



Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 12th February 2008

Report from the Director of Children and Families

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Report Title: Overview of the Youth Offending Service

1.0 Summary

This report outlines the work of the Youth Offending Service (YOS) including the statistical profile of young offenders, information on the programmes of work undertaken with them and YOS prevention programmes for those at risk of offending. It includes information on key issues and some indications of likely future developments.

2.0 Recommendations

Members may wish to consider establishing a Task Group to explore in more depth specific issues detailed in the report. Possible topics are indicated in the body of the report and reiterated at the end as suggested options.

3.0 Detail

3.1 The Youth Offending Service

Brent YOS has been operational since 2000 and is a multi-agency service working primarily with children and young people who have become involved with the criminal justice system aged 10-17 and resident in Brent. The service includes representatives from the police, the Probation Service, health, drugs and alcohol misuse services, as well as staff who are qualified social workers and teachers.

The principal aims of the service are:

- To prevent crime and disorder by children and young people
- To work positively to reduce the fear of crime in the local community

- To assist children and young people to become active young citizens making a full contribution to the community

In its primary direct work with young offenders, the YOS works wholly within a framework of statutory requirement. Other strands of work include the development of a range of preventive services which support both the Every Child Matters and Common Assessment Framework agenda. The YOS also plays a key role in the borough's inclusion and safeguarding work, retaining a dual role across both the local crime prevention and welfare agendas.

3.2 Youth justice and youth crime and disorder prevention

Although the YOS reporting line is within the Department of Children and Families and the service is a part of the Social Care Division, there is full local recognition of wider partnership arrangements, governance and accountability for the YOS. The YOS reports to the Crime Prevention Steering Group and the Head of Service is also a key member of the Borough Criminal Justice Group. The work is governed by National Standards established by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) which is also the source of a substantial proportion of the funding for the service. The YOS is a fundamental part of the borough's Youth Crime Prevention Strategy and the Youth Crime Strategic Group, which seeks to mobilise across a range of agencies to prevent offending and re-offending by young people, is chaired by the Head of Service. There are also key strategic links to the Community Safety Team and strategic and operational links with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

3.3

Brief overview of activities/services provided by the YOS

Because the YOS incorporates representatives from a wide range of services, it can respond to the needs of young offenders in a comprehensive way. The YOS identifies the needs of each young offender by assessing them with a national assessment tool (Asset) utilising this to identify the specific problems which may contribute to the young person's offend as well as measuring the risk they pose to others. Specialist additional assessments are also carried out as appropriate including ones to determine mental health, identify any substance misuse and screen for dyslexia. This enables the YOS to identify suitable programmes to address the needs of the young person with the intention of preventing further offending. The key interventions for young people currently delivered are as follows.

Final warnings:

These occur at the pre-court stage; young people are interviewed and assessed by YOS police officers and offered constructive programmes to divert them from future offending – an approach found to be highly effective. The Final Warning is carried out at the YOS, by one of the seconded police officers on the Team.

Referral Orders

These are available to courts as a sentence for the first criminal appearance. The orders are overseen by community volunteers who act as Referral Panel members and with whom young people sign a contract specifying the work which will be undertaken to meet the terms of the order. Young people are supervised by YOS staff and engage in various activities and programmes which may include reparation to the community, tackling education non-attendance, employment or family issues and work around consideration of victim issues and the reasons that led to offending. Reparation to the community is also a frequent feature of these orders; from April 2006 to March 2007 3,241 hours of unpaid reparative work was undertaken by young people. The figure for April to December of 2007 stands at 2,273 hours.

Community Supervision:

There is a range of court ordered sentences which also result in community supervision of the young offender. These include for example, Supervision Orders and Community Punishment Orders. The level of engagement and activity required is determined by the nature and seriousness of the offence and the type of punishment directed by the court and may include an element of unpaid work. These programmes may also include specific provision of education or training, work around various types of risk behaviour including drugs or carrying weapons. The orders available all have a strong element of enforcement for failure to comply. For young offenders for whom a high level of supervision is required and who would otherwise be serving a custodial sentence there is the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP).

