



West Midlands Police and Crime Panel
c/o Scrutiny Office
Birmingham Council House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B1 1BB

Dear Councillor Sean Coughlan and the Police and Crime Panel,

Thank you for your invitation to participate in the forthcoming inquiry into partnership working focusing on Youth Justice.

I have been the Strategic Lead for Targeted Youth Support and Youth Justice Services (Head of Service) in Walsall for seven years and presently transitioning into my new role within the Public Service Reform Team with the Combined Authority looking specifically at Criminal Justice and the Devolution of Youth Justice. I would be grateful of the opportunity to address the inquiry in both my substantive and new role, as well as forge strong links and a shared understanding of the agenda and issues regionally.

In respect of the specific questions the panel seeks to address;

1. What role does your organisation play in tackling youth offending?

I lead a Service defined by section 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as a 'Youth Offending Service'. In Walsall the Youth Justice Service is the lead organisation in co-ordinating and delivering services at an operational level to prevent and reduce youth offending. The current legislative system for governance and delivery of youth justice services was established by the 1998 Act informed by the 1996 Audit commission paper *misspent youth*, that is Local Authority Chief Executive Officers are responsible for the establishment and governance of local partnerships (YOT's / YOS's / YJS's). They remain a statutory partnership consisting of Local Authority, Education, Probation, Police, Health. Wider partnerships include Fire Service, Housing, Judiciary, Police and Crime Commissioners and the voluntary sector.

Since its peak the current youth justice system nationally has excelled in achieving its three primary performance objectives. Reducing first time entrants into the criminal justice system by 83% since 2006. Reducing youth reoffending by 73% reduction in young people and a 70% reduction in offences since 2007, and reducing the numbers of young people in the Youth secure estate (custody) by 72% since 2002.

In Walsall the Youth Justice partnership recognises that the current system has achieved outstanding results for children, young people, victims and communities locally and we are incredibly proud that the outcomes for young people in Walsall who are at risk of offending or have offended are significantly better today than previously. We have, however seen the cohort of young people coming through the criminal justice system change, the young people the service is currently working with are more complex, more vulnerable, higher risk and present significantly more challenges to engage and reform. This is amidst the backdrop of reducing resources across the public sector which has led to increased pressure within the youth justice system and with our partners. In Walsall we have concluded that the current youth justice system is neither sustainable nor fit for purpose. We would welcome

and embrace the role of the Combined Authority Public Service Reform team to seek both economies of scale across the sector and innovation to negotiate local devolution of powers in youth justice.

Locally we are now currently only delivering those services required under legal and statutory obligations in youth justice, save for a small crime prevention project funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner through the community safety partnership. We are a key partner in developing the Early Help offer locally and anticipate that this wider partnership activity will continue to support the reductions in First Time Entrants that have been achieved.

2. What are the challenges and barriers, successes and good practice?

The key challenges currently are the restrictions of the raft of legal and statutory requirements both in terms of governance and delivery of services coupled with the reduction in resources. Walsall Youth Justice Service have limited scope to be creative in devising new initiatives or projects as all of our resources are deployed in meeting statutory obligations. Notwithstanding that, there are a number of partnerships which we have encouraged to progress locally, specifically around sports, arts and in reducing serious youth violence through working with voluntary sector organisations. In Walsall we have focused on our improvement journey in core practice, our workforce now are exceptionally skilled in understanding, assessing and managing criminogenic need and desistance factors. We are the experts locally in understanding youth offending and we are keen to ensure that we utilise these skills, knowledge and experience with our partners to ensure young people continue to receive a consistently good to excellent level of service in Walsall.

The Youth Justice Services work well together cross boundary in sharing good practice, transferring young people from one local authority area to another is largely seamless and in specific circumstances such as the Black Country Youth Court partnership and the services provided within the eastern Custody block in Oldbury.

3. From your perspective:

- *How could the different partner agencies work better or co-ordinate better;*
- *Who should lead this; and*
- *What should the PCC's role be in this?*

In Walsall the partnership works well together, we recognise there could be improvements locally through having greater flexibility in meeting the legal and statutory requirements. A number of our partners have undergone significant change in recent years (notably probation, health and the Police) and one frustration of the management board locally has been the lack of true and transparent consultation in these processes.

There are a number of research questions which the Criminal Justice and Devolution of Youth Justice work stream within the Public Service Reform team have posed, the priority research questions concern offender pathways, relevant services and interventions, and perceptions. In terms of **offender pathways**, we need to understand areas where regional working can add most value, together with the offence profile and pathways for young and women offenders. With regard to **services and interventions**, we need to understand current levels of service provision and outcomes; the managerial incentives and resources position of the different agencies in the criminal justice system; the mesh with wider children's services; sentencing trends; and the evidence base for potential interventions. Concerning **perceptions**, we need to understand the experiences of women and young offenders: what are their priorities and perceptions?

The Public Service Reform team have approached the Government with several new devolution asks, which were, largely, positively received. These include scope to consider a devolved custody and / or remand budget for the youth justice system in the West Midlands. The work stream is in its infancy and is planning to learn from new and emerging models of youth justice delivery in England and Wales, being particularly keen to explore the Scottish panel model and the use of Restorative Justice in the German youth justice system further. I would welcome the opportunity to present the draft problem profile to the panel and ensure the panel are kept abreast of the development of this work stream.

The Panel will be very familiar with the recent Government review into Youth Justice (AKA Charlie Taylor Review) and the subsequent Government response.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-youth-justice-system>

The panel will no doubt also be aware that Lord Tom McNally steps down as the Chair of the national Youth Justice Board in March and Charlie Taylor has been announced as his replacement. That announcement also outlined plans to move the control of the youth justice secure estate from the Youth Justice Board through to a new Youth Secure Estate department within HMPPS.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2017-02-24/HLWS504/>

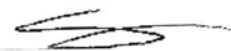
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594448/finding-and-recommendations-of-the-ycib.pdf

The Panel may be interested to note the findings within the research paper 'examining the case for Justice devolution' which outlines wider criminal justice research and proposed reform as well as that specifically to youth justice. The author, Harvey Redgrave, may be interested in sharing his research and insight to the panel, or the OPCC if appropriate and helpful.

<http://crestadvisory.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/governup-harvey-redgrave-justice-devolution-report.pdf>

I hope you find this letter helpful and I would welcome the opportunity to ensure that the Public Service reform work stream and the important work and findings of the Panel are cohesive.

Yours Sincerely,



Mrs C Dhami
Strategic Lead for Youth Justice Services