

# briefing

JUNE 1998

## Misspent Youth '98 The Challenge for Youth Justice

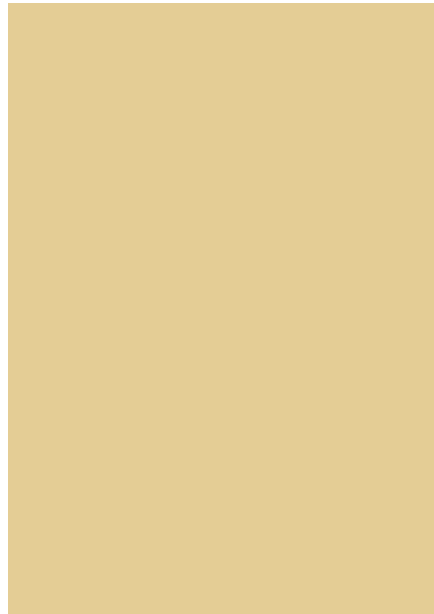
**Misspent Youth, published in 1996, identified a number of problems with the system for dealing with young offenders...**

- prosecution through the courts is slow
- not enough is done to address offending behaviour
- the agencies involved often work in an unco-ordinated way
- little is done to prevent young people from offending in the first place

**...and the Government's Crime and Disorder Bill means that agencies will have to make substantial changes to address these issues.**

**Audits of local criminal justice services reveal that much has yet to be done if these changes are to take place on time...**

- on average, a case takes four and a half months from arrest to sentence – over two months before it even reaches court
- only 2 per cent of offenders are given 'caution plus' programmes, which will shortly be introduced everywhere as 'warnings'
- on average, only 30 per cent of youth justice workers' time is spent addressing offending behaviour
- information systems are often inadequate and do not facilitate data exchange between agencies



- one-third of supervision plans fail to address the educational needs of offenders.

**...but there is wide variation.**

- performance is not related to the level of resources and there are examples of good practice
- fast-tracking for the most persistent can speed up the process for all offenders and frees up staff to address offending behaviour
- effective bail support programmes can reduce remands to custody
- early intervention can be helpful for first offenders

- good 'caution plus' programmes by multi-agency teams can reduce re-offending and save over £20 million

**The best way to reduce crime by young people is to prevent them from offending in the first place through co-ordinated strategies.**

- support for schools and pupils at risk can reduce problems and increase educational achievements
- joint work between social services, schools and police can reduce disruption and help young people in local areas
- some local multi-agency strategies are being developed and evaluated in the UK

**For the Crime and Disorder Bill to be successful, a number of challenges must be met.**

- good-quality systems should be established to allow sharing of information
- agencies dealing with young people, such as schools, should review how well they serve those at risk to prevent them becoming offenders
- authorities have an opportunity to review how they allocate resources for best effect



**AUDIT  
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Promoting the best use of public money

## The *Misspent Youth* report

1. In *Misspent Youth*, the Audit Commission identified a number of problems with the system for dealing with young offenders:

- delays in prosecuting young offenders through the courts;
- resources being spent on processing rather than on addressing offending behaviour;
- a lack of co-ordination between agencies in the criminal justice system; and
- insufficient emphasis on preventing young people from offending at an earlier stage.

2. The new government has initiated changes that address many of these issues, including the introduction of new 'warnings' for early offenders and youth offending teams (YOTs) in all areas, to begin in 1999. The Commission has been monitoring the youth justice system, looking at the ways in which local agencies in England and Wales are working together to address youth offending. The results indicate that, in some areas, agencies have much to do before the Crime and Disorder Bill is implemented in

1999/2000. They establish a benchmark against which further audits in 1998 and 1999 will assess progress.

3. Most local authorities found data-collection a very difficult task, as computer systems were rare and paper recording systems were slow to provide the required information. Good-quality information systems are needed in all areas before the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Bill.

