

# **Newport Youth Justice Service (YJS) COVID-19 Recovery Plan**

**September 2020**

## **Introduction**

The devastation and impact of Covid-19 on individuals, families and communities cannot be underestimated. Short and long term effects of the pandemic will vary in ways and degrees for everyone. The speed of how services were expected to change and respond to the pandemic was unprecedented, providing no meaningful time to plan ahead, prepare for sustaining service delivery and provide effective communication to families and children.

From the very moment the pandemic was upon us, Newport Youth Justice (YJS), along with all teams in Children's Services, adjusted swiftly to maintain positive links with children and families known to them. Safeguarding Newport children and public protection remained at the top of our agenda, informing decision making every step of the way. Within Youth Justice, a contingency plan was rapidly drawn up with colleagues in wider Gwent Local Authority Youth Justice services, ensuring there was a Gwent regional shared response to the pandemic, specifically in relation to providing consistency where possible. Newport Youth Justice was also able to identify specific requirements to meet the needs of Newport's children and their families within their own service. Much of the contingency plan forms the body of this recovery plan.

The YJS workforce adapted at speed to having to work from home in line with local and national guidance, ultimately rethinking how the right support could continue to be available to the right individuals in the right way – given the restrictions. The service purposely avoided use of and challenged references to 'recovery', opting instead for the more positive narrative of opportunities and innovation. Newport corporate IT made almost immediate provisions to support the new working from home arrangements, and without their support and willingness to help services find solutions, we would have undoubtedly struggled to respond in the way we have.

The YJS team, as with all our colleagues have been faced with a change to their working environment, managing child care and other dependents care as we saw the normal supportive infrastructure around us all but shut down. Staff have been highly commended in Newport Children's Service for their commitment, energy and care of our children and families in the face of the pandemic, whilst managing their own personal challenges. Without this, the fears expressed by many for safeguarding, criminality and exploitation would be far greater realised.

## **Governance and Service Delivery**

Prior to the pandemic, Newport YJS was already undergoing a journey of transformation. A significant amount of change with the staff group, management structure and internal processes/pathways was underway. The service therefore took the opportunity to further build on the 'culture of change' with the pandemic upon us. A virtual Strategic Partnership Board meeting in June 2020 was fully briefed and updated on service delivery by Newport YJS, and the team received acknowledgement and thanks from Board members for the consistent work being

delivered in responding to the needs of children accessing the service throughout the pandemic. Successes and challenges experienced during Covid-19 were shared by all Board members, including discussion on how best to safeguard the children known to the YJS collectively.

The momentum of the refocussed Strategic Partnership Board was temporarily impacted by 2 things; a change to the chair of the Board following retirement of the previous chair, and then the arrival of Covid-19. With a new chair in place, and once the Covid-19 related initial shifts and priorities were addressed within the Local Authority, the Strategic Partnership Board was able to reconnect and regroup. With Covid-19 being a standard agenda for the Board, we have been able to now move forward with the wider agenda of meeting the needs of Newport Children strategically and continue to develop all areas of the service as appropriate. Development sessions for the Board members have been reinstated to assist members with the knowledge and understanding in all things Youth Justice.

The hugely improved integration of the YJS within Children's Services as a directorate has meant a greater presence and attendance at a number of forums including child exploitation meetings, and whole manager meetings. This provides a greater degree of transparency for the work of the YJS, ensuring the governance and delivery are as they should be.

Governance and service delivery has also been enhanced by regular national meetings with YJS/YOT Managers Cymru and support from the Youth Justice Board.

Newport Council has an agile working policy and all Children's Services teams have their own laptop. Newport YJS have been allocated smart phones and any necessary furniture and are fully equipped to continue service delivery from their home environments. Wellbeing and practical support is offered to the team via team meetings/wellbeing forums/supervision to ensure they can manage their working commitments around any increased family pressures. The YJS building was initially closed at the start of lockdown, and managers utilised this 'forced' opportunity to relocate to the Civic Centre alongside most of the other Children Services teams. This move was already part of the longer term plan for the service to enhance joint working and integrate YJS within Children's Services meaningfully. The pandemic inadvertently assisted in progressing this action far more swiftly than expected.

Due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic, all staff continue to work from home but have access to the Civic Centre if they need to. Some difficulties were anticipated as a result of this environmental change, however these did not occur in any measure. Staff report to be happy with home working as an alternative to office working, and significantly managers have not noted any drop in productivity that can be linked to this change.

