

## Slough Borough Council

Information needed	Details
<b>Report To:</b>	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Youth Justice Service Inspection Outcome and Improvement Plan Progress
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Sue Butcher, Executive Director Children's Services Chief Executive Slough Children First (SCF)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Donna Briggs, Head of Adolescent Support (SCF)  Ben Short, Director of Operations (SCF)
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	NO
<b>Appendices:</b>	(1) HMIP Inspection Report January 2025 (2) Youth Justice Plan 2025 – 2026 (3) Equality Impact Assessment

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

This report outlines the findings from the Youth Justice Inspection conducted in September 2024, highlights the progress achieved against the agreed Improvement Plan, and presents a summary of the Youth Justice Plan 2025–2026 which is a core component of the Council's policy framework and has been formally submitted for Council approval.

#### **Recommendations:**

Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the findings of the inspection by HMIP
- b) Comment on the improvement programme already underway
- c) Note the Youth Justice Plan 2025 – 26

### 2. Report

2.1 Slough Youth Justice Service (YJS) works with children aged 10 to 17 years old at risk of or involved in offending behaviour.

2.2 The establishment of a Youth Justice Service (YJS) is a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Key partners form part of the multi-disciplinary team including Police, Probation, Education, Health and Children Social Care.

2.3 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), is the independent body overseeing youth justice and probation services in England and Wales.

Slough YJS were inspected by HMIP in September of 2024. Although 'Organisational Delivery' was rated as 'Requires Improvement' in recognition of the improvements made by the Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB) the overall judgement given was inadequate.

2.4 HMIP made ten recommendations for improvement which are included in the Inspection Report (Appendix 1) and are set out for action in the Improvement Plan (Appendix 2). The overall results for each of the individual domains are as follows:

Organisational Delivery (leadership, staffing, facilities) **Requires Improvement**

The Management of children serving court sentences (Court Disposals) **Inadequate**

Children serving cautions or community sentences (Out of Court Disposals) **Inadequate**

Inspectors found that whilst staff managers, and board members were dedicated to providing quality services to children and young people, significant barriers hindered their ability to deliver necessary interventions to support desistance and protect the public.

Positively, HMIP acknowledged the efforts of the new chair of the YJS Management Board. (YJMB). The reconstituted board and new members have begun understanding their roles and responsibilities, showcasing an ambition to transform the YJS into a service that recognises and responds to children's needs.

2.5 Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires YJS to set out how its services are to be provided and funded, how they will operate and what functions will be carried out.

The Youth Justice Plan 2025–26 (The Plan) has been developed collaboratively with children, families, statutory partners, and the workforce. It sets out a comprehensive, child-first strategy rooted in restorative practice, multi-agency collaboration, and continuous improvement.

The plan identifies four strategic priorities for the coming year:

1. Addressing disproportionality
2. Strengthening victim engagement
3. Fostering co-production
4. Early intervention supporting prevention and diversion

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 HMIP Inspection**

Prior to the most recent HMIP Inspection in 2024, Slough Youth Justice Service hadn't been inspected since 2011 under a previous Inspection Framework. The most recent independent review of the service was an LGA Peer Review which took place in 2023 prior to the HMIP inspection. Although this was useful, it did not consider the whole inspection regime for example reviewers did not look at the Youth Justice Management Board or track young people's experiences through their case files.

At the point of the inspection, a new Head of Service had just been appointed, and the service was mid consultation for a significant restructure.

Following the initial Inspection feedback, the Head of Service and Senior Leadership implemented a 12 week 'elevator plan' to immediately respond and address the inspection findings to avoid any delay in addressing the findings with pace. This included:

- The immediate identification of existing staff resource to provide support for victims
- Training and development for the whole service including MAPPA, (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) Domestic Abuse, Child First and Risk Management.
- Completion of a skills-gap analysis to inform the development of a Workforce Development Plan
- Investment in specialist training including Restorative Justice and Disproportionality identified by HMIP. (Disproportionality refers to the over representation of a particular group in relation to the target population)
- Permanent recruitment to vacancies following conclusion of the restructure, including additional management capacity
- Work with Probation which has led to improved transition arrangements for children. This includes attendance by Probation at critical decision-making forums to support the development of risk assessment and plans for children.
- Exploring how we can share a seconded probation officer with a neighbouring authority where there is shared police custody.
- Strengthened links with Substance and Alcohol misuse services, Domestic Abuse Services and Community Safety.
- Team members leading on development of Reparation Opportunities for children whilst a specific worker is being proactively recruited.

