

Version 2 - by David Thrussell on 9 May 2017

1. Introduction

Children and young people at risk of offending or within the youth justice system often have more unmet health and social care needs than other children. The 2013 Young Minds Report¹ states that 95% of imprisoned young offenders had a mental health disorder. In addition, 80% had between 1 and 5 vulnerabilities including mental health issues, behavioural issues and social problems.

It is therefore important that the needs of vulnerable children and young people (aged 10-17) at risk of offending are included in mainstream planning and commissioning. The Public Health Outcomes Framework states that a lack of focus in youth offending could result in greater unmet health needs, increased health inequalities and potentially an increase in offending and re-offending rates, including new entrants to the system. By incorporating vulnerable young offenders into mainstream commissioning this has the potential benefit of impacting on the young person's wider family in the short and long term. This is particularly true when the young person may already be a parent.

Leicester's Youth Offending Service (YOS) work with young people aged 10 to 17 years who are convicted of criminal offences. For those young people who are involved in the criminal justice system the majority do not re-offend following their conviction. The re-offending rate for Leicester is 39.2% which is slightly higher than the national average of 37.9%².

Young people known to the YOS may experience a range of risks associated with their offending behaviour which can include school absence, not being in formal education training or employment, negative peer influences, special educational needs and poor mental health and wellbeing. There is a disproportionate number of children in need, looked after children, young people at risk of sexual exploitation who are known to the YOS.

Demographic Summary

The YOS cohort ranges from ages 10 to 17 years with a small number of 18 year olds.

- 278 young people were supervised by Leicester City in 2015/16
- 84% (n=234) of young people supervised by Leicester City YOS in 2015/16 were male
- 72% of the YOS cohort were aged 15 and above in 2015/16 which was similar to the England average.
- White young people make up the majority of Leicester's youth offending population (approximately 60%).

¹ Young Minds report. Available at: http://www.youngminds.org.uk/assets/0000/9472/Barrow_Cadbury_Report.pdf

