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# Gloucestershire YOS

## Recovery Plan

September 2020

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PROSPECTS, PART OF SHAW TRUST, DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF GCC

## Executive summary

Gloucestershire's Youth Offending Team is an integrated provision within the Youth Support Team, a commissioned service delivered by Prospects, part of Shaw Trust. Gloucestershire County Council is the accountable body for youth justice in the county and, working with local partners, has oversight of the Youth Offending Team. GCC's Commissioning Team and the YST work collaboratively to ensure our YOS provision continues to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people within the county. The last six months have seen some of the most challenging circumstances faced by organisations within the public sector, and the uncertainty continues.

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, Gloucestershire's YOS has demonstrated resilience, innovation and creativity in order to continue to support and protect children and young people, particularly those on the periphery or already immersed in the Criminal Justice System. This report details the journey the YOS has been through and outlines how services and systems have adapted during lockdown and thereafter, and what priorities have been identified going forward. It draws upon research and learning whenever possible.

### 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform relevant stakeholders of Gloucestershire's Youth Offending Service's plans for transitioning towards recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. This recovery is unlikely to be a straight-forward process; returning to the world as we know it is likely to be slow and complicated, with further periods of local, regional, and potentially national lockdowns in the near future.

'The current crisis is unprecedented and ongoing'. This sobering observation comes from Lockhart and Sopp's timely research, 'Children & Young People's Mental Health Restoration & Recovery Planning' (2020, p. 2). The research was sponsored by the NHS and, like many similar articles on the topic of COVID-19, a common theme is that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on children and young people. In addition, there is a consensus that we are a long way from returning to a 'normal' world.

Taking this into account, we are mindful that there are aspects of our recovery that may be delayed until such time as the health risks are declared negligible. This report will provide a summary of the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown throughout each category, followed by how we have already transitioned to the next phase – we would argue that the nation is currently in limbo between lockdown and business as usual. Finally, there are priorities referred to throughout, identifying the direction of travel for Gloucestershire YOS going forward.

### 2.0 Summary of the impact of COVID-19:

The national lockdown instigated on 23<sup>rd</sup> March had a significant impact on Gloucestershire. The rural nature of the county meant that for some of our young people and staff, the elements of isolation were more keenly felt. The use of virtual methods to ensure that regular contact was maintained became incredibly important. Our main priority was the maintenance of services for all young people; to facilitate this we created a rota of key working teams in building spaces across the county, with appropriate social distancing and PPE provision. Our practitioners were able to maintain face to face contact with our more vulnerable, high risk young people, and those deemed to be lower risk continued to be supported but through virtual platforms and telephone calls. We also strengthened links with the Youth Court to ensure children could be prioritised, especially those turning 18, to enable them to enter pleas prior to becoming adults.

At the beginning of the pandemic some board meetings and other arrangements had to be postponed so that all staff could collaborate and find creative solutions to the unprecedented situation, with a keen

focus on work with young people. Once a degree of balance was restored and we were able to provide ongoing support to our young people safely, multi-agency and board meetings were rescheduled.

Fortunately, technology is sufficiently advanced that we were able, as a county, to move to online conferencing almost immediately. However, a real challenge was that different organisations had invested in different virtual platforms, (Microsoft Teams, Jabber, Webex, Zoom etc.). Complications arose due to IT equipment having different restrictions which prevented 'cross' sharing of these platforms. All partners were committed to finding innovative solutions and over time the barriers were over-come. Over the longer term, consideration must be given to moving all organisations in the county involved in youth justice to a single shared virtual platform for joint working.

A positive outcome is that online conferencing has become crucial in maintaining effective practice and some meetings will remain online going forward. The ability to get many people to a virtual meeting where they can share documents, record pertinent aspects, and engage in a chat room at the same time is an efficient system that will continue to save resources and reduce impact on the environment.

The pandemic has contributed to a shift in the timing and priority of some of our planned future objectives. For example, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) noted specific recommendations during their most recent inspection including that the Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJPB) 'be more visible in the YOS to gain a better understanding of the work of youth justice practitioners' (2020, p. 11). In the current climate this recommendation, and others, have been shifted to allow our focus to be on more immediate challenges, such as ensuring we have sufficient levels of PPE to keep our staff and young people safe through a second lockdown. Another challenge is finding ways to maintain a positive and healthy staff body to reduce absences which would otherwise have a detrimental effect on our provision.

We have adopted a rota system across our buildings to allow small numbers of staff to work on site, whilst maintaining safe social distance practices. Any face to face work with young people is strictly managed through a booking system to reduce the risk of contamination, and sufficient time is blocked off either side of such appointments to allow the practitioner to fully clean areas that have been used with antibacterial products.

Funding was secured to enable all staff to be provided with individual laptops to facilitate working from home. No staff were furloughed or made redundant during the lockdown, but unfortunately one member of our team lost their life because of COVID, one to a heart complaint and one to an unsuccessful surgery. These losses had a significant impact on colleagues who were already in a heightened state of anxiety due to the initial uncertainty and lack of knowledge surrounding the virus.

The county's summer provision was significantly impaired primarily due to decimated because staff and failing providers, resulting in a 50% decrease in youth work. To minimise the impact on young people we reallocated resources to facilitate delivery of youth groups and activities in areas of greatest need. Due to the constraints imposed we were limited to how many young people we could engage at any time, and so we were repeating groups to accommodate those interested. This aspect remains a priority for us and going forward we will expand our oversight and provision of youth work to counter the deficits across county-wide provision for some time to come and allow for early identification and intervention of young people experiencing difficulties.

Section 39 (5) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 specifies the 'statutory minimum staffing requirements' for each YOS (Ministry of Justice, 2013, p. 11). Gloucestershire YOS is fully compliant with the following roles in place:

- Seconded Probation Officer (this 1.0 FTE post will reduce to 0.5 FTE this month as a result of the National Probation Service review)

- Two qualified Social Workers as Case Responsible Officers, and numerous staff with experience of social work with children
- Two seconded Police Officers
- Number of health professionals including Substance Misuse CROs (4.0 FTE), CAMHS (2.0 FTE), a Physical Health Nurse (0.6 FTE) and Speech and Language Therapists (0.8 FTE)
- Qualified Secondary Teacher (Head of YOS), and an Education Lead

During the national lockdown our Seconded Police Officers were understandably re-deployed to operational teams, but we were still able to liaise if we had need, for example if we required specific information regarding the progress of a police investigation. They returned to our team once the lockdown was lifted.

Each of the staff within our integrated teams act as a conduit to external agencies and the multi-agency strategic partnerships are strong. HMIP noted that our YOS 'plays a central role in Gloucestershire partnership decisions and initiatives' (2020, p. 6). In addition to this, new projects have been launched to support services across the county, and YOS staff are involved in these projects in critical roles.

For example, the Vulnerable Children and Young Person's Cell is a weekly conference involving various agencies to identify, plan and implement strategies to support children and families disadvantaged further due to COVID-19. This Cell generated an expansive summer youth work provision and the wider Youth Support Team in which the YOS is situated, were able to engage with over 1,000 young people during the summer months on outreach and targeted youth work, with minimal notice and no additional funds.

Within the education sector we are involved with a working party and at a strategic level to plan and implement an additional layer of support for schools, to prevent an escalation of post-COVID exclusions. The Team Around the Locality Clusters (TALC) are the basis of significant research and collaboration, culminating in two pilots across Gloucester and Cheltenham, with an additional triage system. The YOS will be one of several organisations involved in the triage system and will also sit on the panels to identify support for 'at risk' children and young people.

YOS is also represented in the Intervention Circles which involve colleagues from across the education sector and other relevant agencies such as Children's Social Care. These meetings allow all high-risk young people in the county to be discussed and actions raised to re-engage them back into education. Our Education Lead has a wealth of experience and is respected by all agencies, and her input is invaluable to assisting young people to transition back into education.

YOS staff are also pivotal members of the Violence Prevention Partnership and the Head of YOS chairs the panel that meets regularly to discuss and identify relevant support for young children involved or on the periphery of violent behaviour or carrying weapons. Other partners include Gloucestershire Constabulary, Fearless and Young Gloucestershire. Additional work is also ongoing with the Constabulary's Community Harm Reduction Team to identify and roll out resources across the county to reach as many young people as possible through youth work provision.

Further work is ongoing with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) regarding quality and performance of our provision. We carry out regular monthly audits across our teams which are then moderated and submitted to GCC for review. Where best practice is noted during audits/moderations, this is then shared across our teams in regular team meetings and performance review meetings. Where there are areas of development identified, then these are also addressed through 1:1 Supervision, or group training if the issue should be prevalent in other areas of our work.

Another aspect we are currently scrutinising is the efficacy of the system of transferring young people to Local Authority accommodation. Gloucestershire Constabulary's and GCC's Joint Protocol outlines that its purpose is to 'ensure children and young people are safeguarded through avoiding, so far as is

practicable, their detention overnight in police custody following charge and the denial of bail' (2018, p. 1). The Head of the YOS and the Constabulary's Chief Inspector for Criminal Justice meet, along with other relevant staff, on a regular basis to review every single young person who has passed through custody in the previous quarter. Where any young person remained in custody overnight there is a forensic exploration of the reasons for this contravention of the protocol. Where the procedures have not been followed by any one agency then actions are recorded and addressed to prevent such breaches in future.

GCC and the YOS are in the process of under-taking an audit of this protocol and the outcomes will be used to share best practice or address failures in the system. Such work is critical to ensure that no young person suffers harm by remaining in a police cell overnight. Being arrested and investigated for suspected criminal behaviour is a traumatic experience for even the most resilient young people, so it is imperative that all agencies protect them from further harm wherever possible.

Linked in with trauma are other risks young people may face which are likely to be exacerbated during lockdown. A greater awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has emerged over the last few years and knowledge and understanding of the impact of ACEs is now more widely known. For those children and young people living in already chaotic, violent, or neglectful homes, they will have lost the safety net of attending school routinely, and it is unquestionable that such children will have suffered during lockdown.

In addition, an untold number of children will have lost parents/carers to the virus but at this time the figures are unknown (Lockhart and Sopp, 2020, p. 4). Whilst such complexities are hard to identify, a sensible plan is to expand our knowledge and support regarding ACEs and the consequences of bereavement, based on current research findings. Lockhart and Sopp's research explored the consequences of natural disasters as they feel this could be beneficial when looking for strategies to support young people through this pandemic. For example, they reviewed the impact of bereavement on children because of the 9/11 attack and have provided some useful insight into how such 'grief reactions should be targeted' (2020, p. 4).

As a result of these findings the Head of YOS has a meeting planned with GCC's ACEs Partnership Officer in October to ascertain what resources and training could be available for our frontline staff who will be engaging with these children over the coming months. Whilst most of our staff are not specialists, the expected latent demand for clinicians in the near future means resources and availability of highly trained practitioners will be reduced. Therefore, it is a sensible option to provide YOS staff with a working knowledge of how to navigate young people through the basic aspects of bereavement/trauma. In addition, training is being provided via Shaw Trust for all practitioners within YST on how to support young people with mental health and wellbeing issues, including self-harm and suicidal ideology.

A further aspect of note is the continuing work to reduce the 'disproportionate impact' faced by the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community (Youth Justice Board, 2020, p. 5). As well Black children being significantly over-represented within the criminal justice system, recent research suggests that children of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority heritage are 'suffering much worse damage to their mental health as a result of the pandemic than their white peers' (Campbell, 2020 para 1).

Public Health England has funded research to understand the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities and offers some guidance on how to create solutions. A suggested option is to access these groups via faith communities as they are seen as a 'trusted source of information, leadership and engagement' with many BAME groups. This is perceived as one way to build 'community resilience' to prepare for the long-term challenges of COVID-19.

Other ideas include identifying ways of mitigating fears, building trust, and encouraging uptake of vital prevention services (Public Health England, 2020, p. 9). Whilst these options were taken in a health

context, the same options could be utilised in terms of supporting our BAME young people through the criminal justice system.

As an organisation with a diverse workforce, staff within the YOS and particularly our BAME staff are very active in raising awareness and understanding of BAME related issues. We are piloting systems to contribute to *active* anti-racism practices, such as ‘reverse mentoring’ where a black member of staff is working alongside a white senior manager to ensure any policies or systems that are introduced going forward are BAME-friendly.