## **COVID-19 Practice Response**

Undoubtedly Newport YJS usual practice had to change due to lockdown restrictions, social distancing and adhering to Welsh Government guidance and instruction on remaining safe. With no home visits initially allowed, staff have

needed to be creative in the way they made contact with children and their families. The use of texts, emails, face time, Whatsapp and Skype has been encouraged and will remain so for the period of the pandemic.

Practitioners are expected to contact children they are working with, and their families daily if necessary, but certainly regularly/weekly to ensure that they are aware of the support available to them, and that the usual services are continuing with YJS. Provision of any resources and literature, and signposting to access support is routinely provided to families and children to help them cope with the lockdown and restrictions.

All statutory Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS) interventions are fully complied with, whilst implementing full guidance from both Welsh and UK Governments on being safe and utilising the appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

Newport YJS acknowledges that families may have added pressures at home due to initial and ongoing disruptions to educational provisions. Teenagers usually free to go out are now expected to stay in the home environment more, creating additional pressures for them, their parents and families. The YJS proactively aims to provide families with resources to support them in these difficult times. A YJS practitioner has been an active contributor to a working group across Childrens Services and Education, pulling together all relevant Covid 19 literature for all age groups and disseminating it to families.

Initially daily, now weekly Covid 19 Senior Management Meetings are held to ensure teams are updated appropriately with advice and guidance, given the fast changing nature of the pandemic and how to manage it. All contacts with a child are recorded on ChildView (YJS case management system) as a contact entitled: COVID 19 contact.

There is now a robust and hugely improved management oversight for ChildView recordings for ALL cases regardless of intervention level. This approach will also support future audit purposes and includes;

Newport managers recording a contact entitled: *COVID19 Risk Management planning*.

This will include a record of:

- Risk levels
- Risk management plan.
- Communication and contact strategy for all professionals involved in the YJS contact/communication plans.
- Resources to be used with the child – content of contact sessions.
- Form of contact/communication with children/families and frequency.
- How the voice of the child and the parent/carer will be captured in discussions with case-holders.

- Communication method preferred by the family and not what is easier for the case holder (where possible.)

All cases/Covid recordings are audited monthly with clear records of dates and names of the auditor.

**This practice will remain post pandemic for quality assurance and audit purposes.**

## **Courts**

At the start of the pandemic, Youth Courts were suspended for 8 weeks across Gwent, except for remand cases and those held overnight in custody cases. These exceptions were seen in Newport Magistrates Court.

Prior to the lockdown being implemented, the YJS had a court rota in place which was not deemed ideal. Managers found the competing court demands versus case management work creating tensions and issues. As a direct response to Covid 19, Newport YJS assigned one Court Officer to manage and respond to the court requirements on a daily basis, and subsequently later identified a backup officer to cover absences. Primarily this decision was taken due to their considerable court experience, and living local to the Court. Duties include checking the court lists daily and attending Court as appropriate to provide consistency of communication and presence. This has been very successful during the pandemic, with improved relationships in the court arena, whilst providing a child focussed consistent approach for children finding themselves in court.

A clear benefit of the new arrangement has been the Court Officer developing her relationship with the Bench, and is now engaged in consistent dialogue and negotiation to ensure that diversion is considered at every stage, with out of court disposals prioritised to provide support to young people. The Bench has been able to more fully explore and understand trauma informed practice utilised by YJS, showing a keen interest in the experiences and developments of children that have attended court. This helps to break down barriers and reduce fear for children attending court and is an excellent example of child focussed practice.

Satisfactory social distancing measures have been put in place and the court officers have reported that they have felt safe within the Court arena.

Furthermore, if assessments can commence at court safely they will be, whilst the child and family are present. This will largely depend on triage questions and the identification of a suitable space to allow social distancing etc. A consistent review of the court lists enables YJS to consider if any additional staff members are required to attend court to start assessments and support the Court Officer to deal with any additional cases.

If Youth Courts or Magistrates Court move to virtual hearing the YJS is now confident it can engage via any means of communication method implemented.

