

COUNCIL DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Clare Besford

Youth Justice Plan Stockton-on-Tees 2026-2027

Summary

This report presents the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2026-27 for consideration and endorsement.

The Plan sets out how statutory partners will work together to prevent children entering the criminal justice system, reduce reoffending, minimise the use of custody, strengthen responses to serious youth violence and child exploitation, and ensure children's voices shape service delivery. The Plan demonstrates continued commitment to Child First principles and reflects strong partnership working across Children's Services, Police, Probation, Health, Education and the voluntary sector.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)/Decision(s)

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires local authorities, working with statutory partners, to prepare and publish an annual Youth Justice Plan. The Plan provides strategic direction for youth justice services and outlines how partners will fulfil their statutory responsibilities and improve outcomes for children, young people, victims and communities.

The Plan reflects positive performance in reducing First Time Entrants into the criminal justice system and sets out priorities for addressing ongoing challenges relating to reoffending, serious youth violence, exploitation and custody.

Recommendations

Cabinet/CMT is recommended to:

- Note the contents of the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2026-27.
- Endorse the strategic priorities and delivery approach outlined within the Plan.

- Support continued multi-agency collaboration through the Youth Justice Management Board to deliver improved outcomes for children, families and communities.
- Approve the implementation and monitoring arrangements contained within the Plan.

Detail

1. The Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Partnership has developed the Youth Justice Plan 2026-27 in accordance with statutory requirements and Youth Justice Board guidance. The Plan has been approved by the Youth Justice Management Board and reflects a collective commitment to delivering high-quality, evidence-led and child-centred services.
2. The Youth Justice Management Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services and includes representation from Police, Probation, Health, Education, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and voluntary sector partners. The Board provides strategic oversight, performance scrutiny and governance for youth justice services across the Borough.

The Plan highlights significant achievements during 2025-26, including:

- Continued reduction in First Time Entrants (FTEs), with the rate falling from 154 to 96 and the number of children entering the criminal justice system reducing from 33 to 21. These figures are significantly better than regional and national comparators.
 - Successful use of Child First Out of Court Disposal Panels, diversionary interventions and the Ministry of Justice Turnaround Programme.
 - Continued reduction in the use of custody, with custodial sentences reducing from five to four children.
 - Strengthened partnership responses to serious youth violence, child exploitation and organised crime.
 - Positive feedback from children and families regarding the quality of relationships, intervention delivery and support received.
3. Despite these achievements, the partnership recognises several ongoing challenges:
 - Reoffending rates remain above national and regional averages.
 - A small cohort of children present with increasingly complex needs linked to trauma, exploitation, violence and organised criminality.
 - Serious Youth Violence and school exclusions continue to present risks to children's safety and long-term outcomes.
 - Reductions in external funding streams may impact future prevention and early intervention activity.

4. The Youth Justice Plan identifies the following key priorities for 2026-27:
 - 4.1 **Prevent Children Entering the Criminal Justice System**
Continuing to strengthen diversionary approaches, Out of Court Disposals, Turnaround interventions, early identification and preventive support through multi-agency partnership arrangements.
 - 4.2 **Reduce Reoffending**
Improving intervention programmes, strengthening transition arrangements into adult services, addressing health needs and maintaining a strong focus on education, training and employment outcomes.
 - 4.3 **Reduce the Use of Custody**
Ensuring robust community alternatives are available, strengthening resettlement arrangements and enhancing multi-agency planning for children at risk of custodial sentences.
 - 4.4 **Strengthen Responses to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation**
Working closely with the Harm Outside the Home Team, Police, Community Safety and Violence Reduction partners to identify vulnerability, safeguard children and disrupt exploitation.
 - 4.5 **Early Intervention and Children's Participation**
Ensuring services are informed by children's lived experiences and expanding participation opportunities so children influence both individual plans and wider service development.
5. Progress against the Plan will be monitored through the Youth Justice Management Board and reported through established governance arrangements.

Community Impact and Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

6. The Youth Justice Plan adopts a Child First approach and recognises the impact of deprivation, inequality, adverse childhood experiences, exclusion, trauma and exploitation on children's outcomes. The anticipated impact is positive through improved access to services, strengthened prevention activity, reduced offending and better long-term outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Corporate Parenting Implications

7. There are significant corporate parenting implications. Many children involved within the youth justice system are children in our care, care experienced, or have additional safeguarding needs. The Plan reinforces the Council's commitment to reducing the criminalisation of children in care, promoting positive outcomes and ensuring children receive coordinated support across agencies.

Financial Implications

8. Delivery of the Plan will be supported through a combination of Youth Justice Board grant funding, Ministry of Justice Turnaround funding, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner funding and existing partner contributions. The Youth Justice Service continues to utilise available resources efficiently and benefits from substantial in-kind contributions from Police, Probation and Health partners.
9. There are no immediate additional financial implications arising directly from adoption of the Plan. However, reductions in external funding remain a strategic risk and will continue to be closely monitored through governance arrangements.

Legal Implications

10. The Youth Justice Plan fulfils statutory requirements under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and aligns with expectations set by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. The Plan supports partners in meeting their statutory responsibilities relating to youth justice, safeguarding and crime prevention.

Risk Assessment

11. Key risks identified within the Plan include:
 - Reduced external grant funding impacting prevention and diversion services.
 - Continued challenges associated with serious youth violence and child exploitation.
 - High levels of complexity amongst a smaller cohort of children.
 - Ongoing system and performance reporting changes associated with Youth Justice Modernisation.

These risks will be monitored and managed through the Youth Justice Management Board and relevant council governance arrangements.

Wards Affected and Consultation with Ward/Councillors (refer to Concordat for Communication and Consultation with Members)

12. The Plan applies across all wards within Stockton-on-Tees. It has been developed through extensive collaboration with statutory and voluntary sector partners and informed by feedback from children, young people and families engaged with youth justice services.

Background Papers

- Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2026-27.

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