

¹Youth Offending Team - Notes from Meeting with Karen Roberts and Jo Graves 21 April 2006

The Youth Offending Team operates from its own premises on the Binfield Road. It acts as a partner within the Safer Communities Strategic Partnership alongside the Police, PCT, Fire Service, Probation Service, DAAT and BFBC. Although it falls within the Department of Education, Children's Services and Libraries it does have its own Management Board drawn from the SCSP. (Appendix A). Its performance is monitored against 16 national KPI's and reported to Members through the QOR's, and by the SCSP on a quarterly basis.

YOT is also involved in a number of other partnerships such as Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, Children's Fund Partnership Board, Safeguarding Children Board, the ASB working group and the Local Criminal Justice Board.

It is funded from a variety of sources – Department of E CS & L, Thames Valley Police, Probation Service, PCT and grants from the Youth Justice Board, Children's Fund and Safer Communities Fund, (Appendix B). Whilst these grants are direct and do not impact upon the Council Tax, they do have the drawback of being approved on an annual basis, with no long term commitment.

The Youth Justice Plan provides the framework for the service delivery of the YOT. Whilst there is ample scope for the YOT to tailor its services to meet local demands, these services must address the targets set in the template of the Youth Justice Plan. In very simple terms the YOT has two aims – firstly to improve the behaviour of offenders who are clients as the result of court orders, and secondly to identify potential offenders and implement an Early Interventions Strategy.

The first group who are subject to statutory supervision would normally number around 60 clients, which is small in comparison to many Authorities. This group are already offenders and will have had dealings with the Police. There are a number of programmes available to assist and encourage these offenders with the aim of changing their offending behaviour. The Early Interventions Project has had 51 referrals since its inception in September 2004. In most cases this group will not have come to the attention of the Police and will have been involved in the Justice system but their behaviour would suggest that they are on the periphery of offending. The referrals could also come from the schools, or from within YOT itself following interaction with an offender's family. The aim here is to prevent these clients moving into the criminal justice system. Obviously as these are not statutory clients, but get involved voluntarily, there is a degree of mutuality with these clients.

¹ **Appendix E**

In both cases there will inevitably be interaction with the parents. It could be argued that without parental support and intervention there is little prospect of success with young offenders. Fortunately YOT has been successful in a bid to the Youth Justice Board for funding for a programme providing parenting services, both statutory and voluntary.

New clients receive an ASSETS assessment to determine which programmes will be of value. Some of the programmes available are:-

IMPACT This is a six week general offending behaviour group work programme, which is attended by all statutory clients. This programme is run by YOT staff.

DRUG TREATMENT This is run by the YOT substance misuse worker, a post split with DAAT. In more extreme cases clients may be referred onto Berkshire Healthcare Trust's CASCADE programme or a residential programme under DAAT.

MENTAL HEALTH YOT have access to a clinical psychologist within the Children's' Social Care Department. Following assessment clients are "signposted" to appropriate treatment. However some youngsters fail the criteria for CAMHS intervention. A treatment group for youngsters with mental health issues will be available from April 2006.

BOYS TO MEN This addresses the issue of domestic violence. Many adolescents growing up in a culture of domestic violence develop the same abusive behaviour. This programme helps such clients develop more positive and respectful relationships. It is likely that most male clients, aged 16 & 17, will complete this programme.

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE This is carried out in schools for year 10 pupils who are at risk of exclusion, but who are not YOT clients. After six weeks the programme is taken over by the teaching staff.

PARENTING These programmes will be provided on a voluntary basis, as part of a formal parenting contract or statutory parenting order. The programmes include group work, parallel work and one to one sessions.

PREVENT and DETER These cases include clients of the Early Interventions Project, as well as offenders who are targeted as part of the Prolific Priority Offenders strategy.

There are a few issues which the working group feel are worthy of further interest at this early initial stage.

The Management Board has one elected Member, who is there as a representative of the Police Authority. Consideration needs to be given to including a backbench Member to ensure such a key area is part of the Council's mandate on Overview & Scrutiny.

The Youth Justice Plan, which forms an essential part of YOT's strategy and service delivery is not part of the Overview & Scrutiny process and at the time of writing it is not due to be taken to any of the O & S Panels for Member input.

YOT's ability to fully address issues of mental health is limited by the criteria set by CAMHS. It excludes 16 and 17 year olds, who are out of full time education. It is likely that any adolescent of this age with mental health problems is almost bound to be out of the education system, so the criteria excludes a group which patently needs support.

Funding through direct grant is not uncommon in this area of the Council's service delivery. Whilst direct grants allow the Council to provide services in addition to those covered by the Council's normal revenue expenditure it does mean that planning is constrained by the uncertain future of the level of grants.

John Piasecki