## Speeding up the process

4. The average delay between arrest and sentence in the youth court was 131 days, and generally took longer in London boroughs than in other types of authority [EXHIBIT 1]. Slightly more than half this time elapsed before the first court appearance, so the agencies responsible for bringing cases to court (the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and others) need to work out together how to reduce this delay. The average number of appearances per case in the youth court varied from fewer than two to more than six. If all courts took an average of three appearances before sentence (achieved or bettered by the best 25 per cent), instead of 3.6 (the average), the number of court appearances in England and Wales could be reduced by 71,021, saving £12 million. Special schemes in some areas have reduced the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young

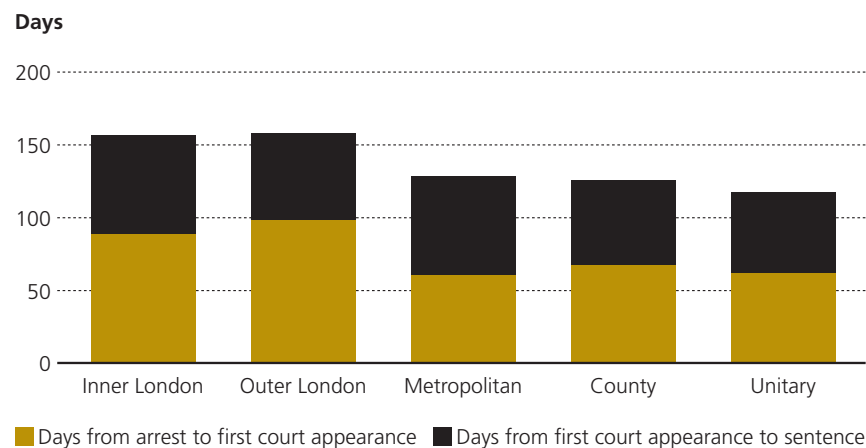
offenders to an average of 59 days and increased, by a factor of three, the number dealt with on a first appearance. One of these schemes identified several ways to reduce delays:

- an inter-agency group meets regularly to review progress and discuss issues;
- a specialist team of court clerks manages particular cases;
- fixed days in court are set to follow these cases to completion; and
- time targets are set for persistent offenders and others.

EXHIBIT 1

### Days from arrest to sentence for different types of authority

Cases generally took longer in London.



Source: Audit data returns, based on a sample of 50 cases in each local authority area

## Addressing offending behaviour

5. 'Caution plus' programmes, such as those carried out by the Northamptonshire Diversion Unit, address the offending behaviour of young people who have been caught once or twice before and who admit their guilt, and avoid the need to go through a court process. However, only 2 per cent of young offenders were given 'caution plus' programmes in 1996 [EXHIBIT 2]. If those first- and second-time offenders who were given a conditional discharge, an absolute discharge, a fine or an attendance centre order had been given 'caution plus' programmes instead, £23 million could have been released by the courts and other agencies. In addition, something would have been done

to address the offending behaviour more effectively. 'Warnings', introduced in the Crime and Disorder Bill, are similarly aimed at young people who have offended only once or twice and require similar action to address offending. Youth justice services in areas without such schemes will need to develop them rapidly in order to manage young people who are given 'warnings' when the new arrangements are in operation. These initiatives should be started as soon as possible, as they take time to establish.

6. In contrast to the effort that goes into the court process, only 30 per cent of staff time was spent, on average, on addressing

offending behaviour. (Such activities include work with those on supervision orders, bail support, 'caution plus', visits to custody and work with people on licence). In many authorities it was less than 20 per cent. Staff in authorities with more resources do not necessarily spend more time on addressing offending behaviour [EXHIBIT 3, overleaf]. All authorities, especially those spending the lowest percentage of time with offenders, should review their priorities to divert staff resources to address offending behaviour. Speeding up the criminal justice process frees up staff to spend more time with offenders.