Custodial support:

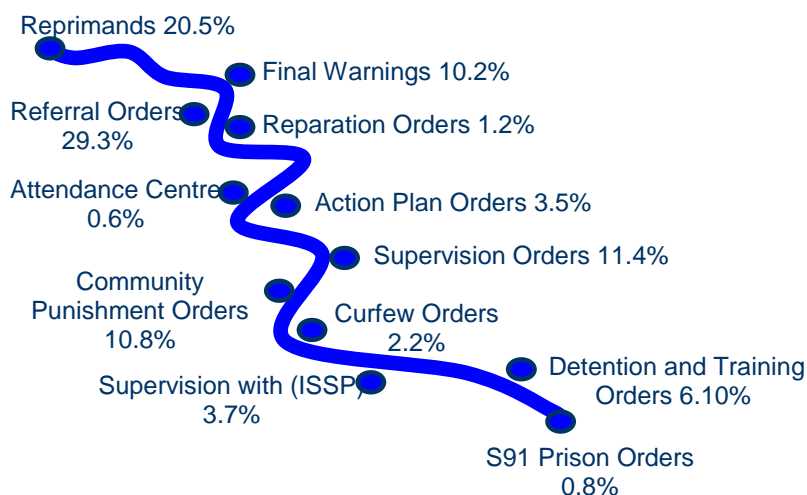
This involves regular contact with young people in custody to ensure that, on release, they are able to re-integrate successfully, thereby posing less risk to the community.

Post-release supervision and support:

This includes formal and intensive support in the period following release from custody, coupled with strict and vigorous enforcement. In addition there are mentoring support programmes to help the transition into the community and provide ongoing support when the YOS engagement formally ends via the Resettlement and Aftercare Provision (RAP) programme.

Types of Youth Justice Disposals (Jan-Dec 2007)

(Shown as percentages of all disposals)



Parenting programmes

These are for parents and carers to support them in the increasingly complex task of raising and supporting young people. The programmes are delivered to parents on Court ordered sentences as well as those voluntarily seeking support.

In addition the Youth Offending Team has a key role alongside partners in implementing the Prevent and Deter strand of the Brent Prolific and Other Priority (PPO) Scheme.

3.4

Preventative programmes

The YOS also has a preventative arm, funded in part by the YJB and also via Brent's Preventive Services (previously Children's Fund)

- Children's Support Panel

This service is sited within the YOS and engages with young people, aged 5-13 and their families to reduce the potential for offending and to improve educational outcomes. The programme works intensively with young people displaying multiple and/or complex needs. The majority have at some point been involved with social services, many have experienced fixed term and permanent exclusions or are regular truants. Each of the children will have Individual Support Plans (ISPs) or Action Plans drawn up in partnership with the child and their family. Activities / interventions are then developed or commissioned to meet the needs identified. Some referrals come via the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and the CSP work in partnership with them to draw up an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC). Increasingly, referrals to this service come through the CAF process.

- Youth Inclusion Project (YIP)

The YIP is a locality-based provision and is sited on the Church End estate and services that area and Roundwood. The senior arm (for 13-17 yr olds) is currently funded via the YJB with match-funding from local agencies and the Building Stronger and Safer Communities Fund and caters for 50 young people. The junior arm (for 8-12 yr olds) engages 25 children and is currently funded via Brent Preventive Services. Those attending have been identified as 'at risk' by agencies including for example, the Education Welfare Service, the Anti-social Behaviour Team, Fortunegate Housing, and the YOS. The YIP engages participants in a range of activities, including both educational and leisure oriented ones, in the evenings and weekends

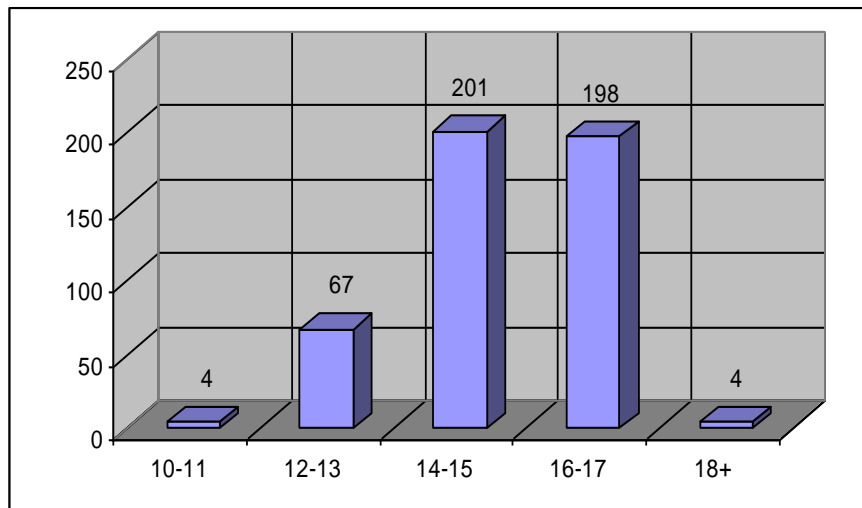
in term-time and during the day for many of the holiday periods based on assessments of their individual needs.

