



PCC spotlight: Young Adults (18-24) in contact with police and criminal justice services

PCC Spotlights

Through our First Generation Project, Revolving Doors Agency and the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) aim to show how Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) across the country can help to cut crime, end 'revolving door' offending, and improve responses to young adults and people with multiple needs who come into repeated contact with the police.

This is the first in a series of 'PCC spotlights', highlighting promising work that we have identified on key issues. We aim to share examples that other areas may wish to develop, and to inform the ongoing debate on the future of the PCC role.

Introduction: Improving responses for young adults

Young adults (18-24) are the most likely age group to come into contact with the police, both as victims and as offenders. Nationally, they represent just 10% of the population, but account for around:

- **one-third of those commencing a community sentence**
- **one-third of the probation service's caseload**
- **one-third of those sentenced to prison.ⁱ**

Young adults are the most likely age group 'grow out of crime' and desist when the right interventions are in place. However, too often they face a system that fails to take account of their varying levels of maturity and their often complex needs. They fall through gaps in support services as they transition between youth and adult systems, while criminal justice interventions aimed at adults often fail to prevent further offending - **around three-quarters of young adults leaving prison are reconvicted within two years.**

Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence of the kind of interventions that can work for this group. The Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) have highlighted key recommendations at each stage of the criminal justice pathway, while the T2A pilots worked intensively with young adults in three locations to deliver a dramatic reduction in reconviction and breach rates across the cohort.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, many of the principles successful in the youth justice system for under-18s could also be extended to this age group.

Local leadership is crucial in embedding a more effective approach. Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in particular have a key role to play, cutting across youth and adults systems with an interest in reducing the demand that this age group place on the police.

Our recent briefing *Improving responses to young adults: a 'checklist' for police and crime commissioners* highlights a number of key recommendations for PCCs to consider in improving responses for this age group.ⁱⁱⁱ Building on this, this 'PCC spotlight' focuses on promising practice, highlighting areas where PCCs are taking a lead on this issue and offering examples that could help inform others looking to develop a more effective approach for young adults.

Examples of promising practice

Leicestershire PCC: The 'Young Adults Project (YAP!)

Leicestershire PCC Sir Clive Loader identified young adults as a priority group in his police and crime plan. Following this, Leicestershire OPCC funded the multi-agency Young Adults Project (YAP!). Reporting to the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Reducing Reoffending Board, the project began with an initial analysis phase looking at the issues facing young adults in contact with the police and criminal justice agencies. Research in this phase found that in 2011-2013, 40% of offenders and 21% of victims in Leicestershire and Rutland were between 16-24 years old.^{iv}

The final report from this initial analysis phase makes the case for a distinct approach to young adults. It takes a 'whole system' view, making 18 recommendations which are now being taken forward. These include: **reviewing the use of out of court disposals** to improve diversion of young adults involved in less serious offending; **ensuring local mental health liaison and diversion schemes** consider the specific needs of young adults and develop the approach accordingly; **developing bespoke sentencing options for young adults**, based on local need and effectiveness in consultation with local sentencers; and **ensuring commissioning of restorative justice (RJ) and victims services** promote development of RJ approaches for young adults at all stages of the criminal justice process.

YAP! has now entered the implementation phase and progress has been made in several areas, including:

- **The development of a new transitions protocol** between youth offending services and adult probation providers, with the local IOM scheme taking on a tracking and quality assurance role.
- **The commissioning of a resources website** for young people, young adults and practitioners
- **The establishment of a Young Adults Team** tasked with providing voluntary support and interventions to 18-24 year olds at risk of offending/reoffending. The purpose of the team is to prevent offending, or if reoffending occurs to support a smooth transition into the adult criminal justice system. It is also anticipated that the team will offer a bespoke conditional caution for young adults.

Crucially, the project has strong strategic governance and cross-sector support. With an initial drive from the PCC, the local Strategic Partnership Board have now identified young adults as a priority group and are overseeing the project, helping to bring partners together to support a system-wide approach to these problem. The focus on young adults also continues throughout the PCC's commissioning strategy, with many services receiving funding expected to tailor their approach to the specific needs of this group. This includes a new mentoring service for short sentence prisoners, and the local Integrated Offender Management approach.

South Wales PCC: Extending the principles of youth offending services to young adults

South Wales PCC has targeted an improved response to young adults, with a particular focus on extending “youth offending team principles to young adults”.