A recurrent theme throughout research and anecdotal experiences of our staff revolves around the concept of trust. BAME young people generally do not trust authority, and this contributes to more BAME children going before courts because of a reluctance to engage with Police during the investigative stages. Once in court, data shows that ‘BAME defendants were consistently more likely than White defendants to plead not guilty’ (Lammy, 2017, p. 5). The criminal justice system out of court disposal process, and our own *Children First* diversion scheme, rewards early admissions of guilt or responsibility. Time and again BAME young people are being further disadvantaged because they do not feel comfortable or safe enough to admit responsibility to criminal behaviour, which means they are generally then processed through the courts, with more punitive outcomes.

We are unable to amend the out of court processes, but we are researching ways to create a pilot scheme whereby BAME young people who have committed an offence (where appropriate) can be processed through *Children First* even without an admission of responsibility. This has been discussed within the *Children First* working party and all agencies, including the police, are willing to explore this further to go some way to redress the disadvantages faced by the BAME community. Any change will require Board approval.

## **THE CHILD’S JOURNEY**

### **3.0 At the Police Station:**

#### **3.1 The needs of the children**

Our Custody Programme Officers work within the Police Station to engage with any young person brought to the custody suite. They carry out Liaison and Diversion (L&D) assessments to ascertain any immediate needs and vulnerabilities. NHS England notes that a ‘significant number of young people who enter the criminal justice system experience mental health, learning disability, substance misuse or psychosocial vulnerabilities’ (2019, p. 5). By undertaking the L&D assessment at the earliest opportunity, identification of such issues can be made in a timely manner. The process also enables the Custody Programme Officers to ‘provide critical information to decision-makers in the justice system, in real time, when it comes to charging and sentencing these vulnerable people’ (NHS England, 2019, p. 5).

Police Stations can be daunting and even more so for any young person being brought into one as a suspected offender. Having a trained Custody Programme Officer to talk to and work through their concerns and needs is a reassuring and necessary process and enables swift referrals to relevant agencies to provide ongoing support.

This is a consensual process that is usually easily facilitated; a young person in a Police Station makes for a captive audience and generally engages well. However, once a young person leaves custody, they are more reluctant to engage in any assessment dialogue. As a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions, our Custody Programme Officers were unable to attend the Police Station and meet with young people in person. This barrier prohibited engagement with young people at a critical point in their lives, leading to missed opportunities to provide the earliest interventions.

Further to this, NHS England confirms that studies show a significant number of children and young people, between 25 – 50%, were reported to ‘experience worries about themselves, friends or family catching COVID-19’ (2020, p. 6). These concerns would have been further exacerbated as other support networks the young people rely on, such as solicitors and appropriate adults, were also providing their guidance remotely in many instances. Young people missed out on crucial interaction with adults who would ordinarily defend and protect them, and a lack of personal engagement, along with the trauma of being arrested and fears of COVID-19, would certainly have contributed to further significant anxiety for many young people in custody.

When notified by the Police that outside agencies were prevented access to the Police Station the YST immediately expanded the Custody Advice Line. This provided access to relevant and trained staff that could provide remote support to Police Officers to ensure young people were processed appropriately, based on their circumstances and the nature of the offence. This advice line was available from 9am – 9pm, seven days a week. This extended provision remained in place until the start of July, when certain restrictions were eased, and Programme Custody Officers were able to once again visit the Custody Suite to carry out L&D assessments. However, to reduce risk, the Programme Officers leave Custody once the assessment has been completed and complete any additional work remotely.

Additional support for children in custody that continued throughout the lockdown was the contracted Appropriate Adult scheme. This meant that Police were able to request support where a young person’s parent or other relevant adult could not be available for interviews etc. Our quarterly contract review meetings were increased to monthly review meetings during the restrictions to allow all partners, including Gloucestershire County Council’s Commissioning Team, a chance to review each case and ensure the young person was provided with the services of a contracted Appropriate Adult where necessary.

