

Strategic Framework for Youth Justice - Action Plan 2022-2027

Updated for **2026/27** (changes in **red font**)

Action Plan

TIMEFRAME

ST

Short Term
(under 1 year)

MT

Medium Term
(1-3 years)

LT

Long Term
(4-5 years)

Relevant PfG Priority – Safer Communities

Complete* = embedded as BAU

KEY OUTCOME	PRIORITY ACTIVITIES	ACTIONS	LEAD	KEY PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	STATUS
1. Children are exited from the criminal justice system at the earliest point, with appropriate support.	To work collaboratively with other statutory and third sector partners to help children avoid entering, or moving further into, the formal justice system.	1.1 Develop and deliver Earlier Stage Diversion, in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations, in order to exit children from the criminal justice system at the earliest possible stage, with appropriate support (complete).	YJA	DOJ, PSNI, PBNI, V&C orgs	Ongoing	Complete*
		1.2 Work with partners to implement the findings and recommendations of the external evaluation of Children's Diversion Forums.	YJA	Social Services (HSC Trusts), EA, PSNI	MT	Ongoing Complete
		1.3 Ongoing work with PPS and PSNI to develop proposals for a diversionary disposal which does not attract a criminal record.	YJA	DOJ, PSNI, PPS, NICTS	MT	Ongoing
		1.4 Support PSNI review of Community Resolution Notices with the aim of extending offences covered by a CRN (Subject to appropriate YJA staffing levels)	YJA	PSNI	MT	Complete
		1.5 Liaise with the Home Office over the introduction of a new Youth Diversion Order for terrorism-related offences which is being introduced in NI through the UK Crime and Policing Bill	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PPS, NICTS, OLCJ	MT	Ongoing

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KEY OUTCOME	PRIORITY ACTIVITIES	ACTIONS	LEAD	KEY PARTNERS	TIME FRAME	STATUS
2. Positive outcomes for children, families, victims and communities affected by offending	To simplify and streamline the current provision of community orders	2.1 Introduce a new flexible order to replace the existing 7 community orders based on current evidence and best practice.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, NICTS, OLCJ	LT	Ongoing
		2.2 Consider and implement actions to improve the experiences of youth court hearings for children and their families, informed by problem solving and trauma informed approaches, and the views of stakeholders.	DOJ	YJA, PPS, PBNI, NICTS, PSNI, OLCJ	MT	Ongoing
		2.3. Develop and deliver an Enhanced Case Management framework for children who pose a high risk of significant harm and/or who have complex needs. (complete)	YJA	PSNI, PPS, NICTS, OLCJ, Social Services (HSC Trusts)	ST	Complete*
	To deliver enhanced engagement and support for the most complex cases	2.4. Develop a rolling programme of service developments that improve supports for children who have offended and help reduce reoffending. In the short-term, this will focus on:				
		i. Rolling out Evaluating the YJA-HSC joint CAMHS service across NI to provide effective access to and its provision of mental health support services for children in the justice system (subject to budget availability);	YJA	DoH (SPPG), HSC Trusts	MT	Ongoing
		ii. Improving employability among 16 and 17 year olds in the justice system by developing a wider set of partnerships and improving connections to existing services (complete); and			ST	Complete*
		iii. Improving support for the families of children in the justice system both through direct delivery by YJA and improving referral pathways to services already funded by Health, Education and others (complete).			ST	Complete*
	To develop and deliver Model of Practice work streams for continuous service improvement					

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2. Positive outcomes for children, families, victims and communities affected by offending	To simplify and streamline the current provision of community orders To deliver enhanced engagement and support for the most complex cases To develop and deliver Model of Practice work streams for continuous service improvement	2.4. Cont...:				
		iv. — Review and update the new YJA assessment tool and provide richer data on “journey travelled” for children engaged with YJA across 5 domains—Family; Education; Training & Employment; Being Connected; Substance Misuse; Health & Well-being.	YJA	DoH (SPPG), DE, EA, DfC, DfE, VCS, Employers	MT	Ongoing Complete
		v. Participation – to further develop effective mechanisms to involve young people, their parents and carers in policy and service development.	YJA	Children, Families & Carers	MT	Ongoing
		vi. Further develop approaches and partnerships to ensure more children improve their engagement with education, training or employment during their time with YJA.	YJA	DE, EA, DfC, DfE, VCS, Employers	MT	Ongoing
		vii. Review YJA’s support for victims to ensure it is aligned with the commitment to trauma-informed practice.	YJA	PSNI	MT	Ongoing
		viii. Work in partnership to improve the evidence base on the needs of girls in the justice system and implement learning in practice	YJA	QUB, Limerick Uni, Probation IE	MT	Ongoing