Investment has been made in recruiting a specialist Strategic Improvement Lead for youth justice and a Safeguarding Consultant for 'Harm Outside the Home'. Both officers are working alongside the Head of Service to bring expertise and pace to the required improvements to better support our children and young people.

3.2 Ten main recommendations were given, with the responsibilities for the recommendations set out for the Youth Justice Service, the Youth Justice Management Board and the Probation Service.

### **Slough Youth Justice Service must:**

- ensure that quality assurance arrangements, oversight of practice and supervision arrangements consistently support the development of staff and volunteers
- ensure assessment activity identifies children's desistance needs and always considers how best to keep the child and the community safe
- ensure planning activity is comprehensive and that it aligns effectively with activity undertaken by other services, including activity to keep children and other people safe
- ensure staff consistently liaise with all relevant services and understand the role of partnership agencies
- provide sufficient resources, knowledge and focus on services for victims, including the use of restorative justice.

**Slough Youth Justice Management Board should:**

- ensure that the YJS is both sufficiently resourced and structured to facilitate the delivery of high-quality interventions for complex children and the victims of crime
- review the local implementation of the out-of-court disposal scheme to provide clarity about the scheme and the service offer, to ensure that there is a consistent decision-making and a suitable offer of help and support for children
- review the training offer for staff, volunteers and partners to provide knowledge and skills that are specific to youth justice work
- increase the knowledge and understanding of youth justice work and responsibilities at strategic and operational level

**National Probation Service should:**

- ensure there is effective information-sharing with the YJS to support public protection and the safety of victims

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Investment has been made in recruiting specialist Strategic Improvement Lead for Youth Justice and a Safeguarding Consultant for 'Harm Outside the Home (HOTH)'. Both officers are working alongside the Head of Service to bring expertise and pace to the required improvements to better support our children and young people.

3.4 A comprehensive Improvement Plan was submitted to HMIP on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025 in response to the final report which was published on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

### 3.5 Improvement Plan

The improvement plan contains 28 actions. Each action is rated as Blue - Completed, Green - On Track, Amber - At Risk and Red -Off Track. The improvement plan is overseen monthly by the National Youth Justice Board to ensure that sufficient progress is made in a timely way.

- Over half of the actions are progressing well or have been completed. 7 actions are rated as blue and 15 actions are rated to be green. Progress has also been made on the 6 actions that are amber. There are no actions that are rated as Red.
- The Improvement Plan is overseen by the National Youth Justice Board (YJB) through monthly oversight meetings with the Head of Service and the Youth Justice Oversight Manager for the YJB. The Slough Youth Justice Management Board receives quarterly updates from the Youth Justice Service.

Progress against the robust improvement plan shows strong momentum and has already brought about several changes aimed at supporting children working with in the Youth Justice Service as we prepare for a re-Inspection under a new Inspection Framework within the next 6-9 months.

Some key areas of progress include;

- Recruitment to all posts within the new structure which has increased capacity and management oversight, to drive practice improvements
- Recruitment to 2 cohorts of volunteers, ensuring children receive timely and well supported referral order panel to reduce future likelihood of offending
- A dedicated child friendly space for children open to the service which is enabling better engagement in sessions, including speech and language assessments

Outcomes for children known to the Youth Justice Services are not the sole responsibility of the service, the Youth Justice Management Board is a partnership board with responsibility for monitoring the Improvement Plan and to lead on significant aspects of the improvement. This includes representation from Police, Education, Schools, Health, Probation, Community and Voluntary Sector and Social Care.

### 3.6 Youth Justice Plan 2025-26

Slough's Youth Justice Plan addresses critical inspection feedback and includes robust performance monitoring mechanisms embedded into monthly thematic audits and quality assurance processes.

The Plan's four strategic priorities—addressing disproportionality, strengthening victim engagement, fostering participation and co-production, and providing early intervention to support prevention and diversion are actively embedded in daily practice.

These priorities align closely with the Youth Justice Board "Child First" principles that guide the service's approach, which includes trauma-informed, neurodiversity-aware, and developmentally attuned interventions.