### **3.2 The needs of staff:**

Prior to COVID-19 Gloucestershire YOS had staff based in the police station, to allow for prompt advice to staff or engagement with any young people brought in. In response to the access restrictions staff moved quickly to a telephone response provision. This has proven more difficult to engage young people as they could only be contacted and offered an L&D assessment after they were released. As Young Minds notes during research into the impact of services moving to virtual and digital support, ‘many young people were uncomfortable talking about their problems while at home, because of concerns about their parents or others overhearing, while others felt it was more difficult to open up when conversations were not face to face’ (2020, p. 8).

Staff have explained that the shift away from meeting with young people face to face has been a difficult transition for them, particularly as for most, this work is the most meaningful aspect of their job. This is a theme that is reflected across a team where face to face engagement with young people has always been a significant part of their role. This loss, in addition to staff being unable to work closely with their peers for the support, warmth, banter and advice that is prevalent in the YOS, has proven a real challenge and impacted wellbeing and motivation.

The Police eased their restrictions on 1<sup>st</sup> July enabling the Custody Programme Officers to attend the police station and carry out face to face assessments with young people, with the appropriate PPE and protective behaviours followed to reduce risk.

One aspect that has proven difficult is that some of the furniture within the police station is bolted to the floor, so it is not always possible to socially distance. This introduced the risk of contamination, particularly with older staff members who fall within the vulnerable risk bracket. Advice has been provided to address such issues where possible, such as by bringing other chairs into the space instead.

The YOS will continue with the process of only attending the police station to engage with a young person for the purposes of any assessment, and then they will complete any additional administrative tasks back at YOS premises. This ensures the potential risks for these frontline staff are reduced to the lowest possible levels for the foreseeable future. This is a sensible compromise to keep staff safe and will not be detrimental to our young people who once again have the option of personal support.

#### **4.0 Out of court disposals**

##### **4.1 The needs of the children**

Gloucestershire's *Children First* diversionary scheme has been pivotal in maintaining a responsive, timely and appropriate alternative to the criminal justice system throughout the pandemic. As a result of the effectiveness of the system, any young people caught up in offending during the lockdown were processed through the Joint Decision Panel (where appropriate) as efficiently as they were pre-lockdown. The only difference is that the multi-agency members of the panel converted their weekly meet up in a central location to a virtual media platform instead. This increased efficiency and allowed better attendance for all concerned as no travel or room bookings were necessary.

There are few positives that can be drawn from a world-wide pandemic, but this global enforcement to a virtual world is certainly something that can be exploited where appropriate once full recovery has been reached, and will certainly remain an aspect of our *Children First* provision going forward.

In terms of the practicalities of working with children who had been diverted from the criminal justice system, our staff maintained a personal, face to face regime with those young people deemed high-risk throughout. These meetings were carefully orchestrated and full PPE was incorporated to minimise the risks. Whilst such engagement was challenging, our staff were very willing to continue to work with those youngsters who absolutely needed to have regular face to face support from their key workers.

For other young people, we continued to provide constant and timely support through social media, virtual platforms such as WhatsApp, and phone calls. Where we already had an existing relationship with the young person, this shift to a remote delivery was easier to implement and maintain as the trust and rapport had already been created in person. The more difficult aspects of remote working related to young people who were issued with outcomes during the lockdown and this meant they never got to meet their relevant key worker(s) in person. This work still had value and was maintained throughout the lockdown, but the personal touch is so crucial when supporting children who are experiencing chaos, trauma or other complex emotions so it is possible that we've had some missed opportunities to improve lives more fully. However, once the stringent lockdown processes were eased, we moved to a personal provision immediately where possible and appropriate, suitably assessed for risk throughout.

During the national lockdown, the YST undertook a comprehensive survey of young people engaged with our services to ascertain their preferences in terms of how contact is made. Over 300 responses were received from young people aged 11 to 18 years. The overwhelming response was that young people preferred face to face contact, followed by telephone and then more virtual means. This information was used to influence our contact methods.

Despite these difficulties, preliminary analysis of data shows that there was not an increase in the number of young people failing to engage with their diversion outcomes which would suggest a level of success in terms of support, even where provided remotely.

We will maintain a sharp focus on the re-offending rates of the young people processed during the COVID-19 era.



