



**Youth Justice Sector
Improvement Partnership**

Flintshire Youth Justice Service

Peer Review - Final Report

October 2023

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1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

2. BACKGROUND

3. DETAILED FINDINGS

Key Lines of Enquiry:

- The strength of strategic board representation – are the right people at the table?
- The extent to which partners are able to respond to the evolving youth justice strategic landscape and key performance indicator (KPI) developments.
- The effectiveness with which board members advocate youth justice, within their own services and with partners.

Golden Threads:

- Voice of the Child.
- Anti-Discriminatory Practice, Diversity & Disproportionality

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Peer Review is not an inspection, but an exploration of issues identified by the host area, with agreed key lines of enquiries, which leads to a summary of findings carried out by trained peers and supported by the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership (YJSIP) and the Association of YOT Managers (AYM).

The Peer Review in Flintshire was conducted from 16th October to 19th October 2023.

The Peer Review Team (PRT) was represented by senior youth justice leaders:

Lead: Jacqui Belfield-Smith (Stockport)

Strategic Lead: Youth Justice, Targeted Youth Support, Serious Youth Violence, Complex Safeguarding. *Also Chair of the AYM (Association of YOT Managers)*

Co-Lead: Dan Bride (Kent)

Assistant Director, Adolescent Services (Social Work, Early Help, Youth Work, Children's Centres, Response Team, Youth Justice) and Head of Youth Justice, Kent

Co-Lead: Dr Ali Davies (Neath & Port Talbot)

Principal Officer, Youth Justice & Early Intervention Service, Leaving Care (Route 14) and Pathway Plus.

Gwasanaeth Cyfiawnder Ieuenctid ac Ymryrath Gynnar NPT, Gadael gofal a llwybr plws

Peer Reviewer: Chris Sweeting (Kirklees)

Current Board Programme Manager (recent Service Manager): Youth Justice Service

YJSIP Representative: Laura Kinsey, YJSIP Co-ordinator

The Peer Review Team (PRT) would like to express their thanks and appreciation for the welcome and hospitality provided by Flintshire YJS and the Management Executive Board and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions.

The PRT would like to express special thanks to Flintshire colleagues, for their business support and logistics prior to, and during, the review.

The PRT would also like to express particular thanks to Jamie Warr, Senior Manager for Flintshire Youth Justice Service and Sorted and the youth justice team for taking such excellent care of us whilst on site.

The team would also like to thank Laura Kinsey from the YJSIP for her support prior to and during this Peer Review.

2. BACKGROUND

A Peer Review is a voluntary process undertaken at the invitation of the local Youth Justice Partnership. This report is a summary of the findings of a youth justice sector-led Peer Review carried out by trained peers and supported by the YJSIP.

The report reflects the findings of the PRT, which were shared with representatives of Flintshire YJS Management Board on the final day of the review.

The Peer Review process is designed to be an opportunity for Youth Justice Services and local partners to gain a fresh perspective from peers.

It is not the role or purpose of Peer Review to comment specifically upon any inspection outcomes or to provide reassurance in advance of any future inspection.

Likewise, it is distinct from any formal improvement work undertaken by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) or any other regulatory agencies.

The review represents a snapshot of the workings of Flintshire, and all points and issues identified in the report will have been verified and triangulated, as far as possible, to ensure that the process is as useful as possible to the Youth Justice Partnership.

We would encourage all involved with the Youth Justice Partnership to celebrate their achievements, some examples of which we note and report back on and then the Service can build upon what they do well going forward.

The scope of the review was explored during a meeting between the CEO for Flintshire (and Chair of the Executive Management Board), the Senior Manager for Flintshire Youth Justice Service, the PRT lead, a PRT co-lead and the YJSIP representative in August 2023.

It was agreed that the Executive Management Board would act as the sponsor, and that the PRT would be asked to examine the following key lines of enquiry:

1. the strength of strategic board representation – are the right people at the table?
2. the extent to which partners are able to respond to the evolving youth justice strategic landscape and key performance indicator developments
3. The effectiveness with which board members advocate youth justice, within their own services and with partners.

