

ADCS and AYM response to the YJB's consultation on an in-year reduction to the Youth Justice Grant

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers (AYM) fundamentally disagree with the proposals put forward by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to reduce the Youth Justice Grant (YJG) by an additional £9 million in the current financial year.

The news of this in-year cut over and above the savings that have already been identified in 2015/16 is unexpected and will involve some very difficult decisions for local authorities. The YJB grant has already been significantly reduced in recent years and some local areas have already lost up to 40% of their overall funding. YOT partnerships have responded well to this challenge by reducing management and support services, adopting smarter working practices and pooling resources in an effort to protect outcomes. There is quite simply no more fat to trim.

The majority of Youth Offending Team (YOT) partnerships will have already agreed local work plans for the current year and have entered into agreements with other service providers on the basis of these plans. Contractual obligations and financial penalties are likely to mean that in-year savings cannot be realised in this area.

As staffing costs now make up the vast majority of spend, an in-year cut will have a significant impact on the ability of frontline staff to undertake the vital preventive work that has enabled YOTs to manage down first time entrants to the youth justice system and lower reoffending rates. This has in turn resulted in fewer custodial sentences and reductions in the use of costly secure placements. Making staff redundant will not yield any savings in this financial year, in fact quite the opposite, it will add a further cost burden on local authorities in the form of severance payments as redundancy costs have not been budgeted for and anyway cannot be met out of grant funding. This means, ostensibly, that these further in-year cuts will simply be shunted onto local authorities to bear.

With this in mind YOTs will have little option but to reduce both the quality and quantity of services, and in some cases, cease providing services all together. The ability of YOTs to commit to a whole raft of evidence-based and effective partnership activities, such as the Troubled Families Programme or the Channel Panel, will be compromised. YOTs were established to address the underlying causes of youth crime e.g. poor parental supervision, and their practice of targeting specific children for early help and additional support has been highly successful.

Further budget reductions will mean court ordered interventions will have to be prioritised over preventative work or community-based responses such as:

- Early work with a young person identified as being at risk of offending
- Restorative justice interventions for community resolutions
- Parenting and family support
- Additional support for those young people who reach the end of their order but are still at risk of offending.

An in-year reduction of this size will undermine the ability of YOTs to safely manage the higher levels of risk in the community and custodial sentences will inevitably rise which is not in the best interests of children and young people.

Earlier this year the Ministry of Justice undertook a stocktake of 20 YOTs in order to better understand how local services are being delivered and to inform future thinking about how the system can be improved. The results of this exercise were published in a report entitled 'Youth offending teams: making the difference for children and young people, victims and communities.' Here is an extract from that report:

"All the areas we visited noted the extremely challenging financial situation for local authorities and other youth justice partners... Those we interviewed felt strongly that further reductions to the YOT grant would have a serious effect on the ability of the local authority and its partners to deliver youth justice services. They reported that further reductions in funding from central government could result in YOTs focusing solely on statutory work at the expense of prevention and diversion work, and at the expense of the more innovative work that they undertake... In our view there is a strong case for continuing investment by central government in local youth justice services. While we recognise there needs to be a better understanding of the relationship between funding and outcomes, we are concerned that reducing central government funding without understanding the potential impact risks undermining the successes achieved by the youth justice system in recent years."

In summary ADCS and AYM believe that disinvestment now under the pretence of savings to the public purse is short-sighted. The government has made a significant investment in the youth justice system over the last 15 years and we believe the YJB receives excellent value for money and tangible outcomes for this relatively small investment in YOTs. In the longer term the impact of this decision will be keenly felt in other public services, namely local authorities, in health services, in the police and in education.

We believe an equalities impact assessment should be carried out as a matter of urgency under the Equalities Act 2010 before a final decision is made due to the over-representation of children and young people in care, those with emotional and mental health needs, learning difficulties and those from BME backgrounds in the criminal justice system and the secure estate.

In terms of the other savings proposals put forward by the YJB we are very concerned about the impact of reducing the YJB's contract with secure children's homes, this will remove the only guaranteed income that these homes have, leaving providers, largely local authorities, with difficult decisions to make on the sustainability of this vital provision. This is yet another example of passing financial risk from central to local government. We believe there is more that the Ministry of Justice can do in partnership with the Department for Education and the Department of Health to integrate Tier 4 mental health provision with safeguarding and youth justice secure placements to ensure the stability of this market whilst realising savings through smarter commissioning.

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