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<i>report:</i>	CYP22/09

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES

by Bill Alexander

Summary

This report provides an update on youth justice services and makes proposals for closer working between Youth Action Teams and Northern Constabulary, including new services to ensure a continuum of responses to offending behaviour. This includes redirecting funding that was previously allocated to SACRO.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There has been significant development in youth justice services across Highland since 2002. These range from diversionary services within universal provision, to early warning and restorative services, and more intensive services in Social Work and partner agencies to address significant offending. As a consequence, youth offending across Highland is now around 50% lower than pre-2006 levels.
- 1.2 The implementation of *Getting it right for every child* has though highlighted the need to have a continuum of services, as well as a range, addressing all levels of youth offending.

2. Restorative Justice

- 2.1 As part of the development of these various services, there has always been a significant focus on restorative practice, ensuring account is taken of the impact of crimes on victims, and that wherever possible there is acknowledgement or reparation by the offender.
- 2.2 Restorative principles are practiced by all agencies, and many staff support and undertake restorative interventions, such as awareness-raising, mediation and reparation.
- 2.3 One organisation, SACRO, has been funded to support specific higher level restorative interventions, including restorative conferences, bringing offenders and victims together. However, it has at times proved difficult to provide SACRO with necessary victim information. Further, given the process of disposal via the Children's Hearings System, referrals to SACRO often take place a number of months after an offence has occurred, thereby reducing the value of restorative activity. Attempts to address these constraints over a number of years have met with only limited success.

3. Continuum of Services

- 3.1 Youth Action Teams have been established in each Area of Highland to work with young people who have serious offending behaviours. The Teams include specialists in youth crime and substance misuse, and are about to be joined by a Forensic Psychologist and three Public Health Practitioners.
- 3.2 The Youth Action Teams use specialist assessments to evaluate the likelihood of further offending, and to identify strategies to reduce and where possible, prevent this.
- 3.3 Non-specialist Children & Family Teams have also developed new approaches with children who have less serious offending behaviours.
- 3.4 In terms of earlier intervention, a range of diversionary approaches have been put in place, including:
 - targeted youth work;
 - late night sports events, discos and other community based activities;
 - activity programmes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh and Operation Youth Advantage;
 - mentoring services.
- 3.5 Police Restorative Warnings have been introduced to ensure an effective early response to a first, low level offence by a young person. By ensuring a prompt response from a uniformed officer, and through the involvement of the family, this is considered to be successful in preventing many young people from further offending.
- 3.6 However, as this latter initiative involves local community police officers alongside their many other duties, it cannot require a significant level of either individual assessment or follow up activity. Also, a Police Restorative Warning has explicit criteria, and is not used where there is more than one offence, or where the offence is serious.
- 3.7 Such cases require additional assessment, and can entail a more significant level of intervention, but they often still do not involve a level of risk or need that would require a Social Work response.
- 3.8 As part of the implementation of *Getting it right for every child*, it was acknowledged that it was necessary to fill this gap in services, by ensuring a response in those cases where young offenders exceed the criteria for Police Restorative Warnings, but do not have a level of offending behaviour that brings them to the attention of Social Work Services.
- 3.9 This involves around 300 young people each year. The vast majority will not go on to become involved in serious offending, but a small proportion will, and there has been no dedicated provision to identify these young people, and undertake diversionary programmes with them.

- 3.10 Around fifteen months ago, SACRO were asked to change their model of service to fill this gap. There has been significant discussion with the organisation about this, and they have agreed in principle to undertake this role. However, they have been unable to provide a new service model.
- 3.11 SACRO suggest that they could use their established interventions including street mediation, restorative approaches within schools and restorative justice conferencing to supplement other approaches within youth justice services. This is not significantly different to their existing service model. SACRO confirm that there are continuing challenges about information sharing and referral processes, and indicate that that any changed approach would be ambitious and would exceed current resources.
- 3.10 Officers believe that the extensive and extended discussions with SACRO have not provided assurance that the organisation can change their service model to address the identified gap in provision.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 Accordingly, more recent discussions have taken place with the Northern Constabulary, to evaluate whether additional and enhanced policing might fill this gap in services. This would involve a new, dedicated service, in a unique partnership between a Council and Police Force.
- 4.2 It is proposed that the existing funding to SACRO is utilised to enable the Northern Constabulary to appoint a uniformed officer as a Youth Co-ordinator for each Divisional Command, attached to the local Youth Action Team.
- 4.3 The Youth Co-ordinator would identify those children who are coming to the attention of the police for anti-social and offending concerns and who require more intervention than a Police Restorative Warning.
- 4.4 The Youth Co-ordinator would provide a direct link between Northern Constabulary's Divisional Public Protection Units, the Police HQ Public Protection Unit, the Youth Development Officer and Community Safety Officers and the Youth Action Teams in relation to all youth offending and youth anti-social behaviour issues. They would:
- have an overview of Child Concern Forms in relation to anti-social and offending behaviour;
 - support ongoing dialogue with social work staff about actions in relation to these concerns;
 - assess the circumstances of young people who exceeded the criteria for Police Restorative Warnings but are not known to Social Work;
 - link with Northern Constabulary colleagues and partner agencies to put appropriate programmes in place for some of these young people, where there is concern about the potential for further offending;
 - liaise with the Children's Reporter to review all youth offending cases and share information to assist the decision making process in identifying those individuals who require to be referred to a Children's Hearing.

- 4.5 It is suggested that such an approach would also address our objective to reassure communities, who are likely to welcome an approach to youth crime and anti-social behaviour that involves enhanced policing.
- 4.6 It is proposed that the funding that has been allocated to SACRO is redirected to this new service, and that SACRO are given six months notice of this. It is envisaged that the new service could be established from October 2009.
- 4.7 The Northern Constabulary indicate that the total annual cost of each Youth Co-ordinator would be in excess of £45,000, but that they would absorb any costs that were additional to this amount. At £135,000 per annum, this is £21,000 more than the current funding to SACRO, but the additional funding can be identified from efficiencies that would result across the Youth Action Service.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to agree the proposal for a Youth Co-ordinator in each of the Police Divisional Commands, linking with the Youth Action Teams and providing a continuum of service provision.

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