All Peer Reviews will consider the following:

- Voice of the child.
- Anti-discriminatory practice, diversity, and disproportionality.

3. DETAILED FINDINGS

It is important to note that this Flintshire Youth Justice Peer Review was a 'bespoke' review with a specific request to focus on 'Governance and Strategic Leadership', with a particular focus on the strength of the Executive Management Board. There were 3 Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) that the Peer Review Team (PRT) were asked to examine, and they broadly covered 'representation', 'responsiveness' and 'advocacy' of the strategic youth justice agenda. Some of the key lines, therefore, can be read interchangeably. This is also true for some of the recommendations which are presented at the end and drawn out within the report.

Key Line of Enquiry 1:

The strength of strategic board representation – *are the right people at the table?*

Strengths:

Board members reported that having the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as the Chair of the Executive Management Board gave the seniority and sense of gravitas and importance to the work of the Board, and this helped to raise the profile of youth justice across the partnership. The Peer Review Team (PRT) were advised that this ensured good attendance, papers were read, and members were appraised of key messages about the youth justice strategic landscape. All Board members involved in the review expressed a general understanding of the changing landscape of Youth Justice. The CEO demonstrated a dedication, passion and genuine interest to the youth justice agenda and commitment to resourcing.

The PRT noted that Board representation was in line with good practice and included the key statutory partners at the Board, and other partnership agencies who were able to contribute and influence the youth justice agenda. Board Members reported to the PRT that they valued the induction process, and this allowed them to understand their expectations and responsibilities.

There is a breadth of data and information routinely brought by the Local Authority to the Board and it is reflective of emerging themes and national priorities, that aim to assist members' understanding of how they can contribute and influence the youth justice agenda.

The Board is also supported by the Delivery Group, which acts as a sub-group. Partners expressed confidence in the youth justice leadership and were advised of several links through the Youth Justice Service (YJS) to operational meetings with internal and external partners.

Youth justice practitioners reported that they valued the opportunity to observe and participate at the Board as they reported that this helped them to feel that the most senior managers across the partnership understood and were supportive of their work. Attending the Board also helped front line staff to understand where they fit in the

strategic landscape and enabled them to understand the importance and impact of consistency in their data/recording and performance. They described this as 'empowering.

Staff reflected that they felt their managers advocated for them at the Board and they felt supported by members, highlighting the challenge of recruiting, and retaining staff, due to the short-term and annualised funding model. Examples were given of the Chair having taken what staff perceived as a risk, in making staff permanent despite the financial climate.

Areas for consideration:

The PRT were provided with some information from the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office, the North Wales Police Force and Community Safety priorities. It was not immediately clear to the PRT what the priorities for Youth Justice were, and how the Flintshire Youth Justice Partnership was influencing this agenda at a regional level.

The PRT were unable to determine to what extent the Board had oversight of, and accountability for, other relevant strategic plans and partnership groups, and subsequently how these dovetailed with, or supported, the work of the Board. The PRT received some feedback about a feeling of 'inconsistency across the patch.'

It was clear to the PRT that the Chair of the Board was keen to empower members to be more visible and proactive and ensure that they hold each other to account for their contributions. Therefore, the Board may want to consider development time to explore and clarify expectations about what partners could bring to the Board, through their individual expertise and collective agency contributions to inform and support the youth justice agenda. Strong partnerships see contributions routinely informing performance reports, and ensuring emerging evidence and themes from their own agencies are included within Board agendas. There are good examples nationally of partners contributing to deep dives and presenting thematic, or focussed reports, led by the partner or jointly with the Youth Justice Service.

The PRT did not find sufficient evidence during the review, that partners actively contributed to agenda setting or that Board meetings involve enough reflect constructive challenge to ensure discussions are informed by the wider partnership landscape and expertise. This Board may wish to reflect on what constitutes meaningful engagement of partners at the Board to ensure that it is not perceived as passive. This includes the partnership work that takes place outside the Board, as this was not always clear within the evidence that the PRT were provided with, although we accept that this was a snapshot and may not reflect the reality of what takes place over longer time periods.

