

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

17 JULY 2019

RESPONSES TO QUESTION ON REPORT - YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2019/20

1. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND ADULT CARE FROM COUNCILLOR WILLIAM HOUNGBO

A vast number of young people committing crimes are also victims; since they are groomed by criminal networks. In terms of reducing the number of those youth offenders receiving a custodial sentence, how can we measure the success of the criminal justice system in delivering a good balance between preventive measures and punitive measures?

RESPONSE

There are many factors that can be measured in determining the success of the criminal justice system. For Southwark Youth Offending Service (YOS), reducing first time entrants, reducing use of custody and reducing reoffending are key parts of this. YOS have many programmes in place to try and ensure that only young people who commit or continue to commit serious crimes receive custodial sentences.

It is true that young people can often be groomed by criminal networks. Southwark YOS works in collaboration with local police and the National Referral Mechanism (a national agency tasked with assessing criminal network cases) to determine that where young people are being exploited by adults, these young people are not charged with any criminal offences resulting from actions they have taken as a result of being exploited.

As part of our approach, Southwark YOS uses community sentences which include a range of preventative and punitive elements and benefit to the community. Some examples of this include a mobile painting team that redecorates community buildings, a carpentry workshop based on a community farm in Bermondsey and a bicycle repair workshop in Camberwell that mends local people's bicycles for low cost.

Southwark YOS ensures these projects teach young people new skills which will be of use to them in their future career choices. It is encouraging that many young people who have been involved find it to be a useful learning experience, and several have obtained volunteering or paid employment opportunities as a result.

Southwark YOS also provides a range of group work programmes, including addressing substance misuse, non-violent conflict resolution and assertiveness, developing skills in problem solving, staying safe in the community without carrying weapons, getting prepared for employment and other skills based input and developing alternatives to shoplifting.

These programmes are offered both to young people made subject to court orders but also to young people who have yet to come into conflict with the law. For example, the YOS currently carries out a preventing knife carrying/staying safe programme in Southwark secondary schools on a termly basis.