

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

## Report by the Director of Social Work Services

Children Services Committee: 18 April 2007

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**Subject: The Youth Justice Improvement Programme**

### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** To inform Committee of the Scottish Executive Youth Justice Improvement Programme

### **2. Background**

- 2.1** The Youth Justice Improvement Group was an expert group set up by the Scottish Executive during 2005/2006 to develop objectives and lead on improvement for Youth Justice Services for 2006 – 2008.
- 2.2** The group and associated sub-groups had representation from Health, Education, Justice Department, Police, Social Work, Children's Reporter and Voluntary Organisations.
- 2.3** The Improvement Group presented proposals for action and subsequently the Scottish Executive published a response "Youth Justice Improvement Programme".

### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** The report from the Improvement Group indicated that there has been some success in tackling youth offending but some problems remain.
- 3.2** These problems include: overall the number of persistent offenders has not reduced; too many young people are ending up in custody because their offending was not tackled sufficiently early or consistently; the root causes of offending – in particular poor parenting and difficult family circumstances – are not being tackled in a sustained and comprehensive way and agencies are not yet working together across the country.
- 3.3** In response to these issues, the Improvement Programme identified 6 broad areas where action should be taken. These are:
- to tackle problems caused by a small number of troubled and troublesome families by providing support at an early stage;
  - to stop persistent offending;
  - to ensure young people involved in offending cannot refuse to engage in programmes to change their behaviour;

- to reduce specific risks to communities other young people and themselves, posed by the very small number of high risk offenders;
  - to ensure the workforce has the capacity and skills to deal with this challenging agenda;
  - to build community confidence that effective action is being taken.
- 3.4** An action plan has been developed which sets out expectations for both the Scottish Executive and local Youth Justice Strategy groups.
- 3.5** The plan sets out 5 areas where action should be taken to tackle the issues raised in the Improvement Programme.
- 3.6** The 5 areas for action are:
- action to improve practice;
  - action to ensure performance is evaluated and improved;
  - action to ensure the youth justice system is effectively managed;
  - action to provide information to victims, communities and offenders;
  - action to provide the workforce with the capacity and skills it needs.
- 3.7** Each action area has a number of objectives to be achieved within a prescribed time period ranging from March 2007 until March 2008.
- 3.8** To help with the local implementation of the action plan the Scottish Executive will second a team of professional advisors into the Executive, to work with local teams.
- 3.9** The areas for action will be progressed locally by the Authority's Multi-Agency Youth Justice Forum and will also be incorporated into our Best Value review of Youth Justice Services.

#### **4. Personnel Issues**

- 4.1** At present there are no personnel issues associated with the Improvement Programme but this may change as we progress with the action plan. This will be subject to future reports to the Committee.

#### **5. Financial Implication**

- 5.1** At this time there are no indications of what the possible financial implications may be, but this will be the subject of future reports to the Committee.

#### **6. Risk Analysis**

- 6.1** The main risk at this time is not meeting the objectives and timescales set out in the action plan. Many of them require initial action by the

Scottish Executive. At present some of the timescales have already slipped.

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1** The Scottish Executive has set out an Improvement Programme for Youth Justice Services with objectives to be met over the next 14 months.
- 7.2** Action on achieving these objectives will be progressed through the local Multi-Agency Youth Justice Forum.
- 7.3** Updates on the action plan will be the subject of future reports to the Children's Services Committee.

## **8. Recommendation**

- 8.1** The Committee is invited to note the report and agree to updates on the action plan being presented to future meetings.

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Director of Social Work Services

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**Appendices:** No appendices

**Background Papers:** <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/10/09094340/0>

**Wards Affected:** All wards