**This new arrangement will be retained post pandemic.**

## **Secure Estate**

Parc YOI was initially placed in lockdown, with all visits cancelled. Contact and communication with other secure establishments was as required. Discussions held between all key partners to determine the best forms of communication as opposed to direct face to face were undertaken. This included consideration of all forms of technology available. It was agreed that any contact with children in the secure estate particularly during lockdown periods were to include;

- Safeguarding – any concerns expressed by the child?
- Welfare
- Family contact arrangement for the child during lockdown/coronavirus period
- Financial situation/money for calls to family etc.
- Advocacy
- Contact methods for the children for YJS staff and families
- Provide any info needed/check understanding of the pandemic situation

Newport had one child remanded to secure accommodation in June 2020 as a result of an organised police operation. He was immediately placed into self-isolation as per the official guidelines. However, after 2 weeks and a successful challenge from his solicitor he was released on court bail. The legal challenge was based on Mannings Law which indicated that remanding a child in a lockdown situation of isolation was contrary to their human rights.

No other child has been remanded to secure accommodation.

**All direct contact with children placed in the secure estate will resume post pandemic and when safe to do so.**

## **Resettlement and Transition**

A review of Newport YJS resettlement practice was already underway prior to the Covid 19 restrictions. It had been identified by managers that existing processes and practice were no longer responsive to the changing needs of Newport children. Positively, custody cases had reduced significantly in Newport and there was a renewed focus on identifying community based support frameworks, based on preventative rather than reactive principles.

Under Covid-19 daily welfare checks are in place for all children subject to intensive monitoring as part of the arrangements in place for 'priority groups' and 'risk management arrangements'. Resettlement support continues to be offered and is in place for children within these categories including those transitioning to adult services.

Due to the reduction of children in custody/secure estate, and educational establishments having been closed, there has not been much scope to develop our Resettlement Review Plan in practice. We have however, reviewed the role of our Resettlement Officer in line with the Youth Justice Blueprint and combined this with NEET (Not in Education Employment or Training) responsibilities which has been successful. The Resettlement/NEET officer has now been able to track potential children who fit these criteria and has been developing partnerships within the community to provide resettlement opportunities for children. This has meant the service was better prepared for when the education provision was re-established with a wide range of excellent links and partnerships in place.

**This new role will be maintained post pandemic to reflect the changing picture in Newport YJS and to be incorporated into the new resettlement/NEET plan.**

## **Assessments**

The start of the lockdown arrangements saw a shift from mostly face to face contact to increased interventions offered virtually across a range of communication platforms. Proportionate and initial assessments were commenced via telephone/WhatsApp/face time/at Court etc. Any outstanding information identified in the proportionate (basic) assessment is recorded in the Asset+ created, and then at review stage this must be followed up and included/amended etc. Reviews and case closure assets are as above, completed virtually.

The service has had some difficulties in meaningfully assessing children with additional needs virtually. Some children we know cope and respond better within a home setting and body language can be more accurately interpreted by professionals when there is direct contact. However, the team have quickly adapted to the use of MS Teams to continue their sessions virtually, and considering direct contact sessions where appropriate and safe to do so. There has been a mixed response to this shift in how we work from both children and staff. Some children prefer a virtual medium but staff also report that it can be difficult to engage the more difficult to reach children such as those with behavioural difficulties and language barriers.

**The service intends to fully restore direct contact with children wherever possible once restrictions have been eased.**

## **Priority Groups – Managing risks**

During the COVID 19 pandemic the service has proactively developed the use of virtual Risk Management Panels (RMP) which have worked very well and have been well attended. Joined up working with partners and appropriate information sharing has significantly improved, particularly how the service is managing issues of Safeguarding. There is now an identified Business Support officer responsible for the RMP organisation and administrative side, and to date the panel has had better attendance via MS Teams than in physical meetings previously. Virtual meetings are easier for people to attend, and information groups have been formed to keep everyone abreast of risk issues for any child.

These meetings now include as standard, high/very high cases and Child Exploitation (CE) cases.

**This has worked so well that the service will retain this practice post pandemic.**

## **Prevention/Out of Court Disposal Cases**

Non statutory preventative cases are often considered to be lower level/risk cases. This is not the view of Newport YJS, believing they should not be considered as such.

Since the Out of Court Disposal (O OCD) procedures were updated last year, a lot of cases have been reclassified; meaning cases that previously may have been deemed more concerning and receiving a higher level disposal are now classified at a lower level. Community Resolutions (CR) and preventative cases should not be mistaken for cases without concern. The risk level is determined via assessment authorisation, countersigning and management decisions.

With improved partnerships and pathways developed, the YJS is far more involved at the decision making stage. The team now have access to, and are supported to use the Social Services case management database (WCCIS) on a daily basis. This change in practice ensures practitioners capture any safeguarding concerns as early as possible, enhances joined up working with other teams and improves communication. The service has worked closely with the court to advocate and encourage a greater use of Bureau outcome on appropriate cases before them. This practice has hugely benefitted the YJS and court relationship

The service now also ensures the same decision making wording appears on the Police database (NICHE) and ChildView (YJS database) for consistency.