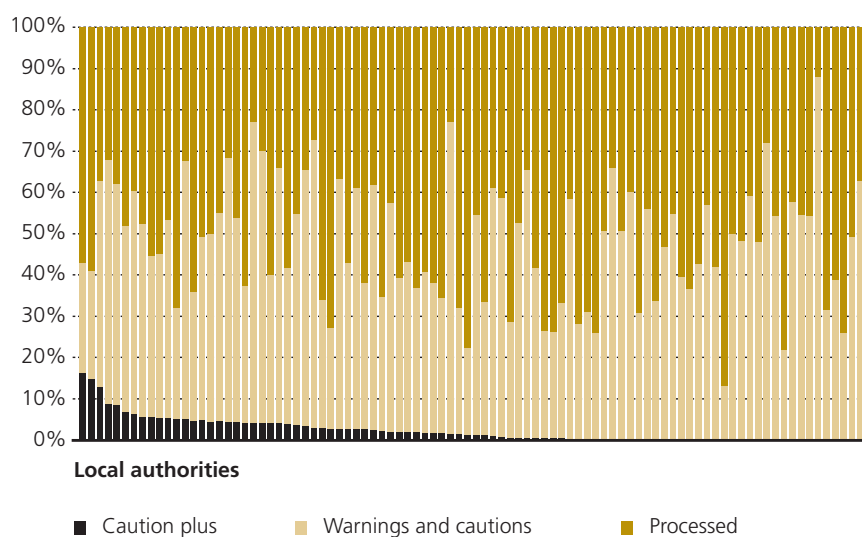
7. The beginning of a supervision order is an important time for a young offender to learn to obey authority and to understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. National standards require the first interview with a young person on supervision to be carried out within five working days of the court order being made. However, on average, just over half of first interviews were carried out within this time. This finding is worrying, as it implies that many young offenders are not being given a clear message by those in authority that their behaviour needs to change. Youth justice managers should monitor the time it takes to start supervision orders and find out why it is taking too long in some cases.

### EXHIBIT 2

#### The use of 'caution plus'

Only 2 per cent of young offenders were given 'caution plus' programmes.

#### Percentage of cases



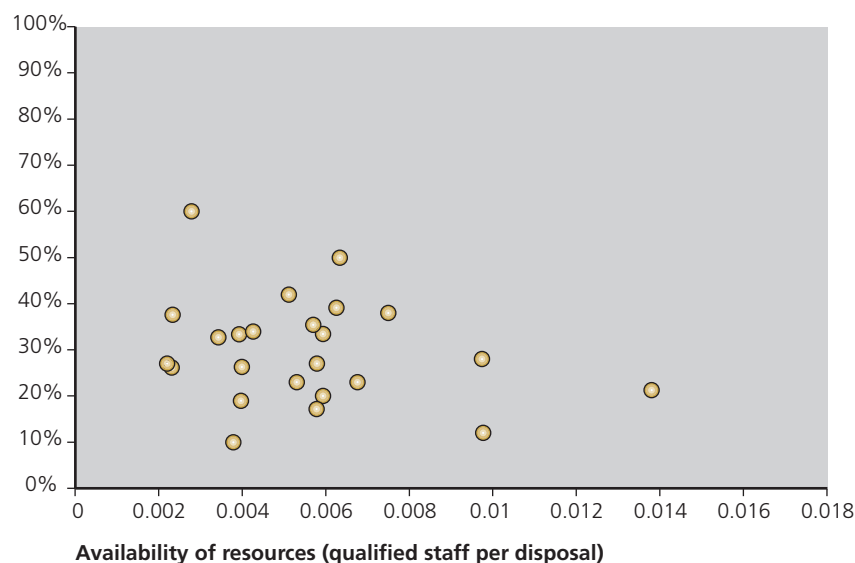
Source: Audit data returns, based on all arrests of young people in 1996 (excluding NFAs)

EXHIBIT 3

**The relationship between resources available and time spent on offending behaviour**

Staff in authorities with more resources do not necessarily spend more time on addressing offending behaviour.