² Ministry of Justice

The level of need in the population

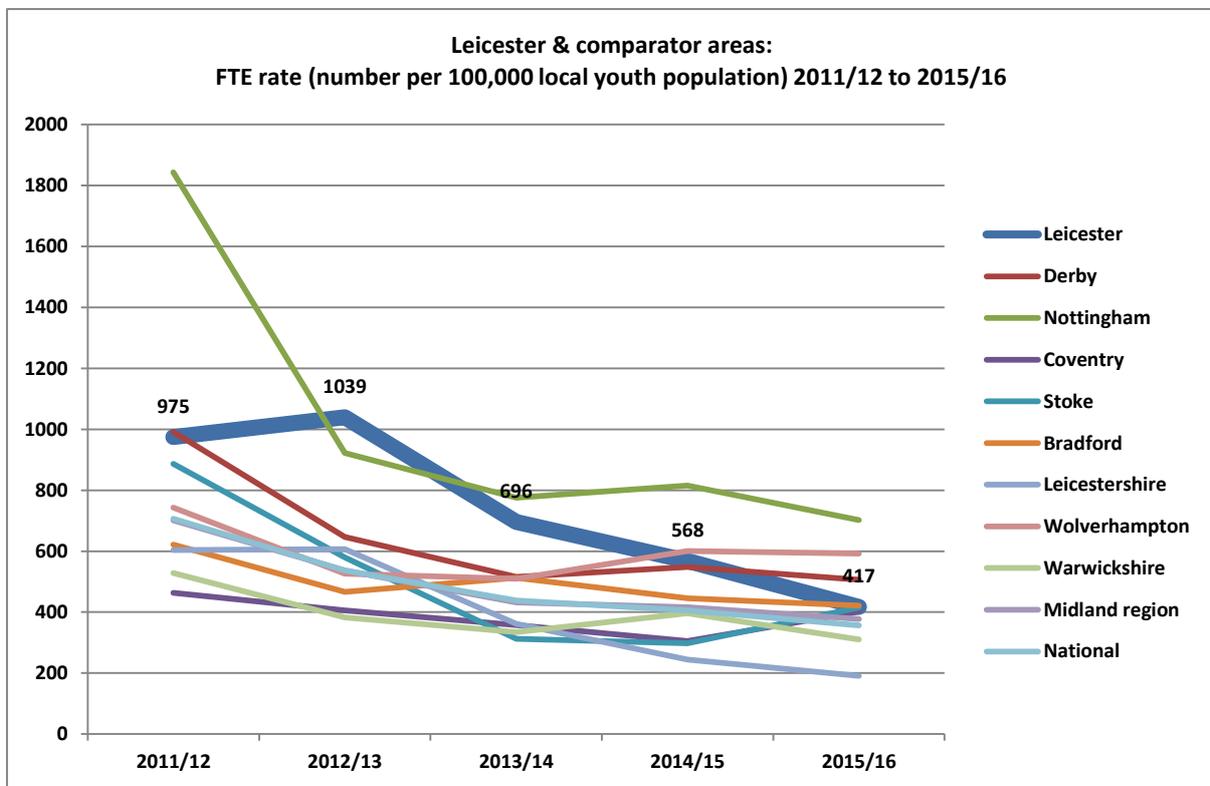
3.1 Youth Offenders in Leicester

3.1.1 First Time Entrants

Data on First Time Entrants to the youth justice system is reported by the Ministry of Justice, but it is also included in the Public Health Outcomes Framework.

The rate per 100,000 local youth of first time entrants (FTE) to the Youth Offending Service has been declining in Leicester since 2011/12. The overall reduction over the period for Leicester was 57%. The FTE rate in Leicester is similar to the Midland region and England.

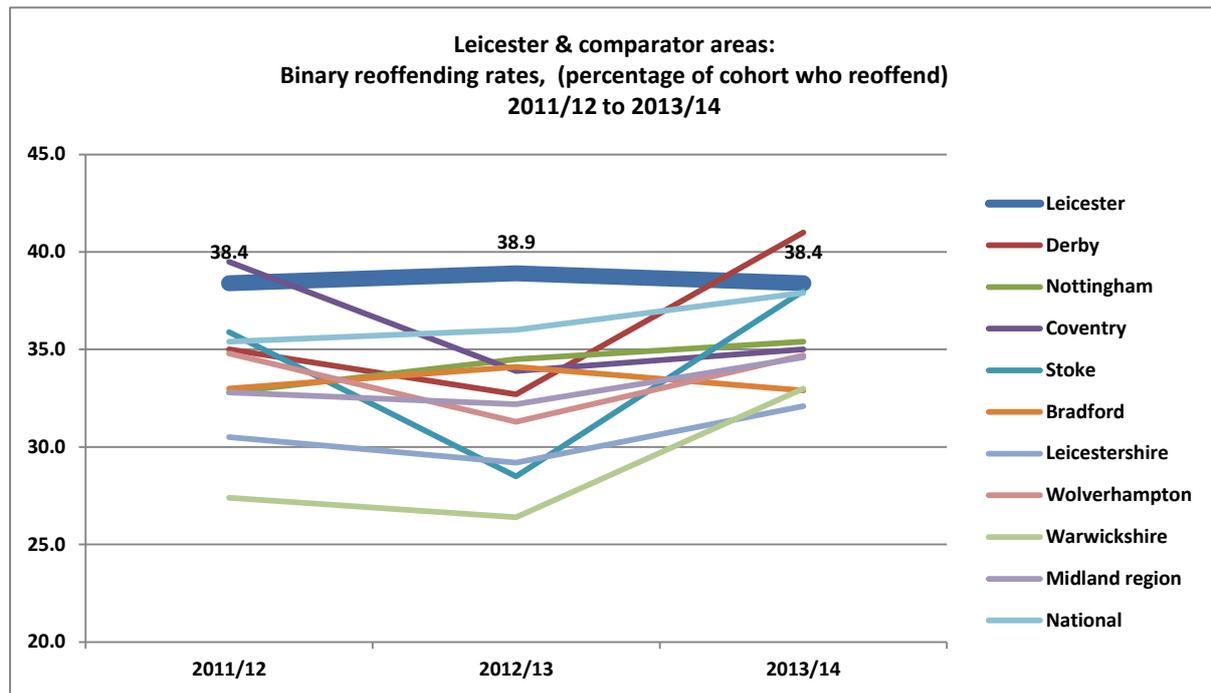
Figure 1: FTE Rate (per 100,000) between 2011/12 to 2015/16



3.1.2 Reoffending

The proportion of young offenders who reoffend has remained fairly constant between 2011/12 and 2013/14. This trend is similar to other areas, although Leicester has a higher proportion of reoffenders compared with peer comparators, the Midlands region and England.