3.5 Profile of Young Offenders in Brent.

The overwhelming majority of young offenders in the borough are male – this year the figure stands at 86% - and although the percentage of female offending has shown a slight rise over the lifetime of the service, this has been the case throughout.

Whilst the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years of age the majority of young offenders supervised by the YOS are in the older age ranges, as can be seen below.

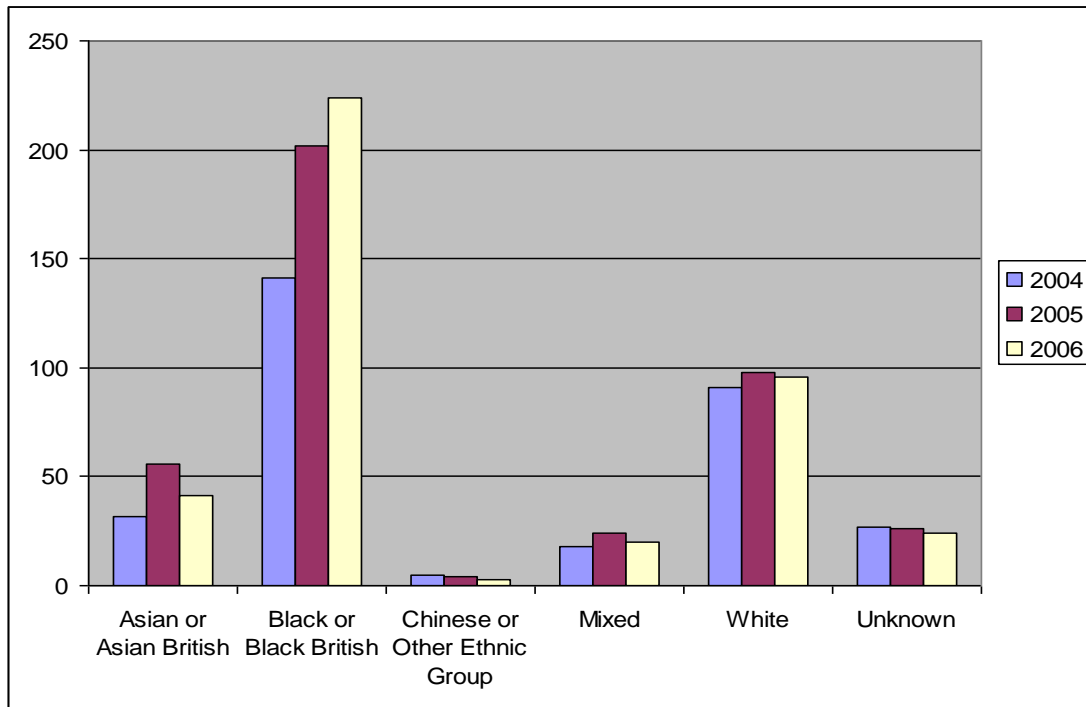
Age at date of sentencing



(Please note – the figures are low for 18+ as cases in this age group are transferred to the Probation Service)

As can be seen from the chart below, the YOS data reveals a disproportionate representation of young people of Black/Black British heritage; 56% of offenders for the calendar year 2007 were young black males. A recent analysis of Detention and Training Order figures also indicates that this group are overrepresented in the numbers of young people serving custodial sentences.

Ethnicity data



The YOS currently contributes two sets of data of relevance to this issue to the Children and Families Vital Signs Performance Indicators

- % of young men supervised by the Youth Offending Team and subject to remand that are Black African and Black Caribbean
- % of young men supervised by the Youth Offending Team and subject to custody that are Black African and Black Caribbean.