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3. Children will only ever be placed in custody as a last resort	To introduce legislative reforms on bail and remand during the next Assembly mandate.	3.1 (i) Improve arrangements for bail, remand and custody for children through amendment to primary legislation.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, NICTS.	MT	Ongoing
		3.1 (ii) Develop detailed guidance for criminal justice partners to assist with operationalisation of new bail, remand and custody provisions following Royal Assent of Justice Bill.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PBNI, PPS, NICTS.	MT	Ongoing
	To support the development and implementation of a Regional Care and Justice Programme in partnership with the Department of Health	3.2 Work with partners in Health, particularly the South-Eastern HSC Trust (through a new Partnership Board), to develop harmonised services between Woodlands and Lakewood and support improved transitions for children from secure care or custody into community settings.	Regional Facilities Programme Team YJA SE HSC Trust	DOH, DOJ, DE, YJA, PSNI, HSCB, EA, Social Services DoH, EA	MT	Ongoing Complete*
		3.3 Develop further the bail fostering pilot scheme as an alternative to custody and to support successful transitions back into the community.	YJA	PSNI, HSC Trusts	MT	Ongoing

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4. Working in partnership to deliver wider systemic change to improve the lives of children	To explore the potential reform of wider systemic issues, in the best interests of children	4.1. (i) Consult on increasing the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility to 14 years in Northern Ireland (complete)	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PPS, NICTS	ST	Complete
		4.1 (ii) Consider outcome of consultation exercise on MACR and develop new proposals in line with the priorities of the Justice Minister and the NI Executive.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PPS, NICTS, DoH	MT	Complete
		4.1 (iii) Continue to promote the outcome of the public consultation on MACR with NI Executive members as well as any developments in other jurisdictions in order to keep the issue live.	DOJ	VCS	Ongoing	Ongoing
		4.1 (iv) Development of alternative support framework for children under new MACR, subject to Assembly support of amendments.	DOJ	YJA, DoH, PSNI, PPS, VCS	ST	Dependent on Assembly
	To deliver agreed recommendations from the Independent Reviewer of Criminal Records	4.2 Conduct research to determine the key obstacles to delays in progressing youth justice cases in courts, with a view to developing solutions to address the causal factors identified. Research has been completed and shared with the group. Work in relation to delay will be taken forward and reported on as part of the wider Speeding Up Justice Programme.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PPS, NICTS	MT	Complete
		4.3 (i) Carry out a review of specified offences which may be disclosed as part of criminal records checks (complete).	DOJ	YJA, PSNI	MT	Complete
		4.3 (ii) Implement proposals arising from Review of List of Specified Offences	DOJ	YJA, PSNI	ST	Ongoing
		4.4 Introduce primary legislation to underpin current filtering arrangements for youth diversionary disposals	DOJ	YJA, PSNI	ST	Ongoing

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4. Working in partnership to deliver wider systemic change to improve the lives of children	To deliver a streamlined youth justice legislative framework which is simpler and more easily understood	4.5 Develop a new Children's Justice Bill which will consolidate and simplify criminal justice legislation relating to children and modernise the delivery of youth justice in Northern Ireland. This action is now closed as there is no scope in the mandate for a dedicated Children's Bill. Many of the anticipated provisions will instead be taken forward in other primary legislation planned for this mandate, including the Modernisation of Justice Bill.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI , PBNI	LT	Closed
		4.6 Develop further understanding of the factors contributing to over-representation of certain groups in the youth justice system and work with partners to develop actions to address the issues identified.	YJA	DOJ, PSNI, DoH, Social Services (HSC Trusts)	MT	Ongoing
	To improve transitions for young people	4.7 Further develop partnerships with DfC and Trusts to find additional ways to prevent homelessness amongst young people (16-18 years) who offend.	YJA	Social Services (HSC Trusts), DfC, NIHE, PBNI, VCS	Ongoing	Ongoing Complete*
		4.8 Working with SBNI, develop the Youth Justice Agency as a trauma-informed organisation and share good practice with Justice partners on trauma-informed and child first approaches	YJA	SBNI, PSNI, PPS, NICTS, PBNI	Ongoing	Ongoing
		4.9 Engage with wider cross-Executive strategies and ongoing programmes of work to ensure the needs of children in the justice system are reflected and considered.	DOJ	YJA, PSNI, PPS, NICTS, PBNI, OLC	LT	Ongoing
		4.10 The Police Service of Northern Ireland will support delivery of the key outcomes identified within the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice through provision of its Children and Young People Strategy across the following themes: Safety and Protection; Suspected Offending; Victims & Witnesses; Stop & Search.	PSNI	DOJ, YJA, PPS, NICTS, PBNI	LT	Ongoing