



Northern Ireland Audit Office

MEDIA RELEASE

Managing children who offend

Mr Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General, today issued his report to the Assembly on *Managing children who offend*. The report examines the cost of youth offending and the strategies and interventions used to deal with youth offending and reoffending.

Mr Donnelly said, ***“The number of offences committed by young people has been reducing in recent years. However, more than one in four young offenders will go on to reoffend within one year. Repeat offenders account for a disproportionately high percentage all incidents, representing over 70 per cent of all youth crime and disorder. There is a need for a specific strategy to guide the Executive in terms of youth justice policy and interventions and to help co-ordinate the delivery of youth justice services.”***

Mr Donnelly added

“Assessing the cost effectiveness of interventions used to address offending behaviour is the foundation for delivering value for money. The Department and the Youth Justice Agency lack the capacity to identify and apportion costs to the full range of interventions. Consequently, they cannot adequately assess their cost-effectiveness and cannot currently demonstrate that the interventions to reduce reoffending by young people represent value for money.”

Most young people recorded as being involved in crime and disorder were linked to only one incident. However, a third of young people were recorded more than once, while two thirds of these repeat offenders will go on to be recorded in more than one year. The most prolific one per cent of young offenders account for around 13 per cent of all incidents

Long term analysis of reoffending has been constrained by a lack of reliable data. However, rates of reoffending have increased since 2010-11. The most recent statistics for 2013-14 reveal that while the overall reoffending rate is 28 per cent, the reoffending rate for those released from custody is 89 per cent (31 out of 35).

Youth conferencing has a central role in the response to youth crime. Although well regarded internationally, it has not been demonstrated that conferencing has reduced reoffending in Northern Ireland. Improvements in re-offending outcomes between 2007 and 2008, when around 1 in 5 who went through a youth conference reoffended, have not been maintained. In 2013-14, more than 1 in 2 young offenders dealt with through community orders reoffended. Youth conferencing may not address the needs of prolific offenders in particular.

Custodial services represent the largest element of the Youth Justice Agency's costs, £6.9 million in 2015-16, when around 160 young people were detained. Historically,

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young people on remand have made up the majority of the custodial population and accounted for half of all those processed through the Juvenile Justice Centre. The average cost per occupant each year in the JJC is £324,000. The Department has not compared the cost of youth custody in Northern Ireland to costs in England and Wales.

Strategies for dealing with reoffending do not differentiate between approaches required for managing youth reoffending and reoffending amongst adults. The challenges faced by young people and continued pressure on public sector budgets require a strategic review of how current arrangements are working.

Reducing reoffending by young people requires significant political and cross-department support to be successful. In practice this will require public bodies to work collaboratively and to maintain their engagement with partners in single outcome agreements. They must work effectively not only with traditional partners in the criminal justice system, but also with key departments and agencies in health, education and housing.

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. In its reoffending statistics the Department defines an offence as a reoffence if it occurs within a one year observation period; was prosecuted by PSNI; and has been committed within Northern Ireland.
3. The report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hours on 6 July 2017.
4. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Sean Beattie (028 9025 1091).