

**EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
– 22 September 2026**

**OXFORDSHIRE YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE
ANNUAL PLAN 2026 – 2029**

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) note the Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service Annual Plan 2026–2029; and
 - b) note the strategic priorities, governance arrangements and performance focus for delivery of youth justice services in Oxfordshire over the period 2026–2029.

Executive Summary

2. This report presents the Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) Annual Plan 2026–2029 for approval. The plan sets out the statutory youth justice plan for Oxfordshire and describes how partners will work together to deliver a child-centred, preventative and evidence-led approach to youth justice. It reflects national reform, including the Youth Justice White Paper, and local priorities to continue to maintain a reduction in first time entrants, reduce reoffending, reduce the use of custody, address disproportionality, strengthen diversion and improve outcomes for children, victims and communities.

Purpose and Background

3. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires each local authority, in partnership with key statutory agencies, to prepare and publish an annual youth justice plan. The Oxfordshire YJS Annual Plan 2026–2029 fulfils this requirement and sets out the county's strategic direction, governance arrangements, performance priorities and areas for improvement.
4. The plan is framed by a period of national reform and by Oxfordshire's ambition to deliver forward-thinking, preventative and child-centred services. It recognises that children in the youth justice system are often among the most vulnerable, with needs linked to trauma, exploitation, mental ill health, unmet special educational needs and disabilities, and disrupted education. The plan therefore places strong emphasis on early intervention, diversion, relational practice and whole-system partnership delivery.

5. For 2026–2029, the plan identifies strategic priorities to: strengthen prevention and diversion and continue to reduce first time entrants; improve the partnership response to reoffending and reduce the use of custody; further develop the county's response to adolescents, exploitation, harm outside the home and online risk; improve support for children with special educational needs and disabilities in the justice system; address overrepresentation and disproportionality through anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice; improve support for victims and families; and maintain a strong focus on workforce development and continuous improvement.
6. Governance of the plan is through the Youth Justice Management Board, bringing together the local authority, police, health, probation and voluntary and community sector partners. The plan describes how delivery will be overseen through performance management, partnership challenge and shared accountability for outcomes, including oversight of risks, issues and the disproportionality action plan.

Priorities and Delivery Focus

7. The plan includes a delivery focus on education, prevention and diversion, serious violence and exploitation, support for arrested children, custodial remand and resettlement, work with families, children from over-represented groups, and continuous improvement. It also reflects local commitments as a Marmot county to tackle inequality and the wider determinants that affect life chances for children involved in, or at risk of entering, the youth justice system.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

8. The plan supports the Council's strategic priorities to tackle inequalities, prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents, and create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. It aligns with the council's wider ambitions for prevention, partnership working, community safety, improved educational inclusion, SEND improvement and better life chances for vulnerable children and young people.

Financial Implications

9. The Youth Justice Service Annual Plan 2026–2029 describes the strategic framework and delivery priorities for the existing youth justice partnership. It is a grant requirement from the YJB to produce this plan. Approval of the plan does not in itself create new financial commitments beyond existing approved budgets and partnership resources. Any future service developments arising from delivery of the plan that require additional investment will be subject to the Council's usual financial approval processes.

Legal Implications

10. The Council is required under section 40 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to formulate and implement an annual youth justice plan, in consultation with relevant partner agencies, and to submit the plan in accordance with national requirements. Approval of this report supports the discharge of that statutory duty.

Staff Implications

11. The plan includes a focus on board and workforce development, reflective practice and continuous improvement. Delivery will be through the existing Youth Justice Service workforce and partner agencies. Any future staffing changes arising from service development would be managed through the Council's normal workforce processes and governance arrangements.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

12. Equality and inclusion are central to the plan. It includes a specific focus on overrepresentation and disproportionality, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice, and improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The partnership will continue to use data, quality assurance and community insight to identify and address unequal outcomes for children from minoritised and over-represented groups.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

13. The reorganisation of councils in Oxfordshire into three unitary councils from April 2028 has both potential benefits and risks for delivery of the Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service Annual Plan 2026–2029. The creation of new unitary councils may provide opportunities to strengthen place-based working, align youth justice, prevention, education, community safety, family help and wider children's services more closely within local areas, and build stronger connections with district-level and community partners. However, the transition also creates risks around continuity of strategic leadership, governance, partnership accountability, data sharing, commissioning arrangements, workforce stability and consistent countywide delivery of statutory youth justice functions. Oxfordshire County Council will cease to operate from April 2028 and its relevant functions, staff and responsibilities will transfer to the new unitary councils. During the transition period, it will therefore be important to maintain clear Youth Justice Management Board oversight, protect statutory compliance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, ensure continuity of service for children, victims and families, and develop transition arrangements that preserve consistent practice standards, performance oversight and partnership accountability across the future unitary council footprint.

Sustainability Implications

14. The approval of this plan has no direct material sustainability or climate implications. Where actions arising from the plan lead to future commissioning, service redesign or programme development with material environmental impact, these will be considered through the Council's usual climate and sustainability assessment processes.

Risk Management

15. The plan recognises a number of strategic risks, including continued demand and complexity, disproportionality in the youth justice system, unmet SEND need, risks associated with serious violence and exploitation, and the need to sustain effective partnership performance through a period of national reform. These risks will be monitored through the Youth Justice Management Board, supported by performance oversight, escalation routes and delivery planning.

Consultations

16. The plan has been developed with Youth Justice Management Board partners and informed by service performance, learning from practice, feedback from children and families, and relevant partnership insight. Final consultation and sign-off will be completed through the Council's and Youth Justice Management Board's governance processes prior to publication.

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Annex: Annex 1 – Oxfordshire Youth Justice Service Annual Plan
2026–2029

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

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