

# Youth Justice Partner COVID-19 Update

**Date issued: 23 April 2020**

*This update from the Youth Justice Board is designed to keep you informed of activity in response to the coronavirus pandemic from the youth justice system and wider partners. We will endeavour to review this document regularly but please be mindful that things change quickly and some information in this document may become out of date.*

## YJB Activity

We are working across government and with other stakeholders on the following:

- Minimising the number of children entering the justice system
- Early release from the youth secure estate
- Maximising children granted bail (including those currently remanded in prison)
- Ensuring the information needed by youth justice partners is available and communicated quickly
- Convening virtual Heads of Service meetings across England and Wales as well as additional stakeholder fora to share and gather intelligence and support collective action
- Raising concerns and issues from the youth justice system from all partners with ministers to ensure children are always considered, including concerns such as criminalisation and safeguarding risks for children during lockdown
- Supporting a youth justice action plan being created by the MoJ Youth Justice Policy Unit
- We are relaxing the statutory requirement to submit an annual Youth Justice Plan this year as much as we are able, requiring only the submission of Covid-19 contingency plans and recovery plans
- We are supporting HMCTS to consider the implications of changes for children, provide communications to the sector and coordinating court lead contact details to support the roll out of virtual court
- We are working with YOTs delivering both the County Lines and Resettlement Pathfinder projects to look at best practice both during the current challenges and into recovery. The resettlement pathfinder has already produced kits for children released from the secure estate which will be shared widely
- We have expanded our [YJ Resource Hub](#) to include practice examples and materials which partners have found useful in their response to COVID-19

We are aware of other challenges including workforce shortages, bail, court hearing postponement, use of technology (courts and community supervision), appropriate adults, transportation for children in custody suites and court prioritisation. We are taking appropriate action to raise or resolve all queries where we can.

## Activity across youth justice

We are aware that the following activity is happening across youth justice and other areas (*please note this is not an exhaustive list of activity*):

- Testing for coronavirus will be extended to include [more frontline workers](#) including staff in prisons (adult and youth), judiciary, operational HMCTS staff and local authority staff, including those working with vulnerable children.

## Police

- The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for Child Centred Policing (Deputy Chief Constable Jo Shiner), provided a briefing document for the policing of children and young people during the current COVID 19 pandemic. Within the document Police forces are reminded to be professionally curious - better understand what is driving the behaviour which has led a child coming to the attention of the police, maintain the overarching principal of safeguarding children and to maintain officers within YOTs.
- The Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) pilot was due to commence on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020 across the London Metropolitan Police Area. However, the pilot has now been suspended due to the Covid-19 restrictions on movement and interaction. The Home Office will be carefully monitoring the situation and will look to commence the pilot as soon as is practical.
- During the government press briefing on 11 April 2020 Martin Hewitt, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council said initial figures showed the "police approach to engage, explain and encourage, and only as the last resort to enforce, is working". He also confirmed that enforcement data will be published every two weeks during the pandemic
- The National Appropriate Adult Network has produced guidance for coordinators. It can be accessed [via their website](#).

## Youth Custody Service (YCS) / Youth Secure Estate

- Action has also been taken to ensure social distancing is in place across the youth estate, in line with Public Health England guidance, while maintaining essential activities, family contact and time in the fresh air
- The YCS is supporting more in-room activities such as workouts and have provided children with additional phone credits so they can stay in contact with their families
- The YCS is working with local Youth Offending Teams to identify and support children who are eligible for the temporary release scheme. No child will be released without suitable housing and support being in place
- Children in YOIs have access to telephones in their rooms, phone lines have been opened for longer periods, additional phone credit has been allocated and all pin phones have free call numbers (i.e. Childline, NSPCC, The Howard League, Samaritans and Barnardo's)
- To protect children, staff and visitors from the spread of coronavirus, all face to face visits (including social and legal) have been stopped in line with government advice
- Individual youth estate sites are in contact with YOT case managers to agree an approach to contacting parents and carers. Many establishments have been writing directly to legal guardians to keep them updated.

## Courts, Judiciary and CPS

- The Crown Prosecution Service has [said](#) prosecutors are being asked to prioritise serious cases to manage the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the criminal justice system and have [issued new guidance](#)
- A [note on listing cases](#) in Magistrates' Courts has been published. It confirms that "sensitive/high profile cases and cases involving children and vulnerable witnesses/victims" and "any serious and time-sensitive Youth Cases (e.g. where delay might mean a relevant age-threshold was crossed)" should be included in the second level of priority.
- HMCTS are working on how to operate virtual courts for youth cases. Full guidance and joining instructions will be issued in due course. However, any internet enabled device that has a webcam and a microphone will enable a user to access the service. Hearings can be joined from a PC, laptop or mobile device using either Google Chrome or a specific app.

- Please note: any changes to individual hearings will be communicated directly to those affected in the usual way, by email and/or phone.