The YOS is also currently engaged in a comparative analysis intended to evaluate whether there are any identifiable differences between black Caribbean young offenders and a comparable white offender group that might explain the differential rate of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Amongst the known risk factors for offending behaviour are educational underachievement, school disaffection and exclusion. These are areas which have been a focus of the Improving Outcomes programme and of its Steering Group of which the Head of Service is a member. Whilst there are positive indicators of reductions in the over-representation of Black heritage groups across a range of economic, social and health measures, this is not the case for the youth offending area where Black heritage groups are becoming increasingly over-represented. The Steering Group has decided that this will be an area of greater focus for the work of the group and determined that further links would be made between Improving Outcomes and wider youth offending developments.

Most Common Offences Committed by Young People in Brent 2006 & 2007

Offence Type	Offences included in these types	2006	2007
Violence Against the Person	Common Assault, Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm, Assault on a Police Officer	9.7%	16.3%

Motoring	Driving Otherwise than in Accordance with Licence, No Insurance, Driving While Disqualified	21.5%	15%
Robbery	Robbery, Attempted Robbery, Robbery with Firearm or Imitation	12%	13.2%
Drugs	Possession Controlled Drugs - Class B - Cannabis, Possession of Controlled Drugs with intent to Supply - Class A, Possession Class C Drugs	10.3%	9.6%
Criminal Damage	Criminal Damage, Possession with Intent to Commit Criminal Damage,	6%	8.5%
Public Order	Causing Harassment Alarm Distress by Threatening Words or Behaviour, Threatening, Abusive or Insulting Words or Behaviour, Drunk and Disorderly	3.5%	4.6%

(The % figure shows what proportion this type of offence is of all offences known to the YOS).

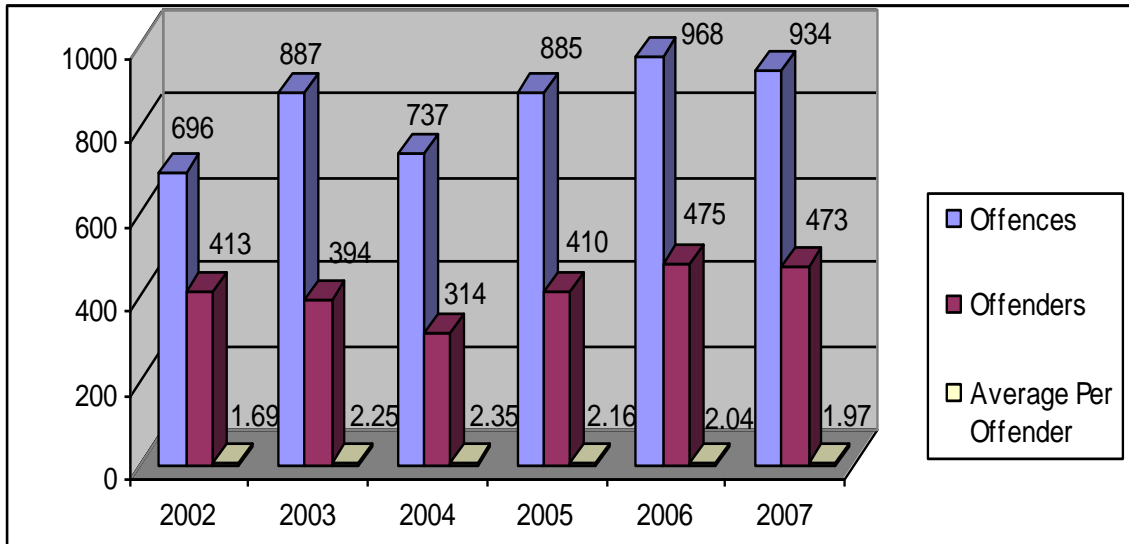
As may be obvious from the table above there has been reduction in particular offence types (e.g. motoring offences) whilst others have remained fairly constant (e.g. Drugs) over the past couple of years. The categories of offending described as Violence Against the Person and Robbery are ones which give rise to particular community concern and in common with the rest of London we have experienced some increase in violent offending amongst young people – although this is not as marked as the press would lead us to believe. However, it is worth noting that the YOS deals with those arrested and brought to justice. When the focus of the police is on offences such as robbery rather than offences which may be seen to be of less significance, there is likely to be an increase in the numbers of young people who are arrested and found guilty of these offences. These trends and our responses to them are explored further below.