Figure 2: Proportion of young offenders who reoffend: 2011/12 to 2013/14



Leicester’s rate has remained static over the period. Nationally reoffending rates have been increasing in recent years as the size of the cohort has reduced.

3.2 Education, Training and Employment

According to the ‘Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales’³ (The Review) many young offenders have poor records of school attendance and educational achievement. Learning and communication difficulties are also common in this population of young people. These children require a carefully considered and coordinated response from a number of partners, making the link between youth offending, children’s services, health and education all the more critical if the root causes of offending are to be addressed.

In Leicester, the proportion of young people in receipt of 25 hours or more of education, training or employment at the end of their court order is similar to peer comparators, the Midlands region and England.

3.3 Health Needs

Young people involved in the criminal justice system are disproportionately likely to experience poor health and wellbeing outcomes. They are more likely to have more unmet health and social needs compared to other children and are at a greater risk of social exclusion.

³ Published in December 2016. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577103/youth-justice-review-final-report.pdf

According to the 'Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales'⁴ approximately one third of young offenders across England and Wales have a diagnosed mental health disorder. Health services therefore play a vital role in preventing youth offending. For children who offend and have a mental disorder or behavioural or learning difficulties, many times these conditions have gone undiagnosed. These problems then can be at the root of a child's offending, and frequently are a barrier to engagement or progress in education. Tackling these problems through multi-agency working as quickly as possible is therefore essential.

The Review also found that many young offenders come from very dysfunctional families where drug and alcohol misuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and offending are common. As has been discussed in other chapters of this JSNA, the behaviours learned and experienced at home and from an early age are heavy influences on a child's future trajectory.

As a consequence of the health needs for young offenders, all young people known to Leicester's Youth Offending Service (YOS) are subject to a generic screening assessment tool (ASSET Plus) which addresses a range of known risk factors including emotional health and wellbeing.

The recent Full Joint Inspection (FJI) by HM Inspectorate of Probation and the Inspection of Youth Offending Work found there was room for improvement by the YOS regarding the health of young offenders. The FJI particularly found there should be better identification and management of young offenders' physical health, sexual health and speech, language and communication needs.

The Leicester Youth Offending Management Board has accelerated this priority and is currently addressing these gaps and improving the health of local young offenders. Work is ongoing between relevant service commissioners to ensure the specific needs of this sub-population are fully considered and integrated into service planning and provision.

As this work has recently begun, there is no health data currently available on their overall health and well-being.

Current services in relation to need

Young offenders have access to all services open to children and young people of the same age. However, young offenders may have special needs or may not be able to easily access the same services. Consideration by commissioners is needed during planning and commissioning to ensure these specific needs are addressed including services for young people in secure detention returning to the community.

4.1 Youth Offending Service

The YOS provides services for young people aged 10-17 years who have offended and are sentenced by the Youth or Crown Court, to be supervised under a range of Youth Justice Court Orders. The service is provided with due regard for the victims of these offences.

⁴ Published in December 2016. Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577103/youth-justice-review-final-report.pdf

The YOS also has a prevention service for those young people who are at risk of offending and entering the youth justice system for the first time.

The YOS assessment tool (ASSET Plus) draws on a range of information across agencies as well as in-depth screenings with service users and their families or carers. The YOS practitioners are required to assess likelihood of reoffending, risk of harm to self and others and safety and wellbeing (vulnerability) and ensure that the intervention planning stages reflect the risk domains identified.

4.2 Mental Health Services

Young offenders have access to the mental health services offered to non-offenders. Considering the large proportion of young offenders who have diagnosed mental health illnesses, further work is required in Leicester identify the emotional health and wellbeing needs of young people known to the YOS. Work is being undertaken to better understand the needs of this cohort as part of the current joint work with child and adolescent mental health commissioners and providers.

4.3 Early Help and Prevention

The majority of young people who commit offences for the first time are successfully diverted away from the criminal justice system through a range of non-court disposals including police cautions and restorative justice interventions.

A small number of first time entrants are identified as having more complex needs and these young people may be offered Early Help support through the YOS or other relevant services including targeted youth support and the education welfare service.

The number numbers of young people referred by the YOS for Early Help services remains low and there needs to be a better understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people who require additional support outside of the criminal justice system including first time entrants, young people completing their community sentences and young people completing custodial sentences.