### Local Government

- The Association of Directors of Children's Services has published a [document](#) detailing COVID-19 resources, guidance and announcements relating to children's services
- The Local Government Association are looking at how work with children to prevent them from risk of criminalisation. There is awareness that some children do not want to be home because they do not feel safe and that there are now reduced services available to support them
- The Department for Education has published [guidance for local authorities on children's social care](#)
- [Gavin Williamson](#), Education Secretary, has asked local authorities to ensure that no children are asked to leave care at this time

### Communication and social media

- The MoJ has been coordinating social media activity to recognise those working on the frontline in the justice sector. The campaign uses the hashtag #JusticeHeroes
- The Butler Trust continue their work to highlight the work of those in the justice system and have [launched a new website](#) celebrating #HiddenHeroes
- Many organisations are creating child-friendly communication about COVID-19
- Peer Power Experts co-produced an [audio message](#) with NHS England to give children and young people in the secure estate information about COVID-19

### General well-being and mental health

- Guidance for parents/carers on [how to keep children safe online](#) is available
- Young Minds, a mental health charity, has published its first report on the [impact of Covid-19 on children and young adults](#) along with [www.thriveldn.co.uk/toolkits/](http://www.thriveldn.co.uk/toolkits/).
- Public Health England published [guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

### Funding

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that charities across the UK will receive a [£750 million package](#) of support to ensure they can continue their vital work during the coronavirus outbreak. £360million of this will be allocated by government departments to charities providing vital services and helping vulnerable people through the crisis, including victims charities and vulnerable children charities
- [Robert Jenrick](#), Communities Secretary, announced that councils across England will receive another £1.6 billion in additional funding + £95 million for Wales.
- Gavin Williamson, Education Secretary, [announced](#) that government will provide laptops and tablets for those with a social worker or care leavers to help them stay in touch with those caring for them and to learn from home. Free 4G routers will be provided for disadvantaged secondary school students and care leavers sitting exams if they don't have an internet connection.

### Inspectorates

- Ofsted has suspended routine inspections but are working closely with YCS, MoJ and DfE to maintain oversight of secure children's homes amongst other places of education
- HMI Probation suspended all face to face inspection activity from 23 March 2020 in recognition of social distancing guidance and the significant pressures youth justice services are under
- HMI Prisons has developed a [new approach](#) to visiting prisons and other places of detention during the coronavirus pandemic which involves short scrutiny visits over one day involving two or three inspectors. Visits will be clustered according to themes, including YOIs, and a summary of findings will be published around two weeks after the visits.

## Sources for youth justice updates

The YJB will endeavour to update partners to the best of our ability, however, you may find it useful to access the following sources for information:

- Please sign up for the YJB's fortnightly [Youth Justice Bulletin](#)
- HMPPS [publishes new advice](#) when it is available and regularly update a [Q&A for friends and families of prisoners](#)
- HMCTS continues to [publish new advice](#) when it is available as well as [weekly operational summary service](#) on all courts and tribunals

In addition:

- The Ministry of Justice is providing a regular update on the latest COVID-19 guidance and updates from central government for stakeholders
- The Youth Custody Service is providing a fortnightly newsletter for Directors of Children's Services and Heads of Youth Offending Teams

## Opportunities to engage

We (the YJB) convene five stakeholder fora which usually meet quarterly. During the COVID-19 pandemic we have been working hard to increase the regularity of these meetings in line with urgency of the situation and stakeholder need.

**Youth Ambassadors Network:** the network offers meaningful opportunities for youth participation including informing policy and creating change. Through this group we aim to hear more voices of children and young people in the system. This group also helps children and young adults to develop skills, share expertise and knowledge. To do this we welcome children and young people who are experts in youth justice through their experiences to become Ambassadors.

**Youth Advisory Network:** In addition to working with children and young adults, we work closely with organisations who represent and support youth participation across England and Wales.

**Voluntary and Community Sector Forum:** open to VCS organisations, this forum has more than 30 members. This group convenes to test current views and emerging thinking. It also identifies and develops joint-working opportunities and effective practice to support the sector, highlighting national and regional emerging youth justice issues.

**External Stakeholder Liaison Group:** comprises central and local government representatives alongside youth justice partners. The group collaborates to gain insight from one another, discuss

current issues, progress the effectiveness of the youth justice system and to provide a forum for stakeholders to highlight national strategic youth justice issues.

**Academic Liaison Network:** more than 50 academics with a specialism in youth justice form the network, with seven members acting as the steering group to help set direction. The panel exists to share and promote research and evidence around youth justice. It brings together a range of valuable external viewpoints and fresh perspectives which help shape the direction and future thinking of the YJB and the sector.

To join a forum or find out more please contact [nicola.kefford@yjb.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.kefford@yjb.gov.uk)

## General guidance

- The Business Support campaign for Covid-19: <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>
- Guidance on protecting vulnerable people from Covid-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>
- Home isolation / 'stay at home' guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>
- Guidance on social distancing: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>