3.6 Trends in young offenders known to the YOS

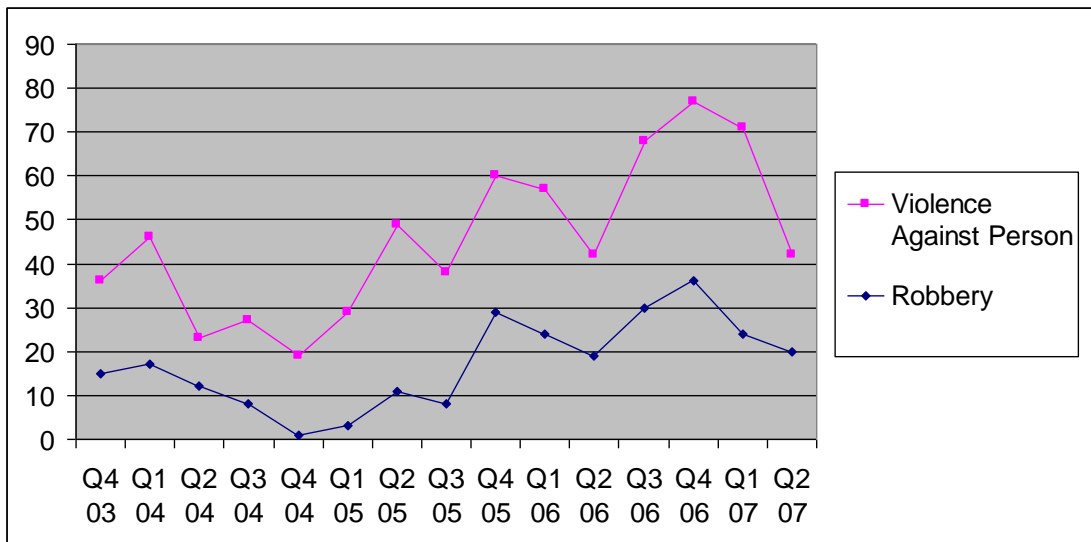
Over the longer term, there have been some differences in the way in which data is collected and analysed, making it necessary to add a caveat to attempting comparisons across the following table. In addition, as was stressed above our statistics are a reflection of those arrested and brought to justice, rather than levels of offences committed.

If we focus on the past three years in particular it does seem to be the case that the levels of offending and the numbers of offenders have remained relatively stable. Given the increase in the numbers of young people in the relevant age range (which whilst not reflected in official statistics, is reflected in the rising numbers requiring secondary school places) we do seem to be holding to a standstill position. The strategies needed to reduce the numbers of young people entering the youth justice system (first time entrants) are ones which require shared ownership across the Children and Families Department, partners elsewhere in the Council and external partners. Work to prevent re-offending is also something which cannot be achieved by the YOS in isolation. Hopefully the move towards Targeted Youth Support (see below) will facilitate more closely integrated approaches.

Levels of Youth Crime 2002-2007



Violence against the Person and Robbery



Please note –

- The data refers to the month in which the offender was found guilty rather than that in which the offence happened.
- The two offences are closely mirrored because those found guilty of robbery are also often, simultaneously, found to be guilty of violence against the person

As is apparent, there are peaks and troughs in this offending and although there is an upward trajectory this is not as marked as might be expected from press accounts of these issues. Since April 2007 we have had a project officer employed by the charity Rainer and funded through the Bridge House Trust's Fear and Fashion (anti-knife crime) Initiative based at the YOS. The focus of the officer's work is to reduce the carrying of knives and other weapons by young people known to Brent Youth Offending Service and to work with partners to address the issue in the community. However these types of offending are complex and tackling them requires joint work across the Children and Families Department and with a range of partner agencies. The YOS is engaged with two initiatives seeking to address these matters in a concerted cross-cutting way.