Percentage of YJS time spent addressing offending behaviour



Source: Audit data returns

# Involving education

8. Most young people on supervision orders have serious educational or employment difficulties and more than half are regularly missing from school. Supervision plans should ensure that school-age offenders receive education. Two-thirds include a strategy to achieve this, but the

range of performance is very wide - in some authorities all of the plans included education but in others none did [EXHIBIT 4]. Pre-sentence reports (PSRs), which are prepared for courts, also varied widely in their education content. Links with education services are particularly important for younger

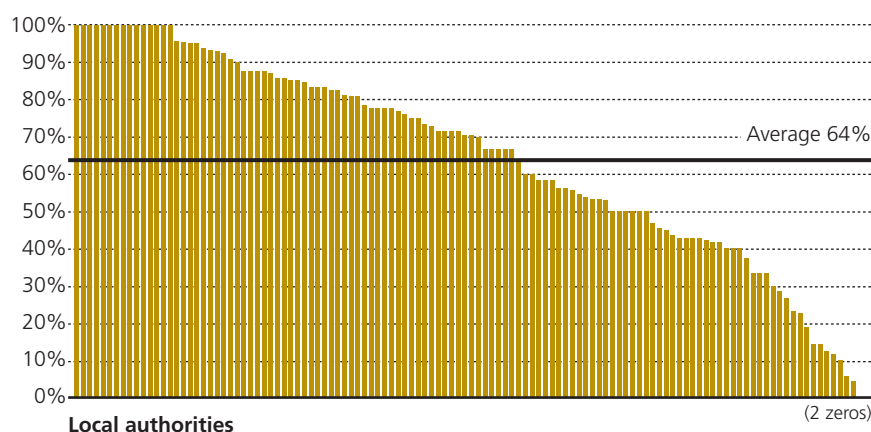
children, as there may be some opportunity to deal with their problems before it is too late. Youth justice teams should start to communicate and co-ordinate more effectively with education services and other agencies, ready for the new YOTs, before the legislation is implemented.

EXHIBIT 4

**Percentage of supervision plans for school-age offenders that included a strategy to ensure education**

In some authorities all of the plans included education but in others none did.

Percentage of supervision plans



# Introducing effective arrangements

9. But there are many examples of effective work with young offenders. Good bail support programmes can help to reduce re-offending at a time of high risk and can encourage courts to grant bail as an alternative to costly remands, thus saving money. They should be provided in all areas. Early intervention with some first-offenders can also reduce re-offending. Information on

re-offending should be used by court users' groups to review their practice and to examine the relative performance of local services. 'Caution plus' programmes that are run by authorities with integrated youth justice and probation teams appear to reduce the frequency and seriousness of re-offending more effectively than those in other authorities [EXHIBIT 5]. This finding

provides encouraging evidence that joint teams may provide more effective programmes to reduce offending. When the new legislation is implemented, all youth offending teams will need to include staff from probation, social services, education, police and health services. They will need to be managed jointly – so work to establish these teams should begin now.

# Monitoring your performance

10. Local criminal justice services for young offenders were given a score between zero and three, according to their efficiency on the following indicators:

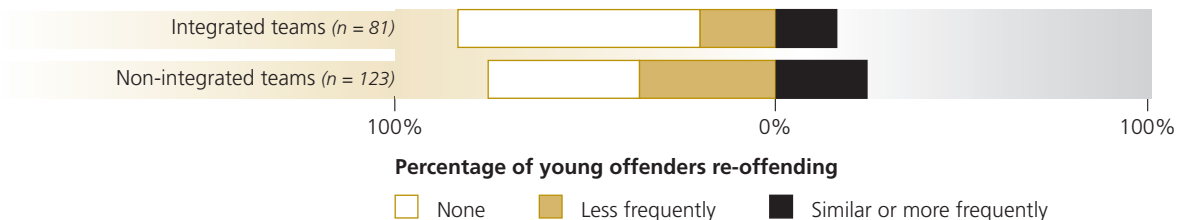
- time from arrest to sentence;
- use of multi-agency panels;
- mean number of court appearances;
- percentage of PSRs presented to the court within 15 days;
- use of 'caution plus';
- percentage of youth justice workers' time spent addressing offending behaviour;
- percentage of first interviews for supervision orders in five working days;
- percentage of supervision plans drawn up in ten working days;
- percentage of PSRs with education input;
- percentage of supervision plans with an education strategy; and
- percentage of PSRs where the court sentenced in line with its recommendation.