The PRT observed a reliance on the local YJS to provide data and reports to the Board. Features of strong Boards and services include all members understanding each other's roles and contributions, both to the Board, and to the service. The PRT did hear some examples of this, noting the Office for the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC) having presented on the Serious Violence Duty (SVD) and 'Sorted' having presented emerging substance misuse trends/issues. However, the Board might want

to consider if priority areas, such as Serious Youth Violence, would be further enriched with police data and health analysis, rather than a reliance on local authority data alone.

Board agendas appeared to both the PRT, and to some of the board members, to be decided unilaterally by the Local Authority, which may or not reflect the reality but was the perception based on the evidence provided. It wasn't immediately clear how individuals contributed to the agenda, set priorities, or held each other to account, which made it difficult to ascertain if there was a shared sense of ownership. The Board may wish to review how Board administration mechanisms could support this, for example, how they evidence partners' contributions to setting the agenda.

Board meetings did not appear to have a Forward Plan, or a dynamic agenda, with an over-reliance on the YJS presenting performance data and the Delivery Group report. The PRT did note a Risk Register for the Board, but it did not appear prominent, where closer attention might support the Board to drive priorities, timescales, and evidence impact of the Board actions and decisions. The Board may wish to clarify a shared position on actions and accompanying recommendations, and if necessary, record any dissent.

Key Line of Enquiry 2:

The extent to which partners are able to respond to the evolving youth justice strategic landscape and key performance indicator developments.

The PRT found a consistent recognition and commitment to trauma-informed approaches. Partners commented on the YJS driving the agenda to embed trauma-informed language and practice, across the workforce and the partnership. Most members also recognised the principles of a *Child First* youth justice system and noted the Enhanced Case Management System. There was feedback that acknowledged the police understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences, and the PRT also noted this in their own observation of the Out of Court Diversion (OoCD) Scrutiny Panel. This panel also evidenced Board members demonstrating a good understanding of desistance, and a focus on outcomes and not just tasks.

Board members spoke about oversight and awareness of contextual safeguarding & risk, child sexual exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour. Members noted that the Board had agreed the development of Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) in response to identified need.

The PRT found consistent evidence of board members being aware that there are revised national Youth Justice Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Some members were able to articulate the importance of education for children, and especially for the youth justice cohort, with this being given prominence by the YJS sitting in the Education Directorate. Some Board members reflected on the new KPIs including children's education, attainment, and levels of engagement. The PRT heard examples of challenges in education being brought to the Board, particularly in respect to short-term funding, and packages of support for children who could not be in school, for example, due to sexual offences. There was a strong sense that the Board understood the education challenges and responded to them. There was positive feedback about AIM harmful sexual behaviour training having been delivered to schools, and this was impacting on schools being less likely to exclude children who exhibit harmful sexual behaviours. The PRT also heard that the 2019 SEND inspection identified an increased level of exclusion due to drugs and knives, and that the substance misuse policy had been refreshed in response to this.

Board members were generally very positive about the YJS and seemed interested in the youth justice landscape. Members expressed pride in how the Executive Management Board, the YJS, and the wider partnership has developed over the years, and there were consistently positive remarks about 'good relationships,' and 'professional respect.' The visibility and diligence of the Youth Justice Senior Manager across the partnerships was consistently highlighted.

The effectiveness of the Youth Justice Senior Manager to share information to and from the Board across the youth justice workforce and various stakeholders was expressed consistently as a strength, with a high degree of trust in his commitment, work ethic and efforts.

Board members reported that qualitative information, such as case studies, are valued when they are brought to the Board. Staff felt that bringing case studies which illustrate the journey of the child helped to get buy-in from senior managers across the partnership. They also felt that their work was appreciated, valued and that the front-line work force received praise, and that case studies being presented supported this recognition.

Some Board members expressed to the PRT they felt that Flintshire was 'ahead' in respect of presenting data to the Board.

Areas for Consideration:

Whilst Board members demonstrated awareness of the new Key Performance Indicators, it was not clear to the PRT the extent to which Board members understood the impact of having to report and achieve these. The Board may want to assure itself that the partnership is clear about their individual and collective responsibilities for facilitating, delivering, and achieving the KPIs, including the level of resource needed to achieve them. It is also vital that it is recognised that these responsibilities extend beyond that of the YJS.