**This practice has significantly improved throughout the course of the pandemic and will be retained as good practice going forward.**

## **Exploitation Cases**

Cases with concerns for risk of exploitation may not be statutory cases, however they remain medium/high/very risk cases and should be regarded as such. Newport YJS now actively consider these cases via the Risk Management Panel (RMP) process.

Improved joined up working during the pandemic period has seen YJS now have a standard presence at the weekly Child Exploitation (CE) strategy meetings with other agencies. The purpose of these meetings is to complete a vulnerability tool for each child presented and agree a multi-agency action plan. This allows for close working and communication between teams, allowing professionals to share information to inform the risk assessment and action plan. The plan is then reviewed in 3 months'

time if required. The YJS Risk Management Panels consider the CE strategy meetings as an option for the RMP action plan where appropriate.

This change in practice has gathered momentum during the pandemic period, provided improved outcomes and greater identification of concerns across multiple agencies.

**This good practice will be retained post pandemic.**

## **Referral Order Panels & Bureaus**

Virtual Referral Order (RO) panels have been successfully established in response to Covid 19, using a variety of communication/conferencing methods, always ensuring that the voice of the child is captured.

Initially there was a short period of holding Bureaus over the phone, with the Police then visiting the home to issue Youth Cautions where necessary. This was quickly revisited as the YJS Team Manager did not like this practice, and then followed trials of various virtual media platforms to enable a proper meeting to be held. This included the use of WhatsApp and Webex initially. With Police and Local Authority not having access to the same media platforms, the service faced a challenge in how to progress with this panel in a meaningful way. However, with concerns raised by the YJS Team Manager, a positive solution was reached. Since overcoming this barrier, virtual Bureau panels has been successfully established, assisting the service in capturing the child's voice, sharing the child's plan and associated documents on screen making it easier for the young person and parent.

This process has also served as a quality assurance function, ensuring the family could understand the documents shared and confirm they had previously seen it. The children appear to engage more easily through this process, with checks made to see if they are happy with the panel. This new process has been deemed overwhelmingly successful, with no issues raised so far.

**The Referral Order Panel process is now being reviewed to replicate the same successes where possible.**

## **Victims and Restorative Justice**

The police officer based with the YJS continues to make contact with victims in similar ways to how contact with children is made as explained above. Victims are kept updated and the police officer communicates with YJS staff regularly on a case by case basis. Any meaningful ways of delivering restorative approaches with the victim is actively explored and promoted.

Creativity has been encouraged with the team to ensure restorative interventions are considered and delivered in the best way possible. This has included for example any outstanding reparation hours on cases were completed via the use of resources such as educational You Tube videos. A programme of work is agreed with the child

and staff, with follow up educational and reflective discussions to explore the issues raised.

Newport YJS team were very innovative during the pandemic, identifying a link with the NHS to create pamper bags for NHS staff, giving them much needed support. The Reparation Officer also identified a safe venue for some of our young people to prepare the pamper bags as part of their reparation hours.

The team also made links with the local community care homes for older people and the young people made friendship bands to distribute to them, writing a card with a message on to show they cared. This was an excellent way of responding to the pandemic, fulfil reparation hours and help members of the local community to feel appreciated and cared for.

These proactive and meaningful community ideas are still being developed. We are looking into securing an allotment and garden for young people to tend and grow their own plants and produce.

**This innovative and virtual ways of delivering reparation will be retained post pandemic.**

## **Staff Supervision and Support**

Whilst supervision sessions are scheduled to take place in the usual way, it is acknowledged that additional support may be needed as a result of the pandemic and new ways of working. Additional supervision and support sessions continue to be available if required. These have been delivered throughout the pandemic via MS Teams, proving to be very successful with minimal disruption.

Team meetings continue to also be delivered this way as the pandemic continues, involving the whole team. Guest speakers and visitors have been able to join these forums, ensuring the wide ranging agenda and core business issues are met.

As a direct response to Covid 19, the team has now introduced a Practice and Wellbeing Forum, as an additional layer of support and opportunity for sustaining team morale and connection. This will be facilitated by the team monthly, discussing any issues they would like, including work, how they are feeling, or just a coffee and chance to catch up with each other, in a way a normal office environment would offer.