### 3.7 Noteworthy achievements include:

- Sustained reduction in first-time entrants in comparison to other national and regional Youth Justice Services.
- Sustained reduction in the use of custody in the last year
- There has been an overall reduction in violence against the person in reported crimes in the Slough area over the past 2 years, which is also reflected by a 16% overall decrease in

children open to the Youth Justice Service for violence against the person. However, this remains the most prevalent reason for children being known to the service (36% in 24-25), thus requiring a continued focus in the next year.

- Stable resourcing and workforce development programmes that span restorative and trauma-informed practice
- Embedded victim services and a refreshed victim policy, alongside expansion of community reparation opportunities
- Strengthened participation, with structured youth voice mechanisms and the development of a Youth Justice Ambassador role
- Work with partners around prevention and diversion are key strengths in Slough which have an impact on preventing our children entering the Youth Justice System which includes work co-delivered with Youth Engagement Services and the Community Detached Team, including locally respected education programmes like “Deal or No Deal” and “Lives Not Knives”

The Youth Justice Plan reflects strong alignment with national priorities, including tackling serious violence, enhancing educational outcomes, reducing disproportionality in SEND and ethnic minority groups, strengthening contextual safeguarding, understanding how policing supports and contributes to national practice and improving collaboration with families and the police.

Key achievements during the 24/25 year includes a strengthened strategic approach led by our Youth Justice Management Board with clear and high expectations set by the Board Chair as recognised during our HMIP Inspection. This is helping to drive improvements across the partnership to work towards improved outcomes and futures for the children supported by the partnership.

3.8 The Youth Justice Board guidance emphasises the importance of co-creating the Youth Justice Plan with strategic partners, staff, children, families, and carers.

Reflecting this, Slough’s Youth Justice Plan was shaped through an extensive co-production process. This included 1:1 engagement with Youth Justice Management Board members, a dedicated strategic planning workshop, frontline staff consultation via team meetings, and direct participation sessions with children and young people. Several iterations of the plan were developed in response to this feedback.

3.9 During engagement, children and young people emphasised the importance of access to employment, apprenticeships, and training as essential to their future. Children made a powerful case for the link between meaningful employment and a reduction in offending. Employment not only provides stability and purpose, but it is also a proven protective factor in desistance. This feedback has informed our commitment to improving pathways into work and learning, in close partnership with education and community sector colleagues.

In response, The Plan expanded its strategic priorities from three to four, with a sharpened focus on participation and transitional support. Additionally, it was agreed that education, employment and training will be a future YJMB agenda item in November 2025

3.10 The inclusion of a clear strategic vision also resulted from our co-production process, echoing the aspirations of the children we support. The following strategic statement for the Youth Justice Service has been developed in consultation with the Youth Justice Management Board:

*Children at risk of or involved in the Youth Justice System (YJS) deserve individualised support, informed by shared intelligence and a framework of consistency and resilience. Through diversion*

*and prevention, we strengthen positive outcomes while reducing involvement in the Criminal Justice System.*

*We recognise that children in the YJS are vulnerable and must be safeguarded, respected, and understood within the context of their lived experiences and not be treated as adults. Equally, we acknowledge the impact of youth crime on victims and commit to restorative and reparative approaches that promote healing and accountability.*

*Through collaboration with education, agencies, and partners, we address neurodiverse needs, health inequalities, and social injustices—ensuring children receive the right support while victims are heard, validated, and empowered.*

The Plan reinforces Slough's ambition to create a local system in which "Every child supported by the Youth Justice Service is *Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.*" This refined wording, shaped through consultation, reflects the collective values of children, staff, families, and partners and our shared commitment to compassionate, restorative, and aspirational youth justice.

#### **4. Implications of the Recommendation**

##### **4.1 Financial implications**

The Youth Justice Service underwent a re-structure during 24/25. The service was re-configured to bring together Youth Justice, Contextual Safeguarding and Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence Prevention and Edge of Care teams under one combined Adolescent Support Service to strengthen practice and support children in one place.

4.2 The 25/26 budget for the Youth Justice Service ensures continued funding to support the wider Adolescent Service within which the YJS sits, in order that it can deliver its outcomes and support children and families in the best possible way. The service cost is within the approved budget for 25/26. The YJS will continue to be part-funded through additional grants including from the Youth Justice Board, and to further complement its activities, funding for the Act Now and Turnaround programmes has been confirmed into 25/26.