This has involved working closely in partnership with local authorities, youth offending services (YOS), probation, and the voluntary sector to develop an approach that delivers across a range of maturity levels in this age group. Features of an initial pilot in Bridgend included:

- **“Relapse prevention” and out of court disposals** - A triage scheme has been developed whereby young adults (aged 18-21) that have previously been involved with YOS are identified if they come into police custody and linked back into the YOS team for further targeted support. There is also work underway to expand out of court disposals to the 18-25 age groups, and to gather more information on the support needs of young adults coming into custody to identify gaps in provision and develop a more evidence-based approach to the provision of diversionary pathways.
- **Employment, apprenticeships and training** - The PCC is supporting a scheme to take the financial risk of employing a young adult with a criminal record away from small local businesses. The project identifies a local business with a genuine vacancy, explains the project to the employer and young person, and then the PCC covers insurance costs, training costs, costs of equipment needed, as well as 50% of the wages for the first three months. If they successfully complete the trial period, the young person will become employed like any other member of staff.

The approach taken in the pilot as a whole is consistent with desistance-based working, and is focused on achieving a positive long-term impact – acknowledging that desistance is a process which can require a long period of time, and a longer time-frame is required for service delivery to achieve realistic objectives and build positive outcomes.

The PCC is working to expand this approach across South Wales, and the process will be informed by a forthcoming academic evaluation of the Bridgend pilot. Building on the pilot, Bridgend have employed a crime reduction officer seconded to the Youth Offending Service who is focused specifically on addressing the complex needs of offenders in the 18-25 age group. Further pilots have also commenced this year:

- **An 18-21 Triage pilot scheme** operating in Cardiff Bay Bridewell. The scheme aims to divert 18-21 year olds away from police custody (those arrested for low level, non-violent offences, first time entrants), and uses a restorative justice approach that builds upon the triage already in place for 10-17s.
- **A Voluntary Bail Support Scheme for 18-25s** in Merthyr and Bridgend Bridewells. This scheme is an extension of the Appropriate Adult Scheme and is aimed at 18-25s who have been identified as vulnerable during police detention and questioning, linking in with them at point of charge and bail to court, working with them in the community to address needs and aggravating factors towards their offending behaviour, and prepare for court by liaising with all relevant parties.

Gloucestershire PCC: Commissioning for young people becoming adults

Gloucestershire PCC Martin Surl has identified “young people becoming adults” as a key priority^v, and is supporting a number of services covering the transition from youth to young adulthood through his commissioning fund. This includes:

- **Outreach support for young women:** The PCC’s strategy places particular emphasis on improving responses for young women. This includes working with the Isis women’s centre in Gloucester, which provides holistic support to vulnerable women who face complex needs, including those at risk of offending or reoffending.^{vi} Through the commissioning fund, the PCC is funding a dedicated female outreach worker to work with girls and young women aged 16 to 24 in rural areas of Gloucestershire who are involved in offending, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and substance misuse, or are at risk of such involvement.

- **Community services for young people and young adults,** including funding extra capacity at services such as the Door Project^{vii}, which works with disadvantaged young people and young adults up to the age of 24 and provides diversionary activity for those at risk of offending.

- **Policing the night time economy:** The PCC has also placed a focus on the night time economy, which raises particular challenges in the policing of young adults.^{viii} A partnership with the University of Gloucestershire will contribute towards funding research in this area.

The PCC’s work on this agenda is informed by ongoing reviews of how young people are policed, including a focus on out of court disposals and the effectiveness of restorative justice practice.

Other areas

Examples from other areas include:

- **Cleveland PCC** has formed the Young People’s Strategic Partnership Group to inform strategy and commissioning. It includes probation, youth offending, health, and voluntary sector partners, focusing on young people up to 24.
- **South Yorkshire PCC** is match-funding two of the T2A Pathway projects with the Barrow Cadbury Trust, with one focusing on diverting young adults with mental health problems into support and another on improved restorative justice and community sentences.^{ix}
- **Avon & Somerset PCC** has recruited a “youth champion” to improve engagement and inform policy and commissioning for young people aged up to 24.

- **Nottinghamshire PCC** has placed a strong focus on issues relating to BME communities, including improved monitoring and oversight of stop and search. This has helped to drive a reduction in the disproportionate use of stop and search powers on young men from BME groups. He has also recently tasked youth offending teams to consider how they can extend their support for young adults locally.
- **Sussex, Hampshire, and Leicestershire PCCs** have all hosted a Youth Commission, run by the SHM Foundation.^x This involves a group of young people aged 14-24 (including ex-offenders) engaging with their peers to produce recommendations that will inform the police and crime plan, covering issues such as antisocial behaviour, reoffending, and relationships with the police.

Conclusion and key themes: a partnership approach

With PCCs just over two years into their new role, many of the strategies, schemes, and approaches highlighted here are still in an early stage of development. In most cases, it is too early to assess outcomes. Nevertheless, it is clear that a number of PCCs are using their wider role to drive an improved partnership approach to challenging issues such as young adult offending, and seeking to improve responses for people that have previously fallen through gaps in the system.

