

Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales

Preventing children from entering the criminal justice system, minimising their contact with it and maximising opportunities for diversion is essential in supporting them to lead crime free lives. The statutory aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sets out requirements to ensure local services are provided to prevent children from offending and to promote their future welfare. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have a significant effect on mental well-being throughout life leading to negative outcomes such as involvement in crime.

Those with four or more ACEs are 15 times more likely to commit violence and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned. Policy is therefore focused on preventing and minimising the impact of ACEs, of stopping inter-generational problems and developing resilience to improve life chances. The Youth Justice Blueprint also recognises the commitment to the delivery of children's rights in Wales. The whole-system approach described below takes account of the relevant articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the design of youth justice services for Wales. It sets out the ambition for a rights-based and trauma-informed system, which will support services to deliver positive outcomes for children in Wales.

<p>Our aspirations are to:</p> <p>Develop a youth justice system which treats children with fairness and respect and helps them to build on their strengths and to make positive changes and choices in their lives.</p> <p>Support children to live crime free, positive and healthy lives, improving well-being and making communities safer.</p> <p>Reduce the number of children in the youth justice system through effective diversion and prevent offending by addressing the vulnerabilities that often lead to crime.</p> <p>Reduce re-offending and create safe environments in which children are protected from harm and supported to thrive.</p> <p>Deliver a bold ambitious approach with transformative, sustainable services that provide continuity of care throughout the system.</p> <p>Work with key stakeholders to strengthen the integrated partnership approach to the delivery of youth justice services which prioritises 'child first' and improves outcomes for children.</p>	<p>The Whole-system Approach will focus on:</p> <p>Prevention: Targeted prevention activity in Wales should continue to be prioritised through dedicated funding. The intention is to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system, who may not yet have offended. We will explore options to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align preventative services offered to children (including those targeted at reducing the number of looked after children, the prevention of school exclusions and homelessness) with a joint framework model and shared risk or intervention trigger factors to improve outcomes for children. Develop effective monitoring of prevention activity to demonstrate impact and to align reporting to Welsh Government, Youth Justice Board and Police and Crime Commissioners where possible. <p>Pre-Court diversion: Existing models and practice in pre-court diversion are a strength and should continue to be supported and funded because of their proven impact in reducing first time entrants. We will explore options to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further develop diversionary practices and a more co-ordinated approach to establish consistent rights-based practice across Wales, including notification between the police and youth offending teams when community resolutions are issued. <p>Community: Children in the system can experience complex needs including a background of emotional trauma and ACEs. We will scope options to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out a trauma-based approach in Wales, which is embedded as systematic practice, starting with the identification of and response to ACEs when children first come to the attention of police. Develop the Enhanced Case Management (ECM) approach nationally for complex and high-risk cases, a psychology led, multi-agency approach, enabling effective tailoring and sequencing of interventions, recognising the trauma and adverse events children have experienced. Align with the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, to benefit children who have become victims through experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse or sexual violence in their home environment and reduce the risk of perpetrating such offences. Support the youth justice sector with resources, training and qualifications to improve practitioner skills in recognising and responding to trauma. <p>Custody: There have been long-standing concerns about the distant placing of Welsh children away from their home area. We will explore options for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Welsh-resident children being placed in secure accommodation in Wales and near to their home communities. This will include reciprocal arrangements with England so that cross-border arrangements are in place for individual cases on an exceptional basis. Trauma-informed secure provision, drawing on best practice in multi-agency working to develop a centre of excellence with delivery of mental health, health care education and training. <p>Resettlement and transitions: Resettlement is most effective when there is multi-disciplinary, collaborative working between agencies providing support in custody and the community. We will consider how:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 'Constructive Resettlement' approach can be adopted, so work with children is constructive, co-created, customised, consistent and co-ordinated. Resettlement practice can be broadened to encompass family-focused work to prepare the home environment for the child's return; improving reintegration. Multi-agency responses to reintegration and resettlement can be further strengthened. Transition arrangements to adult criminal justice services other adult services such as mental health, substance misuse can be improved. <p>System oversight: Effective delivery of youth justice services requires robust oversight and partnership arrangements. We will explore options for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national trauma-informed approach for the delivery of youth justice services in Wales. This will require continued partnership arrangements between the UK Government and Welsh Government to enable the co-ordinated exercise of respective functions to deliver the Blueprint and embed new systems and arrangements. Strengthened partnership arrangements between the Welsh Government, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Wales, Youth Custody Service and the Youth Justice Board to enable the co-ordinated exercise of the respective functions to deliver the Blueprint and embed new systems and arrangements. 	<p>Our guiding principles</p> <p>The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales sets out our vision for youth justice in Wales. It will:</p> <p>Take a 'children first' approach to youth justice, ensure that it is child-centred rather than service focused, ensure that it meets the individual needs of children and responds to their best interests.</p> <p>Take a trauma-informed approach throughout the various stages of the youth justice system, from prevention and early intervention to resettlement from custody, recognising and responding to ACEs and indicators of complex need.</p> <p>Embed trauma-informed approaches into community and custodial practice to effect cultural and systemic change and deliver consistent approaches in meeting children's needs.</p> <p>Align devolved and non-devolved services through a shared vision, values and approach which underpins the design and delivery of services.</p>
<p>What success looks like</p> <p>The youth justice system has experienced significant reductions in first time entrants, and custodial populations. This Blueprint builds on this success. It aims to improve criminal and social outcomes for children in contact with the youth justice system and to support them to develop resilience and to fulfil their potential. It aligns with the principles and objectives of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by modifying services to improve outcomes for children, their families, victims and the wider community. Recognising and responding appropriately to the impact that trauma and ACEs have on children, will result in more effective responses, reduce the likelihood of perpetuating ACEs in successive generations and inter-generational criminal behaviour.</p> <p>This whole-system approach is intended to ensure that children in, or at risk of entering the youth justice system will have access to services that act in their best interests, are non-discriminatory, encourage their active participation in decisions which affect them and ensure their access to rights and entitlements. The Blueprint sets out a commitment for realising how devolved and non-devolved services can work together to realise children's rights and develop a youth justice system in Wales which is based on rights-based principles.</p>		

The implementation of the Youth Justice Blueprint will be overseen through a specialist programme under the oversight of the Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel.