

## Minutes of Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### Apologies for absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were sent from Cllr Povolotsky, who was substituted by Cllr Haywood, and Cllr Smith. Cllr Corkin and Cllr Waine both apologised that they needed to leave before the end of the meeting.

Chandler and Gregory online

Toby and Fraser Long absent

#### 1. Declaration of Interests

There were none.

#### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the 22 July 2024 meeting were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record.

### 6. Youth Justice Annual Plan

Cllr John Howson, Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, and Jennifer Sergeant, Head of Service Leaving Care, were invited to present the Youth Justice Annual Plan.

The Cabinet Member introduced the agenda item, highlighting the four strategic priorities: reducing the number of first-time entrants into the youth justice system, tackling the exploitation of children in Oxfordshire, addressing serious youth violence, and enhancing outcomes for children. Additionally, the Cabinet Member praised the notably low reoffending rates among children who had entered the system.

*Cllr Graham left part way through the following discussion.*

After the brief introduction to the Youth Justice Annual Plan, Members posed several questions and provided comments such as the following:

- There were inquiries regarding the actions being taken to resolve the issue of the delayed budget decision, and what measures were in place to address it.

The delay in the budget had been a persistent problem for several years, well recognised by those managing it. This issue hampered the service's ability to plan effectively. There was always the risk of receiving less funding than anticipated, necessitating decisions to cut back on services. An assurance was given that officers would continue to advocate at the national level with partners and the Youth Justice Board to secure timely budget allocations.

- The plan highlighted the importance of collaborating with partners, including local authorities, police, health services, probation, schools, community groups, and district councils to tackle youth justice issues holistically. District councils were updated on the Youth Justice Plan's report and priorities through the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership Group, ensuring they contributed to reducing crime and supporting young people.
- There was interest in what the statistics in the report, especially rural versus urban offending rates, said about the environments and settings where offences occurred.

The Head of Service Leaving Care outlined that youth crime was not just driven by environment or location. Factors like SEND needs, speech and language gaps, poverty, and children's characteristics also play key roles. Tackling it demanded a collaborative approach, focusing on each child and considering various influences beyond their surroundings.

- Members inquired about how mental health services affect youth justice and what measures are being taken to address mental health issues within this system.

The partnership benefited from direct CAMHS access, enabling swift mental health assessments for young people in the justice system as well as the Phoenix Team, the multi-disciplinary team at Oxford Health who worked with children and young people at risk of exploitation as well as under a court order. This ensured trauma-informed and developmentally sound interventions. This robust mental health support has been a major strength of the partnership's approach to youth justice.

- The discussion stressed the need to keep most children in school for their safety and to lower criminal activity risks. Schools were almost always a safe environment, and efforts were being made to reintegrate children and maintain their attendance.

The partnership was also focused on reducing youth risk outside the home by addressing exploitation and serious youth violence, influencing offending rates.

The link between school exclusions and offending rates was emphasised, which highlighted the need for schools to collaborate with police and other partners to prevent exclusions and support educational reintegration.

*Cllr Waine left at the conclusion of item 6.*