4.3 In order to meet required improvements from the latest inspection, additional funding has been found from other service underspends to offer short term focused improvement work for the first 5 months of 25/26.

##### **4.4 Legal implications**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspector of youth justice and probation services in England and Wales.

HM Chief Inspector of Probation's responsibilities are set out in section 7 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, as amended by the Offender Management Act 2007 section 12(3)(a). This requires the Chief Inspector to inspect (section 1) and report to the Secretary of State (section 3) on the arrangements for the provision of probation services. Under section 7(6) of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, HM Chief Inspector of Probation also inspects and reports on youth justice services (YJS), established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 section 39, and bodies acting on their behalf.

There is a statutory requirement for the Youth Justice Service and Youth Justice Management Board to respond to an Inadequate Inspection outcome through the submission of an improvement plan within the required timescale as set out by HMIP.

Section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a duty on each local authority, after consultation with relevant persons, to formulate and implement for each year a youth justice plan

#### **4.5 Risk management implications**

Risk	Risk Effect	Likelihood	Impact	Risk rating	Mitigations
Future HMIP Inspection Outcome	The YJS has received an 'Inadequate' outcome from HMIP following the inspection of the service in September 2024. There were a number of areas of improvement required, and a particular focus around Public Protection responsibilities. Under the new HMIP Framework, Victims is a separate domain and the focus on Public Protection responsibilities is greater.	3 – Work has progressed in a number of areas of required improvement and continues to build momentum.	4 - High level of work required to improve standards and practice	12	Improvement Plan is in place with action being taken to improve standards and practice  Strategic Improvement Lead in place to add capacity to the service to drive forward improvements

#### **4.6 Environmental implications**

None identified

#### **4.7 Equality implications**

- 4.8 The Equality Act 2010 applies to this report in that the work of the YJS is targeted at ensuring certain ethnic groups and those groups who are not experiencing the same level of outcomes as others are being taken into consideration.
- 4.9 We recognise that many children known to the YJS have experienced wider adversity. A significant proportion have had previous involvement with social care and/or present with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). As part of our commitment to inclusion and equity, we are strengthening screening, workforce training, and integrated planning to ensure the needs of these children are better identified and met across the partnership.
- 4.10 Slough YJS plan contains analysis on diversity, including over-representation of certain demographics in the criminal justice system generally, seeking to address this through the priority focus on disproportionality.
- 4.11 A equality impact assessment is provided in Appendix 4

#### **5 Corporate Parenting Implications**

- 5.1 Under the statutory duty of corporate parenting, all local authority partners have a shared responsibility to act as any responsible parent would for children in our care and

those with care experience. This duty extends to ensuring care experienced children are safeguarded, supported, and offered meaningful opportunities to thrive, including within and beyond the Youth Justice System.

- 5.2 The Youth Justice Service is rooted in the understanding that care experienced children are consistently overrepresented in the criminal justice system, both nationally and locally. In Slough, between April 2024 and March 2025, care experienced children accounted for approximately 9% of the Youth Justice Service caseload, despite representing a much smaller percentage of the overall child population. This disparity demands a joined-up, trauma-informed response.
- 5.3 The Youth Justice plan outlines targeted actions to address this overrepresentation through closer alignment with social care, education, and health, and by embedding restorative and relational practice throughout service delivery. Dedicated pathways for care experienced children—including enhanced transition planning, tailored reparation activities, and prioritised access to employment and mentoring form a key part of our desistance framework.
- 5.4 Other key areas of improvement in the service offer and development which will help us to meet our Corporate Parenting responsibilities include;
  - Improving access to activities within the community for children to support reparation
  - Focus on post-16 alternative provision, education, employment and training opportunities
  - Ensuring Resettlement Policy and Procedures are effective in meeting the needs of children who may require Local Authority care

5.5 The development of an Edge of Care offer as a preventative approach to children becoming looked after is part of the new Adolescent Support Service, which includes the Youth Justice Service. Children will benefit from this approach to support them to remain within their families and communities where it is safe to do so.

## **6. Background Papers**

- 6.1 An inspection of Youth Justice Services in Slough (Appendix 1)
- 6.2 Slough Youth Justice Plan 2025 – 26 (Appendix 2)
- 6.3 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix 3)