It was not always clear to the PRT to what level the Board had meaningful oversight of, and accountability for, the Delivery Group. Most of the actions arising from the Board emanated from the Delivery Group, of which most attendees were Local Authority staff. There was limited evidence of partnership contributions, and an apparent over-reliance on Local Authority resources, and specifically youth justice management, to drive the actions.

The seeming lack of clarity about partner contributions and limited visibility and accountability of some, was described as causing some drift and the work of the Delivery Group not progressing as a result. Clear timescales and accountability for actions was not always evident and there was some comment that 'things can take years' to progress.

The scope of the Delivery Group appeared very broad, and the YJS and its Management Team were perceived as being very 'busy'. It was unclear how the Board supported the Delivery Group to prioritise and to set realistic timescales for work undertaken outside of the Board. For example, the PRT heard that a 'Reducing Custody Strategy' would be taken to the next Board, but also noted that remands into the secure estate were extremely low and therefore it was less likely to be a priority for Magistrates. It was unclear at the time of the review if the strategy was the work solely of youth justice, or if the courts had been involved in the development. It was also unclear if other partners, who would be expected to contribute to robust community remand programmes (such as police), would contribute to the strategy.

The Executive Management Board may want to assure itself that practitioners are able to gain oversight of some areas of multi-agency practice in relation to priorities and emerging trends, for example case level data on low level drugs use and links to

exclusions. This might provide an opportunity for more holistic and individualised support to be offered.

The PRT consistently heard that the voice of victims needed a higher profile, and the Board may wish to review the current victim offer and consider this more within its priority-setting. The new KPIs, which includes victim information, will assist the Board's understanding in this area, to set an ambition for the victim's voice to be heard and to consider what resources would be needed to achieve this.

Similarly, it was unclear how the Board can influence the implementation of Outcome 22, as the PRT heard that there is disagreement regionally at a Force wide level about whether Outcome 22 should be offered to children who do not admit guilt. This did not appear to have come to Flintshire's Board to take a view on. It also was not clear if current board members had the capacity and influence to facilitate and drive the implementation of Outcome 22 at a regional level.

Key Line of Enquiry 3:

The effectiveness with which board members advocate youth justice, within their own services and with partners.

Strengths:

The PRT saw good examples of strategic partnership working through, and with the Executive Management Board. A common thread was that the CEO being the chair added value and status to the management board, which in turn has had a positive impact in terms of corporate ownership by partners for the youth justice cohort in terms of recognising them as 'our children'. The PRT heard justice-experienced young people, those that are care-experienced, and young people with additional learning needs were often the same children. There seemed a collective responsibility and a 'we are all in this together' attitude, which placed children and young people at the heart of service provision, which then filtered back to individual partner organisations.

It was also evidenced that the Chair values service integrity, through the willingness to consider contingency planning that challenges annualisation of funds, to ensure sustainability of delivery. This in turn demonstrates a value in youth justice staff and creates stability within the workforce.

Board members and partners that the PRT spoke to, recognised regional differences across North Wales, for example, there was a higher focus on substance misuse than knife crime in Flintshire based on the data and intelligence received, but recognition that there were differing community safety needs in neighbouring authorities and the wider regional area.

The PRT found a strong commitment to understand and respond to local need which permeated through all agencies. The YJS seemed respected and considered a valuable resource, with its personnel often being asked to attend and/or chair multi-agency meetings with other partners.

Board members seemed open, reflective and engaged in this Peer Review with what appeared a keen interest to consider potential 'blind spots' with a culture to improve.

There was extensive recognition and comment on the outstanding work achieved by the Youth Justice Senior Manager, and his knowledge, visibility, skills, experience, and approachability were key features in most conversations that the PRT held. While this is undoubtedly an asset for the Board and the YJS, it was not always apparent to the PRT the essential role other members of the service undertook, to support Board business and partnership liaison.

Areas for consideration:

The PRT found limited evidence of how other partnership boards, such as the Safer Communities Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board proactively inform or influence the youth justice agenda, and vice versa.