Further details on the individual indicators are provided in *Misspent Youth – Update 1998*.

EXHIBIT 5

## Frequency of re-offending after 'caution plus' programmes provided by integrated and non-integrated teams

Programmes run by authorities with integrated youth justice and probation teams appear to reduce the frequency of re-offending.

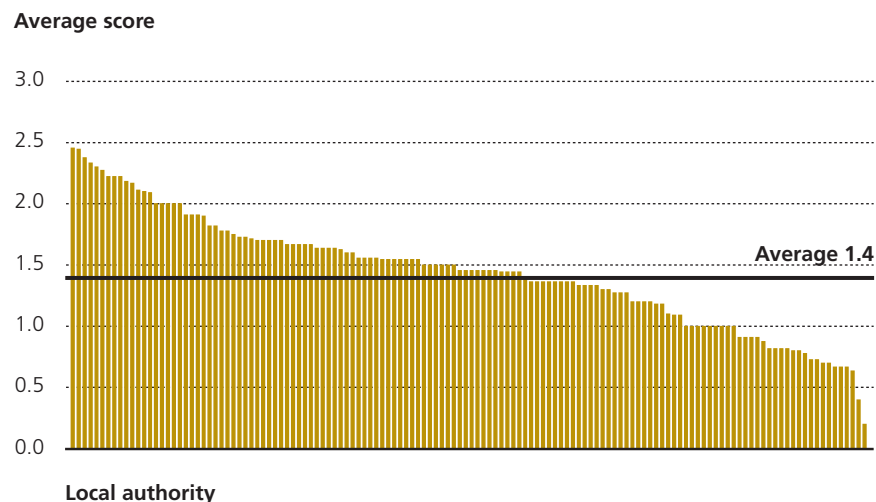


Source: Audit data returns, all young offender disposals from a two-month period

## EXHIBIT 6

**The combined efficiency of local criminal justice services on eleven indicators**

A few authorities scored more than two, but some scored less than one.



Source: Audit data returns

**11.** Authorities in the ‘best’ quartile for each indicator were given a score of three and those in the ‘worst’ quartile were given a score of zero. The score averaged across all these measures indicates an authority’s overall efficiency in processing the cases of young offenders, addressing offending behaviour and inter-agency communication. Some measures

depend on the actions of local courts and other agencies as well as the youth justice service. The maximum possible overall score is three and the minimum is zero. A few authorities scored more than two, indicating a consistently good performance on most indicators, but some scored less than one [EXHIBIT 6].

**12.** There was no consistent relationship between the overall authority performance and the resources available for youth justice. Many authorities that are relatively well resourced are performing poorly overall, and vice versa. Authorities should check their relative position and take action accordingly.

## Preventing offending in the first place

**13.** Improving the effectiveness of the system dealing with young offenders is important, but only 3 per cent of offences lead to a conviction or caution. So the way to reduce significantly the overall level of youth crime must be to stop young people from offending in the first place, by targeting those who are at risk but have not yet begun to offend. Effective crime prevention activities can support the efforts of criminal justice agencies. The validity of this approach is further reinforced by the strong consensus on the main factors that increase the risk

that young people will start offending [EXHIBIT 7].

**14.** A co-ordinated approach to crime prevention requires action at three key levels:

- local agencies need to work together to identify the major risks and develop co-ordinated strategies to address them;
- local services that encounter young people at risk, such as schools and social services, need to act together to promote stable environments and socially responsible behaviour; and

- the Government needs to take every opportunity to encourage departments to work together, to contribute to an overall strategy.