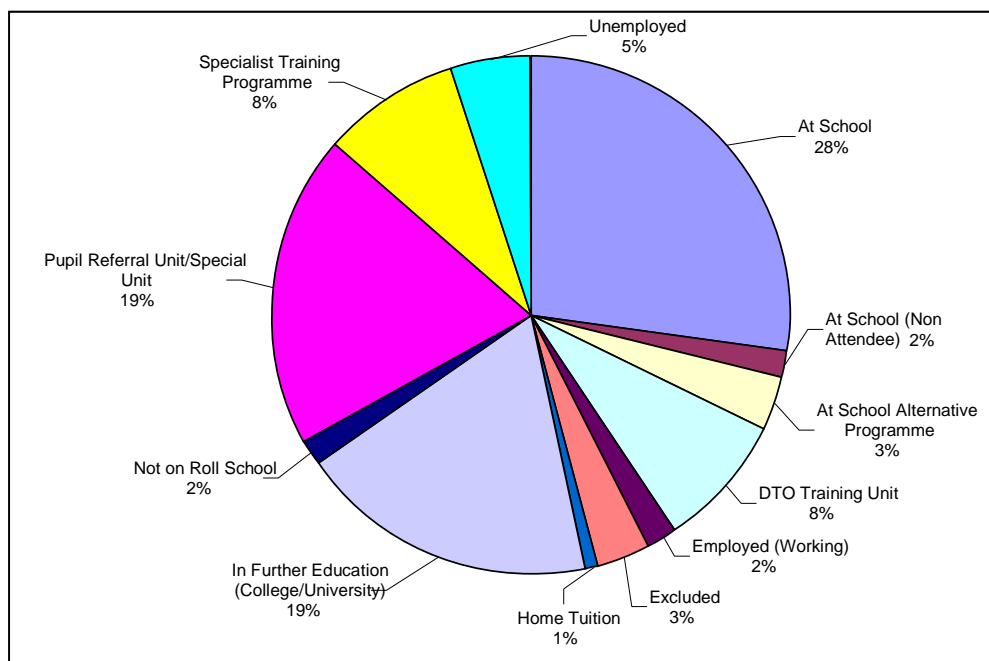
- Robbery

At a joint meeting of the Children and Young Person's Plan Steering Group and the Crime Strategic Partnership Group in July 2006 to explore the issue of youth crime and youth victimisation, compelling evidence was presented which showed a clear link between incidences of robbery and school term times and dates and the areas around schools and transport routes. Following on from that, the Children and Young Person's Plan Partnership Board Away day in September 2006 agreed to prioritise the safety of children and young people in and around schools. As a result, there has been a working group established (*Safety and Security In and Around Schools*) convened by the Borough Commander and with representatives from a range of key partners including inter alia, schools, Transport for London, Youth Service, Community Safety Team. The inaugural meeting in November identified a wide range of actions aimed at beginning to address the issues raised in a multi- pronged, multi agency manner. The Scrutiny Committee may wish to be kept informed of the progress of this work and explore how it may be able to enhance the outcomes of it.

- Violent crime

There is also a group which has been established to develop a partnership strategy to deal with young people who are involved in serious violence. This group has been meeting since September 2006 and includes senior officers from Brent Police and representatives from Trident as well as staff from the Community Safety Team, the Mediation Project and representatives from the voluntary sector. The group has looked at a range of data sources to identify the nature of the problem and is looking at a number of interventions including intelligence- led police operations through to a range of targeted work with those young people identified as being on the fringes of such activity.

Education and employment data



As will be apparent from the chart above, the majority of the young people known to the YOS are engaged in some form of educational provision. However, a substantial number of them have been excluded from mainstream provision. If we add together those who are at Pupil Referral Units (and have, therefore, been subject to permanent exclusion), with those excluded but currently unplaced and those in Specialist Training Programmes (which are generally for those unable to access mainstream provision) then this accounts for 30% of our client group. In addition, a further 8% of the young people we supervise are not on school rolls, are in receipt of Home Tuition, are school non-attenders or are on schools' rolls but on alternative programmes. The perception of the YOS Education Officer is that the number of our clients who are the subject of permanent exclusion has risen over the past three years. The profile of those excluded is largely in line with the findings of the Improving Outcomes research – i.e. males of black Caribbean heritage. In addition there seems to be a trend in our client group towards the exclusion of dual or mixed heritage males. Clearly the work to address some of these issues is taking place in the context of the Improving Outcomes agenda and the YOS will continue to play an active part in that work.