## 4.2 The needs of staff

The manager with oversight for *Children First* noted that enabling business to continue as usual, in spite of the unprecedented pandemic and subsequent consequences, is a testament to the commitment of our staff and those of our colleagues from other agencies such as the Police, CAMHS, Victim Support etc.

By making pragmatic and swift decisions at the outset of the lockdown, processes were adapted in a way that caused minimum delay. Further to this, the JDP took it upon themselves to process some possibly controversial cases through diversion instead of adding young people to a court system that was shut down. This meant that these young people were able to access the right support in a timely manner, potentially preventing further offending behaviour whilst they would have been waiting to be processed through the criminal justice system.

## 5.0 At court:

### 5.1 The needs of the children

Youth Courts, along with many other provisions, were closed during the government enforced lockdown. This created delays for some children waiting to go before the court, but these numbers were much smaller than they would have been without our diversion system. As a result, far fewer young people were left in limbo within the criminal justice system, meaning fewer young people were disadvantaged and impacted by COVID-19 compared to other counties.

Once scheduled Youth Court resumed the back log was dealt with very quickly. The key reason for such a swift recovery was largely due to the *Children First* diversion scheme mentioned previously. Only those young people charged with more serious offences, or repeatedly engaging in criminal behaviour, were processed through to the court stage, with those committing less severe and/or one-off offences being diverted and actioned quickly. We also worked closely with Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunal Services (HMCTS) to prioritise children nearing the age of 18 and/or those deemed high risk to ensure their cases were heard in the Youth Court; this ensured such young people were not unfairly penalised by the more serious sentencing awarded through Adult Courts because of COVID-19 related delays.

The current system is that young people are given time slots to appear so that the court building does not become too busy. This reduces risk of contamination but also means that young people receive a more personal service from our staff. Whilst social distancing restrictions mean that only one Duty Officer can attend, the system is manageable. Due to an excellent relationship between the Youth Court and our YOS staff the judicial team are very patient and allow us the time to carry out personal visits with each young person between cases, even if cases over-run.

### 5.2 The needs of staff

Our Senior Case Responsible Officer, who has oversight of our court provision, continues to meet with the Youth Magistrates and Youth Clerk through virtual means. Whilst personal interaction is preferred from all concerned, the transition to online meetings has worked very well and very little has been lost in terms of efficiency and communication. Once full recovery has been achieved this area of our provision will revert to face to face interaction at the earliest opportunity.

This will also benefit the young people as the best outcomes are achieved for our children when YOS staff are able to discuss the aspects of each case in person with the Crown Prosecution Service, Defence Solicitor, Youth Clerk and Youth Magistrate. Many of our young people have benefitted from such collaboration through negotiations regarding bail packages for example, but at this time such engagement and compromise is not possible.

Another challenge that does continue, despite easing of the lockdown restrictions, is the use of Remand Courts. These processes are still carried out remotely and the young person 'attends' their court hearing via video link whilst sitting in the Police Station. Due to significant demands, it is proving a challenge to get Social Workers or Placement Staff to attend the Police Station during such hearings, which is detrimental to the child. Prior to lockdown all relevant agencies would 'wrap around' the child and work to their best interests in a collaborative manner – this is very difficult at this time.

In addition, there is no specific meeting place available in the current climate, so our staff are generally sat inside a cell with the young person to talk them through the court process or the outcome if it is post hearing. This is not conducive to either the child's wellbeing, or the staff member's safety.

One of our priorities is to push for a return to face to face hearings for all remanded young people at the earliest opportunity.

## **6.0 In the community**

### **6.1 The needs of the children**

At the start of the pandemic we identified within our cohort of young people those who were deemed to be high-risk, whether through their offending behaviour, or due to the risk of harm they posed to others or to themselves. We also reviewed young people who would not ordinarily be placed in this category, but due to the restrictions of lockdown we deemed them to be part of the high-risk cohort. For example, youngsters who we knew to be suffering from negative mental health issues, or those with difficult family situations were going to have a tougher time in isolation. Lockhart and Sopp report there is 'emerging evidence that incidents of family/parental stress... domestic violence, and child abuse during the lockdown period may have increased' (2020, p. 8).