Given the high level of demand that young adults place on the police and criminal justice agencies, all PCCs have an interest in improving responses and reducing young adult crime and reoffending. When comparing how the areas identified above are seeking to achieve this, a number of themes emerge, including:

- **Analysis and evidence**, building an improved understanding of the needs and offending of this age group locally to inform commissioning.
- **Diversion**, including exploring opportunities to tailor out of court disposals more effectively for first time offences; adapting existing youth triage approaches that can be extended to young adults; and ensuring mental health liaison and diversion services respond to the specific needs of this age group.
- **Restorative approaches**, which have been used extensively in the youth sector and form part of the strategies in Leicestershire, South Wales, and Gloucestershire.

- **Targeted support through the transition to adulthood**, with Leicestershire introducing a dedicated young adults team, and Gloucestershire and South Yorkshire commissioning young-adult specific support services.
- **Extending existing youth services**, including exploring how principles of the youth offending team model can be applied to young adults, and developing opportunities to link some young adults back into these teams as piloted in South Wales.
- **Expanding employment opportunities**, promoting employment projects for young adults, particularly former offenders.
- **Improving policing for young adults**, many PCCs have focused on the use of stop and search and policing of the night time economy, which disproportionately affect this age group.
- **Engaging with young adults**, in developing their strategies, many of these PCCs have sought to engage with young adults, including those with experience of offending.

The most promising approaches, however, take an ambitious **“whole system” view**, using the PCC’s role to bring partners together and to drive a multi-agency focus on this issue with key partners from the youth offending, prisons, probation, health, and the voluntary sector.

Despite the controversy and uncertainty that continues to surround their role, PCCs are in an important position to show leadership on this issue, cutting across the youth and adults systems with a key strategic and commissioning role. Whatever the future arrangements, there is much to learn from how different areas have sought to tackle these issues and to improve responses for young adults.

If you have any examples of promising practice in your area, or would like any further information, please contact:

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Further resources

Further information and resources are also available at www.t2a.org.uk.

Revolving Doors Agency and Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) *Improving responses to young adults: a 'checklist' for police and crime commissioners*. Available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/improving-responses-to-young-adults/>

Transition to Adulthood Alliance *Pathways from crime: 10 steps to a more effective approach to young adults in the criminal justice process*. Available here: <http://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/T2A-Pathways-from-Crime.pdf>

The T2A pathway programme is delivering interventions to young adults in six locations across England over three years. These six projects represent collectively a whole pathway approach to working with 16-25 year olds throughout the criminal justice process. Further information available here: <http://www.t2a.org.uk/pathway/>

Police Foundation *Policing young adults: a briefing for police and crime commissioners*. Available here: http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/uploads/catalogerfiles/hotspottting/pol_young_adults_PCC_brief.pdf

Clinks & T2A *Going for Gold: Developing effective services for young adults throughout the criminal justice process*. Available here: <http://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Going-for-Gold-guide.pdf>

Leicestershire and Rutland YAP! *Young Adults Project end of Phase One report May 2014*. Available here: <http://dlnrcrc.co.uk/working-in-partnership/young-adults-project/>

Beyond Youth Custody is a national programme which examines and promotes best practice in the resettlement of young people and young adults leaving custody, including a number of pilots across the country. Further information available here: <http://www.beyondyouthcustody.net/>

Endnotes

ⁱ See Transition to Adulthood Alliance (2012) *Pathways from crime: 10 steps to a more effective approach to young adults in the criminal justice process*

ⁱⁱ Across the cohort, the number in employment also trebled and the number classified as NEET halved. See <http://www.t2a.org.uk/t2a-pilots/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Revolving Doors Agency & T2A *Improving responses to young adults: a 'checklist' for police and crime commissioners* available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/improving-responses-to-young-adults/>

^{iv} Figures for the year 2011-2013. See YAP! *Young Adults Project end of Phase One report May 2014* for further details. Available here: <http://dlnrcrc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/YAP-Phase-One-Full-Report.pdf>

^v See <http://www.gloucestershire-pcc.gov.uk/your-pcc/the-police-and-crime-plan/young-people-becoming-adults/>

^{vi} See <http://nelsontrust.com/community-based-services/isis/>

^{vii} See <http://www.thedooryouthproject.org.uk/about/>

^{viii} See Police Foundation, *Policing young adults: a briefing for police and crime commissioners*.

^{ix} See <http://www.t2a.org.uk/pathway/> for further information

^x See http://www.youthcommission.co.uk/#about_us