

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 04/12

Date: May 2012

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: Provide a briefing and update on the triage programme following a request from the committee.

Integrated Prevention Service -Triage Programme

Background

The Medway Youth Offending Team, Strategic Board, had discussed ways of reducing first time entrants into the criminal justice system. Shelley Green, who represents the Youth Justice Board at the meeting, suggested that the board should contact a neighbouring authority that was operating a 'Triage' programme. The London Borough of Lewisham was identified as a local authority with a successful Triage programme and they were invited to the December 2009 YOT Board meeting to present their experiences on delivering a Triage programme to young people.

Subsequently, visits by Board members were organised to Lewisham to see Triage in operation and discuss the merits with colleagues from their Police and Youth Offending Teams.

Triage ensures that all Juveniles (10-17) that come into contact with the Police and are appropriate for :

- a restorative justice outcome,
- a reprimand
- a final warning,

receive an assessment by Youth Justice Prevention workers to keep young people "on the path to Success" and appropriate diversion away from Criminal activities.

The advantages of Triage were identified as:

- Reducing first time entrants into the Youth Justice System
- Long term reductions in Youth Offending
- Serious offenders are identified
- Less time spent in custody by young people

Medway Youth Diversion Scheme (Triage)

Medway Triage programme began in August 2011. Additional funding of £57,000 was secured from the Department of Health for a three-year period to pilot a pathfinder bid to embed a health element to the new diversion scheme.

A full time nurse is to be recruited in May 2012 to screen young people for health vulnerabilities.

The Triage Programme is the responsibility of the Integrated Prevention Manager, who is supervised, jointly, by the YOT Manager and the Youth Service Team Leader.

Members of staff from the Medway Youth Diversion Scheme work with Police in the Medway Police Station Custody suite to assess all young people (10-17 years) as to their suitability for a diversionary intervention providing it is appropriate for a restorative justice, reprimand or final warning outcome.

Pre Triage

Youths arrested but not placed into the diversion system, as they are not meeting the criteria.

Triage

This ensures that low-level criminal behaviour is responded to via an appropriate diversion away from the criminal activity and out of the Criminal justice system. After a Triage assessment there are 4 potential outcomes. Either:

- No further action required
- Additional education is needed so referred to complete a programme.
- Single agency support. Appropriate referral completed.
- Multi agency support. A team around the child needed via a full Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

The day-to-day operation of Triage is scrutinised by the Community Safety Unit Inspector, the Custody Inspector and the YOT Manager. Triage governance and accountability is via the YOT Management Board and the Health and Wellbeing Boards within Medway.

Performance

Since the implementation of Triage in August 2011, 168 young people, 73% male and 27% female, have gone through the Medway Youth Diversion Service (Triage). The reoffending rate is 3% for these young people.

The Triage programme has reduced the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system in Medway by almost 30% with 200 young people anticipated to enter the criminal justice system against a target figure of 280.

Many of these young people have a range of risk factors affecting their lives from issues of safeguarding, to behavioural, social, developmental, physical, and mental health concerns and therefore meeting the needs of these young people is more important than having them enter the youth justice system.

Challenges

The implementation of Triage provides a cultural change and challenge for the Police whereby young people who were previously caught for offences would have gone straight into the criminal justice system are now offered a diversionary intervention that does not criminalise the young person. This does not support the Police 'sanction and detection' rates, which was a previous measure of Police effectiveness.

There is also a need to build public confidence in this process which will be generated by continued low reoffending rates of young people offered a diversionary intervention.

The range of diversionary activities available in Medway needs to be expanded as do the number of key workers available to provide support to these young people.

The success of Youth Offending Teams across the country means that more and more of the work is involved with young people who are entrenched in their ways and are persistent and high-risk offenders.

There are implications for Youth Offending Teams and local authorities in the future, as remand and custody costs will be delegated to Councils to cover the financial burden of their young people's accommodation costs within the secure estate. Early intervention and diversion away from offending behaviour will be vital and increase local authorities motivation to ensure that their young people are kept out of the youth justice system and on the 'path to success'.

The sustainability of Triage beyond the three-year additional funding period will be dependent on Medway Youth Justice priorities in 2013 –14 and the effectiveness of Triage in continuing to reduce first time entrants into the criminal Justice system.

Also the appointment of Police Crime Commissioners in November 2012 will challenge the way the YJB prevention grant is allocated in 2013-14 and at present this grant funds the Triage key worker posts.

Triage will be at risk if the Police Crime Commissioner's do not support and prioritise youth justice prevention work.

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