Whilst this research is very recent, our staff are experienced, and their wealth of knowledge was pivotal in early identification of those young people whom they believed might suffer during the lockdown. Processes were put in place to allow us to provide our support and we increased our phone contact for all young people, but also provided face to face support to those deemed a higher risk.

In addition, we maintained our weekly High-Risk Panel Meetings (HRPMs) where every high-risk child is discussed through a multi-agency partnership. The HRPMs include input from the Police, Health, Children's Social Care, Probation, Substance Misuse, NEET, Speech and Language and Education, and result in actions designed to protect and improve the young person's chances of success. This forum is also used to identify occasions where a partner agency may not be reacting appropriately or swiftly enough to reduce harm, and Gloucestershire's effective escalation process will be considered.

Furthermore, our colleagues across the YST were able to provide resources that could be used remotely to enable us to continue supporting our children. Our practitioners were skilled at finding ways to provide quiet, confidential spaces for young people to talk, and on occasion this included using our transport to host face to face meetings, where parents would not provide space for their child to engage with us. For those young people who rely on routine, we continued to see them, socially distanced, in our offices.

More face to face work is now taking place, but remote contact is also maintained where necessary to add an extra layer of support. As a result of the proactivity of our staff, very few children have breached their orders during the lockdown. Again, this is testament to the diligence and motivation of our staff and our partner agencies.

## **6.2 The needs of staff**

The following feedback is true for all our staff across the YST, and likely across our partner agencies too. Whilst technology has been an incredible resource and allowed us to continue our work and provide excellent outcomes for our young people, the staff have found the COVID-19 experience gruelling. We have unfortunately lost staff members because of the pandemic, and several members of staff were pushed into isolation for months due to their vulnerabilities. These restrictions have now lifted, and our staff are fully available, delivering support to children and young people. We are mindful of the existing risks and potential further restrictions and so we have a more blended approach at this time, with digital systems combining with face to face support.

The remainder of the staff body have missed working alongside their colleagues in person. The nature of our work means staff get emotionally drained on a regular basis and being able to have a cup of tea and banter with colleagues/friends has always been an effective way to release pressure or share concerns. The current climate of minimal staffing in buildings means most staff can go for days and weeks and not see their friends/close colleagues, and this is taking a toll on staff wellbeing.

We have processes in place that can mitigate some of this stress, with monthly 1:1 supervision for all staff across the YST, and a 24 hour a day free counselling provision. But this only goes some way to ease the pressures, and most staff are looking forward to returning to offices filled with friends and colleagues once more. However, there has been recognition that some benefits, such as being able to work from home on occasion, is a system they would happily embrace going forward.

## **7.0 Secure Settings:**

### **7.1 The needs of the children**

We have a small number of children in secure settings. The difficulties within the community were replicated and exaggerated within these sites. For example, David Richmond, the Head of YCS Wales explained the concept of 'reverse cohorting'. This is a process whereby any young person coming into a secure establishment, such as Parc, had to be completely isolated for 14 days to ensure they were symptom-free before being allowed to mix with the rest of the population.

Whilst such draconian measures have been deemed necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to the existing population, other restrictions such as the temporary withdrawal of family or external professional visits will have caused further harm to the emotional wellbeing of these young people. It is widely agreed that lockdown is likely to add more trauma to an already troubled child.

Secure settings have played their part in trying to reduce the impact of such restrictions, and virtual systems were set up to allow young people to see their families online. There have been issues in terms of malfunctioning equipment on occasion but overall, this system has been welcomed. Specific sites such as Parc also offered the option of professional face to face visits for any young person where such a meeting was deemed critical to their care or their future.

Parc were also very pro-active in engaging with the parents of their cohort to ascertain if there were other processes, they could introduce to facilitate more communication between families and children. For example, they created a Parents Forum that we took advantage of which involved the parent of one of our young people in custody at Parc taking part in a virtual session where they were able to feedback to the YOI their experiences and thoughts of how to improve the systems. This has now become a monthly process and an unforeseen bonus was that the parents supported each other during the session, leading to the potential of Parc setting up a Parent Support cohort where parents can link in with each other to talk things through with others in the same situation.