**This practice will be retained throughout the period of the pandemic.**

## **Appropriate Adults**

This important role has been fully maintained throughout the pandemic, and this will remain unchanged going forward. A specific Gwent LA Covid-19 response was considered very quickly and jointly with Gwent Police, with the appropriate precautions put in place to safeguard both children and staff. Arrangements were

made in local police and custody areas to implement social distancing, handwashing and PPE was made available by both Police and Newport Local Authority.

Considerations agreed have included;

- Gwent Police to consider the need to take children into the custody unit
- Gwent Police to proactively seek family members and friends for AA role
- Appropriate Information sharing if anyone in custody suites has declared themselves to have Covid-19 symptoms/self-isolating.
- YJS staff to ask triage questions when AAs requested, with management oversight of this process.
- YJS staff to only enter custody unit if full PPE equipment is provided by Gwent Police and this must be worn at all times.
- No transporting of children at the end of any AA duties.

During this period of crisis with Covid-19, Newport YJS situation and responses will remain fluid, possibly changing without much notice. The team is expected to be 'office ready' and prepared for every eventuality, however safety will remain the paramount consideration. During the pandemic, the service proactively stepped away from a rota AA provision with neighbouring Local Authorities. Again, this was already an action for the service prior to the pandemic, acknowledging the service wanted to enhance consistency and child focussed approaches with Newport children. The pandemic has allowed us to progress this action, with Newport YJS now responsible for all AA duties involving Newport children where necessary and appropriate.

It is the intention of Newport Youth Justice Service to continue providing the best quality AA service it can within the confines of the Covid-19 restrictions.

## **Conclusion**

Newport YJS continues to create opportunities, where innovative ideas can be considered and trialled where possible. With safety remaining at the forefront in everything we do for the children, families and staff, we aim to maximise meaningful contacts and engagements with as many children as possible.

The service continues to work closely with its valued partners, promoting a truly multi-agency, holistic and child focussed service approach. A one team message has been embedded into the new culture as part of the transformation work already underway, and reinforced as we take care of each other throughout the pandemic.

Whilst it has been very much business as normal within the service and expectations of staff – it has been the delivery of these that has needed to alter in response to the pandemic. This has been requested as a 'Recovery' plan, however, Newport takes the view going forward, of opportunities and improvements to be made. Reviewing every level of the service to embed the YJB National Standards within its processes, has been a challenge however hugely beneficial. Arising out of the work being undertaken has been opportunities to refocus on specific areas and develop action plans. These include;

- Following up recommendations of a Newport YJS report evidencing clear links between school exclusions, criminality and risks of exploitation

- Developing a clear participation role to build on capturing the voice of the child in all the service does
- Steering Group membership of the innovative Levelling The Playing Field/BAME work
- Dedicated and improved joint working with children looked after by the Local Authority
- Safeguarding
- Promotion of Preventative interventions and engagement
- Improved understanding and utilisation of trauma informed practice

This plan will be reviewed as the pandemic changes, and we aim to ensure areas of improved practice and service delivery will become embedded into core business – and not just in response to Covid-19.

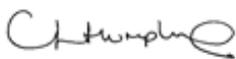
The service awaits a copy of a thematic Covid-19 impact inspection undertaken with a neighbouring Local Authority to consider and build in any lessons to be learnt going forward.

The revised service plan will be put together in the coming months, building on the pre Covid-19 self- assessment audit and new national standards.

Agency	Staffing Costs	Payments in kind	Other Delegated Funds	Total
Youth Justice Board	£307,526			£307,526
Local Authority	£575,288	£73,962		£649,250
Police	£51,510			£51,510
Police and Crime Commissioner	£37,448			£37,448
Probation	£5000	£22,410		£27,410
Health	£19000	£50,938		£69,938
Welsh Government	£12,000			£12,000
Other				
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,007,772</b>	<b>147,310</b>		<b>1,155,082</b>

Type of Contract	Service Manager	Team Manager	Practitioners (PT)	Practitioners (FT)	Administration	Sessional	Students/ trainees	Total
Permanent	1	1		15	4	0		21
Vacant				1				1
Seconded Children's Services								0
Seconded Probation			1					1
Seconded Police				1				1
Seconded Health (Substance misuse)				1				1
Seconded Health (Mental health)				1				1
Seconded Health (Speech/language)				1				1
Seconded Education								
Seconded Other (Parenting)								1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27</b>

**Sign off**



**Date 09/10/2020**

Chris Humphrey – Chair of Newport Strategic Partnership Board