Policies can be set from the top, with clear objectives – but with flexibility in how to achieve them.

**15.** Multi-agency initiatives in this country and elsewhere have developed models from which others may learn. For example, the ‘Communities that Care’ (CTC) programme in the USA, which is based on extensive research, targets areas of high risk and

## EXHIBIT 7

**The cycle of anti-social behaviour**

There is a strong consensus on the main factors that increase the risk that young people will start offending.



Source: Audit Commission

works with local community groups and services to help them to tackle their problems in a focused manner. This programme is now being piloted in Britain in three areas. One Danish initiative brings together social services, schools and police (SSP) in local areas to address the problems of young people at risk. It has led to joint schemes in areas where trouble is common, which meets the needs of young people and helps to lead them into positive activities.

**16.** Helping young people who have problems in school can be one of the most cost-effective approaches to preventing offending. Special programmes in the USA have demonstrated that providing supplementary education for older teenagers from very deprived backgrounds can help them to gain qualifications and jobs, and offend less. Joint

work by social services and the police in a school in Denmark has also proved effective in reducing disruption and offending.

**17.** Partnerships between agencies and information sharing are essential. Local communities also need to be involved. Much of this work can be taken forward by local agencies acting together, without the need for legislative change. Pilot schemes should be set up, targeting those at greatest risk, to help with the difficulties that some children have in their families, schools and peer groups. But other changes would be greatly facilitated by the leadership of central government in areas such as the co-ordination of policies - for example, the initiative on social exclusion - across departments where they may have an impact on youth crime.

**18.** The Audit Commission is developing further work in this area. It is discussing performance indicators with both central and local government for agencies involved in the prevention of youth crime. Indicators could be developed for a wide range of bodies, including police forces, social services, schools and education departments, probation services, young offender institutions and the courts. Performance indicators for schools, for example, could be extended to demonstrate how well they serve those who are less able to achieve academically. The Commission is currently engaged in a study of community safety, looking at the readiness of local authorities and police to implement the Crime and Disorder Bill. A report on the first phase of this work is due to be published in the autumn of 1998.

# Actions for local authorities, with others

Good-quality information systems need to be established in all areas before the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Bill.

## Speeding up the process

- 1 The agencies responsible for bringing cases to court (the police, CPS and others) need to work out together how they can reduce the time needed.
- 2 Youth court users' groups should be established in all areas. Where there is a higher-than-average number of court appearances, these groups should consider ways in which they can be reduced.

## Addressing offending behaviour

- 3 Youth justice services in all areas without multi-agency 'caution plus' schemes will have to develop them rapidly in order to manage young people who are given 'warnings' when the new arrangements are in operation.
- 4 All youth justice services, especially those with the lowest proportion of time spent with offenders, should review their priorities to enable staff to spend more time dealing with offending behaviour.
- 5 All youth justice managers should monitor the time it takes to start supervision orders and find out why it is taking too long in some cases.

## Involving education

- 6 Supervision plans should contain a strategy for ensuring that school-age offenders receive education.
- 7 Youth justice teams should start to communicate and co-ordinate more effectively with education services and other agencies, ready for the new YOTs, before legislation is implemented.

## Introducing effective arrangements

- 8 Bail support schemes should be provided in all areas, and their effectiveness should be monitored regularly.
- 9 Information on re-offending should be used by local youth court users' groups to review their practice and to examine the relative performance of local services.

## Preventing offending in the first place

- 10 To prevent and reduce youth crime, multi-agency strategies for community safety, including programmes to prevent young people from getting involved in offending, need to be established. Pilot schemes should be set up, targeting those at greatest risk, to help with the difficulties that some children have in their families, schools and peer groups.

If you want to know more: the update, **Misspent Youth '98**, looks at all these issues in more detail and includes background information, case studies and specific guidance.

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