

Council/Committee:	Full Council
Report Title	Youth Justice Plan
Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 4 November 2025
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Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Appendices	1. Sandwell Youth Justice Plan 2025/2026

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Sandwell Youth Justice Service (YJS) Plan 2025/2026 sets out the strategic priorities, performance outcomes, and service delivery for youth justice in Sandwell for the next 12 months. The plan has been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and reflects both national guidance and local priorities. In line with statutory requirements and in accordance with s.40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, local authorities must produce and submit an annual Youth Justice Plan outlining strategic priorities, performance, and service delivery for youth justice.

2. Recommendations

Full Council is recommended to: -

- 2.1 Approve Sandwell's Youth Justice Plan 2025/2026 and agree for its submission to the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales as required under s.40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

3. Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is nationally responsible for the governance of Youth Justice Services. It is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice.
- 3.2 Locally the Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJPB) oversees youth justice work in Sandwell. It includes senior leaders from Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT), the Council, Health, Police, and community safety partners. The Board is chaired by the Chief Executive of SCT and provides assurance to both the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board and the Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership.
- 3.3 The Youth Justice Service (YJS) sits within Sandwell Children's Trust. It works with children and young people who are involved in or at risk of entering the criminal justice system. Its core aim is to prevent offending and reoffending by providing tailored support, rehabilitation, and intervention. The service brings together professionals from social care, education, health, and the police to assess needs, manage risk, and promote positive outcomes for young people, their families, and the wider community.
- 3.4 In 2024/25, Sandwell Youth Justice Service supported 308 interventions, 222 new and 86 ongoing across 202 individual children. This marks a 24% increase compared to the previous year, reflecting rising demand and more complex needs, including cases of reoffending.
- 3.5 For the first time, the service recorded assessments completed before formal interventions began, offering a clearer picture of overall workload. A total of 113 assessments were completed, helping to better understand and respond to early risks.
- 3.6 YJS have made strong progress in prevention and early intervention. The Turnaround Pilot Programme supported 127 children over three years, with a 98% desistance rate. A new referral pathway between Strengthening Families and YJS will launch in June 2025 to better support whole families, including siblings.
- 3.7 Multi-agency panels have been introduced to tackle repeat anti-social behaviour, and crime prevention is now part of the Family Help Board's priorities. Over 14% of Early Help Assessments identified children receiving targeted support to prevent crime and ASB.
- 3.8 In response to serious youth violence and exploitation, the Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) Board replaced the Child Exploitation Board, broadening the safeguarding approach. Weekly triage meetings have improved early identification and disruption of exploitation risks. The Knife Crime Offender Management Policy has led to increased referrals, showing a stronger response to serious incidents.
- 3.9 Work on over-representation has been strengthened through police-led strategic leadership, a new ethnicity dataset, and regional collaboration. Engagement with community and faith groups has helped build trust and improve outcomes for children from Black and minoritised communities.

- 3.10 The action plan has still not been finalised due to the challenges in aligning datasets to produce meaningful trends for analysis. However, this is an ongoing priority for this year.
- 3.11 The 2025/26 plan builds on last year's work and responds to new national guidance, local trends in youth offending, and inspection feedback. It follows the "Child First" approach, which means keeping children at the heart of everything we do, helping them avoid court, supporting them through the justice system, and helping them reintegrate into everyday life.
- 3.12 The plan aims to reduce the number of children entering the justice system, lower reoffending rates, and reduce the use of custody. To achieve this, it includes practical actions such as expanding diversion schemes, improving court reports, offering targeted community support, and strengthening resettlement services for children leaving custody. Dedicated staff will support young people into education, training, or employment.
- 3.13 The plan has been rolled out from April 2025 and will be reviewed regularly, with a full evaluation at the end of the year. It will be managed by the Youth Justice Service Board, with clear roles and performance checks in place.
- 3.14 The plan is fully costed and including funding from the Youth Justice Board and local partners contributions, including staff in kind - youth crime officer (YCO), education and employment officer, seconded probation officer. Further staff support has been commissioned and deliver support including Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) therapists, mental health practitioner.
- 3.15 The plan focuses on proven approaches, reducing expensive placements, and improving efficiency. While it doesn't reduce spending immediately, it is expected to save money over time by preventing reoffending and easing pressure on services like social care and health.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 There are no other options to be considered.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The development of Sandwell's Youth Justice Plan 2025/2026 was informed by a wide-ranging consultation process involving:

- Young people and families engaged with the Youth Offending Service
- Community groups and voluntary sector partners
- Statutory agencies including West Midlands Police, Probation, Health, and Education
- Ward councillors and elected members
- Youth Justice Management Board members
- Feedback at the end of interventions and through an annual survey which is then analysed to inform priorities.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The Youth Justice Service (YJS) is funded through an annual grant from the Youth Justice Board (YJB), supplemented by local authority contributions and partner agency support. This combined funding supports the delivery of the Youth Justice Plan.
- 6.2 The YJB grant is subject to conditions, including the delivery of agreed outcomes and reporting requirements. The Youth Justice Partnership Board are required to oversee these conditions are met and that funding is used effectively to support early intervention, reduce reoffending, and improve outcomes for children.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 A Youth Justice Plan must be produced and approved annually by the Youth Justice Partnership Board, in line with s.40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The plan must also be formally approved by Full Council.

8. Risks

- 8.1 The Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 identifies several key risks that could affect delivery. The most immediate is the rising number of children entering the Youth Justice Service, which has increased significantly since October 2024. This has placed pressure on staffing capacity and led to the use of agency staff to maintain service levels. If demand continues to grow, there is a risk to service quality and sustainability.
- 8.2 Financial pressures are also a concern. While the plan is fully costed and supported by Youth Justice Board funding and local contributions, any further increase in demand or staffing costs could impact the budget. A full risk assessment has been completed, and steps are in place to monitor and manage these risks.
- 8.3 There is also a risk around data alignment, which has delayed the finalisation of the action plan. Without consistent data, it is harder to track trends and measure impact, particularly in areas like disproportionality and gender analysis.
- 8.4 All identified risks are being monitored through the Youth Justice Service Board and mapped against the Council's corporate and directorate risk registers. Mitigation measures include regular performance reviews, strengthened partnership working, and targeted resource planning.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 The Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 includes actions to reduce disproportionality, particularly for children from Black and minoritised backgrounds. Gender-specific analysis is planned internally but is not a priority this year. Any risks of inequality are being addressed through improved data tracking and

inclusive service design. Where impacts cannot be avoided, they are balanced against the need to meet legal duties and respond to rising demand.

10. Other Relevant Implications

10.1 The Youth Justice Service Plan 2025/26 has several wider corporate implications that support the Council's strategic goals and statutory duties:

- **Procurement:** Any commissioned services or external partnerships will follow Council procurement procedures. These are already built into the delivery framework of the plan.
- **Corporate Parenting:** The plan strengthens support for looked-after children and care leavers involved in the justice system, ensuring they receive tailored interventions and safeguarding.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** The plan works closely with health partners to address mental health, substance misuse, and emotional wellbeing, which are key factors in preventing reoffending.
- **Crime and Disorder Act 1998:** The plan directly supports the Council's duty under Section 17 by reducing youth crime, anti-social behaviour, and reoffending. It also contributes to the Prevent agenda by identifying and supporting vulnerable young people early.

11. Background Documents

N/A

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

12.1 This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes: -

- **Growing up in Sandwell.** For children to be supported to grow up safely, with access to positive opportunities and reduced exposure to the criminal justice system.
- **Living in Sandwell.** By reducing youth crime, the plan makes communities safer and more supportive for everyone.
- **Healthy in Sandwell.** The plan ensure that health services support young people's mental and physical wellbeing, especially those facing challenges.
- **Thriving Economy in Sandwell.** Supporting young people into education, training, and employment is a core element of the plan. Dedicated staff will help children transition into positive pathways to preventing reoffending also reduces the economic burden on the justice system and social care.
- **One Council One Team Approach.** The integrated working across council services, partner agencies, and the wider community ensures that young people receive jointed up support.