The Youth Justice Board has also hosted COVID-19 specific meetings to provide ongoing support to YOS Heads of Service, and this has enabled sharing of best practice and solutions for issues experienced in other regions. The Head of Youth Custody Service (Wales) was also a regular contributor in these meetings, which allowed us to contribute to ideas to continue supporting any young people in custody at Parc YOI during the pandemic.

## **7.2 The needs of staff**

The impact on staff not being able to visit their young people in secure settings has not been as detrimental as not being able to work with children in the community. This is because, despite the very rigorous measures in place and lack of family engagement, the young people in secure settings are cared for 24 hours a day, and have a wealth of staff trained in a variety of fields to support them. As noted previously, the various sites have provided the option to engage with young people virtually so this has enabled us to continue to work with our young people to address their offending behaviour and other needs, just in a different way.

## **8.0 Transition and resettlement:**

### **8.1 The needs of the children**

Whilst the pandemic has created delays and difficulties in many areas of the criminal justice system, many processes have continued to function fully, either through socially distanced face to face meetings, or by transferring meetings online. Due to the full time Probation Officer on secondment, transition processes within Gloucestershire's Criminal Justice System have continued with minimal deviation. Ongoing collaboration has continued to support those young people becoming adults, to enable a smooth switch to the National Probation Service (NPS). Multi-agency planning meetings continued to be held with relevant young people, their family (where appropriate), YOS, and NPS to discuss the transition process, identify the NPS Named Case Officer, and agree a date for the formal transfer from YOS to NPS to take place. Further arrangements are also made for a four to six week review post-transition to ensure the young person has settled.

We are currently in discussion with NPS to refine our processes further to adopt a system that allows our Probation Officer to have oversight of all transition cases where young people will be transferring to the NPS, as well oversight of those young people becoming adults but whom, for various reasons, it has been deemed appropriate to keep within the YOS. Another priority is to ensure the Youth Justice Board has sufficient oversight of these processes to enable frequent support and challenge where required.

Other areas of transition include young people moving on from compulsory education to further education, training, or employment. Managers across the YOS, Children's Social Care, and Education continued to come together through Intervention Circles to identify and remove barriers young people may be facing. During the pandemic, these meetings moved online, and full support was able to be continued throughout.

In June, Post 16 Transition Panels were also held remotely, allowing relevant staff from, Education, YOS and other agencies to review all Year 11 students and identify those without September guarantees. Work then continued throughout the summer with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), YOS and our colleagues within our integrated Youth Support Team, including our education Lead, and those in the NEET team, Health, and Housing, to find solutions for these young people.

### **8.2 The needs of staff**

The pandemic created unprecedented and immediate demands on resources, resilience, and innovation but a particular strength within Gloucestershire is the intrinsic collaboration between agencies. Colleagues from Commissioning/GCC, the Police, Children's Social Care, National Probation Service,

Education, Health, YST and the voluntary sector have continued to support each other. Gloucestershire YOS, alongside extensive collaboration from partners and agencies, has continued to provide the very best support to the most vulnerable children and young people. Whilst there have been extremely difficult moments over the last six months, we have adapted well and, should there be a second national lockdown, our refined systems and operating protocols are robust enough to allow a full provision to continue indefinitely.

## 9.0 Finance summary

2020-21

### B5: YOT budget Costs and Contributions

| Agency                        | Staffing Costs   | Payments in kind | Other delegated funds | Total            |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Police                        |                  | 62,000           |                       | 62,000           |
| Police and Crime Commissioner | 158,100          |                  | 27,900                | 186,000          |
| Probation                     |                  | 23,250           | 5,000                 | 28,250           |
| Health                        | 154,064          | 194,000          | 72,500                | 420,564          |
| Local Authority               | 702,582          |                  | 330,627               | 1,033,209        |
| Wales Assembly Government *   |                  |                  |                       | 0                |
| YJB                           | 496,153          |                  | 7,483                 | 503,636          |
| Other                         |                  |                  |                       | 0                |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>1,510,899</b> | <b>279,250</b>   | <b>443,510</b>        | <b>2,233,659</b> |

Sign off:


**Head of Service - Youth Justice and Community**

Karon McCarthy - 

**Director of YST**

Kat Aukett -

**Director of Partnerships and Strategy**

Andy Dempsey - 

Date: Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020

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