As detailed earlier, the PRT could not see a consistency in partners contributions to the board agenda and how they utilise their expertise to collectively address issues that arise or respond to emerging trends. The Board may want to consider steering the agenda to include presentations from partners to highlight how they are contributing to the priorities set by the board, as well as identifying their own agency priorities which crossover with the youth justice agenda. It may also be helpful to set the agenda thematically, encouraging partners to present on thematic areas, ensuring that partner agencies assess, and recognise the promotion of the youth justice throughout their own organisations.

The PRT observed Board minutes noting that members had seen the Health Needs Assessment and the ensuing recommendations. However, it was not clear if Board members had individually or collectively considered these and if there was a shared position and response. For example, there were recommendations made about Youth Justice Speech and Language provision. The PRT had received several comments that people were aware of this recommendation, and broadly acknowledged there was a lack of provision, but it remained unclear to what extent the Board has explored this recommendation and acted upon it, considered other opportunities, put contingency arrangements in place or discounted this recommendation. This was also echoed in discussions about Neurodiversity and long waiting lists, which were said to have been raised at the board. Members were described being unsure what, if any, actions were agreed. Actions such as these provide an opportunity for members to proactively take forward responsive activity on behalf of the Board and ensure that it is not perceived as the YJS having to 'fill in the gaps' where others have more strategic leverage.

A reliance on the Youth Justice Senior manager was noted in several observations and discussions, and whilst this dedication was commendable, partners would mention going directly to him for a steer or advice rather than their own organisational leads or Board reps. Where a long-standing member of staff is seen as the knowledge 'gateway' to the service it is often advisable to put contingency and succession planning arrangements in place to ensure that partners have a broader understanding of the skills within and across the Youth Justice Partnership.

Consideration could be given to the interface between research, evidence-based practice and emerging empirically tested models. For example, interviews showed board members' knowledge about models including trauma recovery and trauma-informed practice, adverse childhood experiences and ECM, so it could add more rigour to ensure messages from research and particularly HWB DOETH activity in Wales is threaded throughout board activity.

**Hwb Doeth is the academic arm of the YJB in Wales.*

Golden Thread 1:

Voice of the Child

It was clear to the PRT that there was corporate ownership of 'our' children, regardless of the route by which children become known to services. There was clear evidence of a consistent awareness of trauma at all levels and a commitment to a trauma-informed workforce and practice. The PRT were privileged to observe exceptional child focus, trauma awareness and professional curiosity about child/parents' lived experience when they observed one of the scrutiny panels.

The PRT were advised about several local forums that hear the voices of children and seemed keen to develop similar processes for justice-involved children. Case studies are brought to the Board, and these are valued by members, who expressed how this made the purpose and values of the Board more real. This is a frequent and often salutary response from strategic members nationally, as the lived experiences of children and their families keeps the business of the board grounded and tends to strongly support the collective commitment to improve outcomes for justice-involved children.

The PRT also saw evidence of the child's voice being consistently considered by the police and youth justice practitioners in Out of Court Disposal considerations, and creative ways to engage with children.

The PRT found that the Executive Management Board is ambitious to 'hear' the voice of children and young people and committed to review participatory methods to achieve this. The Participation Action Plan provides a basis for developing mechanisms for co-production and to meaningfully inform and shape service delivery, including reflecting their experience within the Quality Assurance process.

There was a high value placed on the benefits of sitting with the Education & Youth Directorate which enables close links with education colleagues. However, concerns were raised with the PRT about adverse impact of less contact with children's social care, as while the relationships between education and the youth justice seem strong and proactive, the links between children's social care and youth justice are equally important.

The Peer Review process could have been enhanced by inviting children and their families to be involved, as it provides a unique insight to be able to understand their perspective and lived experience as 'Flintshire's children' but unfortunately this was not factored into the interview schedule.

Golden Thread 2:

Anti-Discriminatory Practice, Diversity and Disproportionality

The PRT were advised that the Executive Management Board has approved the Disproportionality Action Plan, however it was not known what the oversight arrangements were, including timeframes and how outcomes would be evidenced.

