of practice has continued to improve following inspection and that outcomes for children and victims are improving accordingly. Key strengths include:

- Strong **relationship-based and trauma-informed practice**
- More robust **assessing, planning and intervention** in respect of safety for others and safety and well-being for children.
- Focus on **identity development**
- Effective **partnership delivery model** driving consistency across services

3.9 In December 2025 the Youth Justice Management Board and Youth Justice Board acknowledged the significant progress made by the service and partnership, following the HMIP inspection in 2024. The board and YJB approved the decision to close the HMIP Action plan and consolidate outstanding actions into a single, operational which sits under the Youth Justice plan. This new plan incorporates remaining items from the improvement plan alongside other new priorities, forming an ongoing framework for continuous improvement. This reports to YJMB and continues to have oversight of the YJB via their Performance Oversight framework.

3.10 The following set of strategic priorities have been identified for 2026-27, with an increased focus on strategic and thematic trends for the final priority:

- Reducing First Time Entrants
- Improving long term outcomes of children who have offended
- Positively addressing and reducing disproportionality of Black and global majority children
- Reducing Serious Youth Violence, including a sharper focus on extremist behaviour and violence against women and girls
- Improving education outcomes for children within the YJS by reducing reliance on part-time timetables and alternative provision, strengthening SEND outcomes, and decreasing the number of post-16 young people who are NEET.
- Improving outcomes for actual and potential victims of youth crime, aligned to our strategic analysis of victim need, specifically a sharper focus on the correlation between victimisation and offending.

The following theme will cut across these priorities:

- Aligning parenting and whole family work with the Family Safeguarding and Contextual Safeguarding practice models for Children's Services.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. The improvement work contributes to the theme of "Promote more equal communities in Reading" and "Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children" as set out in the Council Plan. It does this by delivering essential improvements to the quality of Youth Justice work in Reading.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

5.1. There are no environmental or climate implications linked to the Youth Justice inspection or improvement plan.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Feedback from young people, parents, victims and partner agencies will be used to inform the Plan and priorities for the year ahead. The recent establishment of a 'Young People's Board' in April 2025 within the service is the first major step to our commitment for the voice of young people and victims to shape and determine the future of this service.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Addressing disproportionality within the criminal justice system is one of the priorities for the Youth Justice Service and partnership as outlined in the Youth Justice Plan 2026-27. One of the recommendations in the HMIP inspection report was to ensure the effective implementation of the disproportionality action plan across the partnership. This will continue to be a priority for the year ahead with renewed focus on impact and outcomes for children.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. Following the inspection outcome in 2024, the Youth Justice Service moved to quadrant 3 of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) 4 quadrant oversight framework. The criteria for this are that there is an identified improvement need or concern and that the service is considered a 'priority service'. The classification enables the Youth Justice Board to undertake focused engagement at a service level (or across regional statutory and/or delivery partners) and, where appropriate, provide support on their improvement journey. De-escalation from quadrants 3 and/or 4 can only be achieved through meeting the agreed exit criteria. These criteria will be defined through engagement with the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Justice Service.
- 8.2. The improvement work and impact on outcomes has been recognised by the YJB within their oversight and improvement framework, who are now considering whether Reading YJS should be moved from quadrant 3 to quadrant 2 of the oversight framework.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The publication of the Plan will fulfil Reading Borough Council's legal responsibilities in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
- 9.2. The provision of a multi-agency Youth Justice Service by Reading Borough Council in partnership with the National Probation Service, Clinical Commissioning Group and Thames Valley Police ensures we are compliant with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. The Youth Justice Board contribution (the national contribution) to the YJS pooled budget, is based on a national funding formula. It is yet to be confirmed for 2026-27. Last year's contribution was £324,156.
- 10.2. One of the recommendations from 2024 HMIP inspection was for The Reading Youth Justice Service Management Board to ensure the Youth Justice Service is both sufficiently resourced and structured to facilitate the delivery of high-quality interventions to both children and victims of crime. The service establishment is sufficient to undertake statutory roles and therefore the resources identified are adequate to respond to the learning from the inspection with any vacant posts having approval to recruit.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. 12th June; draft plan is available for Councillors.

- 11.2. 16th June; draft plan is shared with partners prior to Youth Justice Management Board meeting 23rd June.
- 11.3. 23rd June; Youth Justice Management Board sign off plan having already had oversight.
- 11.4. 30th June; Youth Justice Board submission date.
- 11.5. 14th October; Youth Justice Plan to be presented to Council.