3.7 The Changing Landscape

There are a number of key changes which are likely to affect the way in which the Youth Offending Service will be delivered in the near future.

- The 'Scaled Approach to Youth Justice'

The YJB has revised the National Standards for Youth Justice Services with the expectation that the Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) will come into effect in 2009 (legislation is currently going through parliament which will enact this change) The new disposal will replace most of the current set of community orders with a single order, and will require a more targeted and tailored approach to interventions because there will no longer be a tiered set of orders. In contrast to the current system where contact requirements vary depending on the order, the proposed

contact requirements vary depending on an individual's assessed risk. This approach will help prevent further offending by tailoring the type and intensity of intervention to the assessed risk of re-offending and serious harm. Consultation on these revised standards and on the revised case management procedures to support them are currently taking place.

- Integrated and Targeted Youth Support and the 10 Year Plan for Youth Services

The Ten Year Youth Strategy has delineated the mechanisms for the implementing the Youth Matters agenda aimed at delivering the ECM outcomes for young people. Targeted Youth Support (TYS) is central to the movement towards Integrated Youth Support (IYSS). The former is about helping vulnerable young people – both those at risk of poor outcomes and those already experiencing problems - and the latter is about the provision of universal services.

The YOS and its preventative services have a clear role in the provision of targeted youth support. The shape of the services which will be developed in Brent to deliver these reforms is currently in the process of being formulated and the Head of Service is crucially involved in the Brent Integrated Youth Support Services 13-19 Steering Group which is undertaking this work. The borough's plans for TYS and IYSS need to be drawn up by the end of March and the Scrutiny Committee will doubtless be kept informed of these.

- Local Area Agreements

At the time of writing, the process of agreeing the borough's 35 indicators internally and with Government Office for London is still underway. One of those currently proposed is NI 111 which is about reducing the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system. This is a truly multi-agency target and one which will require partnership across the council and with external partners as well as the voluntary sector. The pooling of budgets which is a core part of this process does mean that some sources of funding currently ring-fenced for crime prevention and historically used to fund posts in the YOS may be in jeopardy

3.8 Resources

When the YOT was established in 1999 the staffing profile was based on an independent analysis of the anticipated workload. A parallel analysis conducted in June 2006 identified a 73% increase in workload demands.

Whilst the Youth Justice Board has supplied additional funding to all YOTs over the past five years, much of this is ring-fenced, for example, the Referral Order Co-ordinator post (with allied administrative support) ISSP and the RAP developments. These posts are designed to bring additionality to the various processes and thus sit above the core task. YJB additional resources are designed to assist in meeting their performance targets.

In terms of direct caseload management related tasks there has been an inexorable rise in statutory orders (and the consequential requirements placed on staff to manage within the framework of National Standards). Since the financial year 2003/4 this has risen by over 41%. Of our current core establishment, 13 direct delivery staff (case managers) focus on the core activity. In 2000 the average estimated allocation was 15 cases per officer: in 2002 it had risen to 24 cases: it was 27 in 2005/6. Please note that this only includes cases where the YOS is statutorily involved and providing a service in our own right. It does not include reports.

Another method of analysing workloads looks at the weekly profile of what is required in comparison with the number of available hours. An analysis conducted in February 2007 identified a potential net weekly deficit of over 300 hours.

Workload increases and requirements should be seen against a backdrop of a borough that has a very high use of secure remands and has one of the highest national rates of custodial sentencing. The movement towards the 'Scaled Approach' indicated above may very well intensify workload pressures as risk-led practice increases contact with young people committing more serious offences .

It is hoped that the restructuring of the service which is currently being drafted within existing staff cost parameters, will allow for a greater focus on risk-led approaches. It is also intended to attract and retain more experienced staff and to create a career structure within the service. However this does not address the issue of the workload of staff, or the absence of specialist roles in some crucial areas such as bail. That would require an increase in staffing establishment of at least three staff and the concomitant increase in budgets to allow for it.

3.9 Possible issues for a Task Group

Members may wish to explore these issues in more depth

- The over-representation of Black heritage groups in the youth justice system – particularly in relation to remand and custodial sentencing
- The safety of young people in and around schools – particularly the work being undertaken to reduce levels of 'schoolboy' robberies

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