

**North Yorkshire County Council  
Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
11 December 2017**

**Committee Member visit to Wetherby YOI on 31 October 2017**

**Purpose of Report**

To update the Committee on the visit that that Cllr Derek Bastiman and Cllr Tony Randerson undertook to HM YOI Wetherby on 31 October 2017, as part of the ongoing interest of the Committee in understanding what can be done to reduce reoffending rates amongst young offenders in the county.

**Background**

Julie Firth, Head of Prevention for Children and Families at the Council, attended the meeting of the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2017 to provide an overview of the work of the North Yorkshire Youth Justice Service and their Annual Plan. At the committee meeting, concerns had been raised about the relatively high reoffending rates amongst young offenders in the county and whether more could be done to reduce them.

The committee Chair felt that one way of better understanding the issue was to visit a local YOI, see what interventions are put in place for young people whilst in custody and speak to some young people from North Yorkshire in custody there. As such, arrangements were made for a visit.

Members will be aware that the Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a specific role as the County Crime and Disorder Committee, for the purposes of Part 3 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. It was in this capacity that the visit was undertaken.

**Visit**

Cllr Derek Bastiman and Cllr Tony Randerson attended the visit, accompanied by Lisa Atkinson of the NYCC Youth Justice Service and Daniel Harry the NYCC Scrutiny Team Leader. Lex Gray, Resettlement Officer at HM YOI Wetherby, provided an escorted tour of the prison and also made arrangements for an accompanied meeting with a young person from North Yorkshire who was in custody at the YOI.

**Discussions and observations**

The following is a bullet-pointed summary of the discussions and observations from the tour of the YOI and also the discussions with the young person from North Yorkshire.

- HM YOI is the main custody centre for young people from North Yorkshire. It is the largest in England and so has a wide catchment area.

- The numbers of young people entering custody have reduced over time as more investment has gone into prevention, early intervention and the use of diversionary disposals by the Police. As a result, Young people are typically serving longer sentences, ranging from 9 months to indeterminate.
- Kirklees Youth Justice Service was held up as an example of best practice, largely due to the enhanced level of resourcing that they have which has meant that they can develop and deliver tailored and individualised programmes of intervention.
- The age range for a young person in custody at HM YOI Wetherby is typically from 15 to 18 years.
- Often, a young person in custody will have lost one of their primary care givers, have a drug or alcohol problem, have left school early, and have been convicted of a serious violent offence.
- There is a dedicated facility for those young people who are classed as vulnerable but this is often over-subscribed.
- Over 30 hours of education is delivered each week in classrooms with 8 students. There are opportunities to gain both practical and academic qualifications.
- Sentence length can be a key factor in accessing the support and intervention in prison that can change behaviours. Longer sentences create more opportunities for work to be done.
- Maturity, personal confidence and self-awareness all have a key role to play in how effective rehabilitation interventions can be with young people in custody.
- There is a strong link between the local Youth Justice Service and the prison in terms of preparing for the arrival of a young person, ongoing assessment throughout their sentence and then in preparing for release.
- Offending behaviour, victim awareness and other courses are completed whilst in custody.
- There is access to mental health services, physical health services and drug and alcohol misuse services.
- The Army Cadets have been established in the prison, enabling young people to access the youth entry scheme that is available in the community. Some offences, however, such as drug dealing, can mean that they are not accepted by the military.

## **Recommendations**

That the committee:

1. Send a letter of thanks to the Governor of HM YOI Wetherby for allowing the visit to take place and to note the time and effort put in by Lex Gray and the prison officers to make the visit successful
2. Send a letter of thanks to young person who was interviewed
3. Invite Julie Firth to attend the meeting of the committee on 12 March 2018 to provide an update on the 'Youth Justice Strategic Plan', the implementation of the new model of practice and the impact this has had upon reoffending rates.

Daniel Harry  
 Scrutiny Team Leader  
 North Yorkshire County Council  
 22 November 2017.