There was an understanding and focus on disproportionality locally; specifically, girls, care-experienced children, children with Eastern European heritage and those from Roma/Traveler groups. The PRT found an ambition and recognition of the need to better understand the local demographic and issues related to diversity and disproportionality, particularly in relation to race and ethnicity, but also gender and sexuality.

Interviews as part of the Peer Review highlighted that staff and managers wanted to better understand the lived experience for children and their families across diverse communities, however it was not immediately clear that Flintshire YJS held an overall picture of the specific cultural groups and communities in its area, or fully understood how this impacted on the children and young people that they supervised to inform the services they might require.

There is also an opportunity to consider a dedicated 'Addressing Disproportionality Subgroup' to the Executive Management Board to lead on the Disproportionality Action Plan in conjunction with the wider Council's Ethnicity, Diversity & Inclusion commitments. This sub-group could work alongside an 'Increasing Participation Subgroup' to ensure that the interventions are dovetailed.

Ongoing Diversity and Disproportionality training for Board members and practice staff, to include Unconscious Bias, Cultural Competence & Humility Training could help to address the development of interventions, which explore cultural heritage, identity and gender politics and the implications for supporting Flintshire children, whilst and also ensuring strategic commitment and oversight.

As this Peer Review is Welsh-based and given the national drive and legislative requirements in Wales, the Board may need to assure itself that the importance of the Welsh language is reflected in the Disproportionality Action Plan to ensure it is integral and in line with Council priorities, which includes all documents being produced and translated, and ascertaining a child's language preference.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Executive Management Board to compare their membership with other local and national models to reflect on the role, seniority, and remit/responsibilities of members at the Board, to ensure that all parties are able to represent both local needs and influence strategic and regional responses.
- The Executive Management Board would benefit from reviewing examples of sub-regional and devolved administrations that the Board may wish to consider in terms of influence for priority setting at a regional level, that takes account of youth justice emerging themes.
- The Executive Management Board to review other good practice models of participation nationally to ensure voices of children and young people are heard at the Board and disseminated at partner agency level. Review Participation Strategies that meaningfully increase the mechanisms of participation and co-production via multi-modal means, including feedback, focus groups, digital platforms and semi-structured questionnaires.
- Review the agenda-setting process to ensure that Executive Management Board agenda items actively involve contributions from all members and develop thematic deep dives led by board representatives, which align to the business of the Board and partnership priorities, including regional influence and escalation as required.
- The Executive Management Board to consider utilising a 5WH (who, what, where, when, why, and how) format for members, taking key and assigned actions from board meetings back to their own areas of work.
- Ensure that there is triangulation between the agenda, board papers, minutes, and agreed actions so that the evidence of the work being undertaken is clearly identified. Ensure timescales and owners are included in plans/minutes so that progress is tracked and monitored. Development of a Forward Work plan to enable Executive Management Board members to consider their contributions and consideration of critical developments and emerging business that the Board needs to be cited on.
- The Executive Management Board to assure itself that there is more oversight of the Delivery Group to ensure its work is informing the Board's strategic agenda with relevant data, smart plans and time limited targets that are both deliverable and achievable. The Board to refer to recent HMIP framework and reports regarding benchmarking and expectations for executive boards and sub-groups.
- The Executive Management Board to refer to research and recent academic evidence, particularly HWB DOETH (the academic arm of the YJB in Wales) but also HMIP academic research that is frequently updated on their website, and specific youth justice and participation research, such as that undertaken

independently through Edge Hill and Manchester Metropolitan University to ensure strategy utilises and is derived in research literature.

- To help strengthen the development of the Golden Threads, the Executive Management Board to develop operational subgroups for Participation (Voice of the Child) and Disproportionality & Diversity which report directly to the Board. There are good practice examples of this operating nationally within HMIP reports and guidance, as well as practice guidance in research and YJB basecamp.
- In addition to the named designated leads for National Standards for Children, the Executive Management Board to identify specific 'Owners' for each of the sub-groups, with responsibility for updating the Board on progress and where necessary, eliciting their support to help break down any barriers.

Flintshire Peer Review Team, 10/11/2023