



Press Release
Monday 13 July 2009

New vision for young offenders shown to be viable alternative to currently failing system

A panel of experts is calling on the Government to pilot a new approach to working with young offenders. This would provide the integration and continuity of local services which are presently absent. The proposal is carefully planned and affordable.

A report published today (Monday 13 July) explains how a Young Offenders Academy should be established as a pilot project, offering a radical approach to working with young offenders to prevent re-offending, which would cost no more than detaining young people in a traditional Young Offenders Institution. It would offer integrated and uninterrupted services for young offenders from the local area – who include some of society's most disadvantaged children.

Journalists and photographers are invited to attend the report's launch at a House of Lords reception:

When: 2pm, Monday 13 July 2009

Where: Committee Room 3A, Palace of Westminster

RSVP: Sonia Dunand – sonia@foyer.net (admission by RSVP'd invitation only)

The Advisory Group that developed and published the report *Young Offenders: A Secure Foundation* includes Lord Ramsbotham, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Professor Rod Morgan, former Chair of the Youth Justice Board, Dr Kevan Collins, Director of Children's Services London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Jane Slowey CBE, Chief Executive of the Foyer Federation and David Chesterton, former Chief Executive of East Potential. The Project Director is John Plummer.

The Young Offenders' Academy model would aim to reduce the blight of re-offending among young people - currently nearly two thirds (64.3%) of young offenders who receive a custodial sentence go back to crime. In recent years, little progress has been made in reducing re-offending among young people and Government targets have not been met, despite increased spending.

A Young Offenders Academy would help young offenders move towards independent, crime-free adulthood by ensuring that education, training, employment and mental health services were provided consistently and continuously, and working to restore and maintain young people's links to family and the local community. Currently, young offenders often serve sentences far from home, and experience interruptions and disconnections in services.

The report takes forward a scoping study published in June 2008 and sets out the business case for pilots, which could be located in east London or another major conurbation. The report has been produced using extensive consultations and enquiries with organisations across the UK. It has revealed widespread acknowledgement that aspects of the youth justice system are not working in the interests of vulnerable children and the wider society, as well as increasing support for the concept of the Young Offenders Academy.

The report also uncovered that the true cost of custody in Young Offenders Institutions is double the cost stated by government. **The lack of understanding of the real costs of youth custody undermines policy decisions about alternatives.** The Government presently understates the true costs of youth custody by £120 million p.a. This should be added to the Youth Justice Board's budget by a transfer from the Prison Service.

Today's report outlines how a Young Offenders Academy would reduce the number of local young offenders in custody by two thirds, provide outreach services into the community and improve outcomes for those detained by aiding their rehabilitation, development and reintegration into the community.

A year ago the Youth Justice Board opposed the adoption of a geographical catchment area, which would enable young offenders in custody to be held within one hour's travel time by public transport from their homes, families, schools and communities. Since then, it has adopted an aim of detaining young offenders within 50 miles of their homes and has collaborated with several new initiatives in the north west, south west and Greater London which depend on geographical catchment areas. However, the devolution of budgets and responsibility for youth custody to local authorities has been mooted by the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board and could be relevant to the proposed pilot project.

Comments from some members of the Young Offenders Academy Advisory Group:

David Chesterton JP, Chair of the Advisory Group, tel: 07930 381 144

"Our most important discovery has been that Government has substantially understated the true costs of custody. We are convinced that places in the Young Offenders Institutions actually cost some £100,000 per child per year rather than £60,000. This has distorted policy decisions about a whole range of services for children. When this is understood, measures such as Intensive Fostering and Secure Children's Homes, as well as the proposed Young Offenders Academy, can be seen to be good value for money".

Lord Ramsbotham, former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, tel: 020 7854 0502

"During the year since the publication of the scoping study, the Academy concept has been welcomed by, and attracted enthusiastic support from a number of organisations involved with young people. In particular all have embraced the possibilities presented by consistent support from responsible adults, something that is all too sadly lacking from much of current provision. We have done a lot of work in the last year. There is now a sufficiently detailed plan for the Government to proceed without delay. I call upon them to demonstrate a commitment to improving the youth justice system by establishing the pilot project".

Dr Malaika Culverwell, Olympic Director Skills Legacy, Learning & Skills Council, tel: 020 7904 0735

"We want to work more effectively to get better results, but we are not only concerned with the financial cost of the current system, but in addressing the cost of wasted opportunity and underachievement that blights young lives and the communities where the young people live. This is the time to think imaginatively, to build and support partnerships that promote the shared values of respect, civic and corporate responsibility and a commitment to youth development and engagement."

Dr Kevan Collins, Director of Children's Services, LB Tower Hamlets, tel: 020 7364 4956

"We are convinced that the Young Offenders Academy is the right way forward and want to see a pilot project established here as soon as possible. By this means we can reduce the number of local children in custody and better support their families. We are keen to engage in a constructive dialogue with central government on the devolution of budgets and responsibilities for youth custody to local authorities. However discussions can only begin when there is transparency about the true costs of custody."

Jane Slowey CBE, Chief Executive, Foyer Federation, tel: 020 7430 2212

“Much work has been done since the original scoping study to establish the business case for the Young Offenders Academy. The next step is for the Government to appoint a lead Department and work with the Foyer Federation to set up the first pilot project. At present our society fails some of the most vulnerable children who experience the youth justice system. We must improve on this by reducing the numbers in custody and enabling them to make the transition to independent, crime-free adulthood.”

Prof Rod Morgan, former Chair of Youth Justice Board & Professor of Criminal Justice, Bristol University, tel: 01225 316 676

“There are twice as many children and young people in custody today than there were 15 years ago and their prognosis has not improved despite the huge and growing costs involved. The public is ill-served by arrangements which pretty well guarantees turning young people with multiple problems into long-term, adult career criminals from whose depredations everyone suffers. The system isn’t working. We need imaginative, local initiatives signalling a change of direction. The Young Offenders Academy merits serious consideration.’

John Plummer, Project Director, tel: 020 8340 2312 or 020 7430 2212

“The most astonishing feature during the last year has been the level of support and interest the project has generated. Our purpose has not been to promote the concept, but to seek the advice and engagement of experts. More people and organisations have expressed frustration about the evident failure of parts of the youth justice system and an enthusiasm to embrace change and a new approach. This has been demonstrated in many ways, particularly by the investment of huge value through time, knowledge and expertise on a pro bono basis. It is these contributions which have built the model we now propose”.

Ends

Notes to Editors

More information on the report:

The report ***Young Offenders: A Secure Foundation*** is published by the Foyer Federation, 3rd Floor, 5-9 Hatton Wall, London EC1N 8HX. The full report can be downloaded at www.foyer.net

The report calls for:

- Ministerial authorisation for further development of the proposed pilot project including determination of the lead Department.
- Agreement that the Foyer Federation would play a leading role as co-sponsors of the proposed pilot project.

If an early decision is made, it would be possible for a pilot project to be established and operational in east London or elsewhere by 2012.

For media enquiries please contact.

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The Foyer Federation

For over a decade, the Foyer Federation has helped turn young people's experiences of disadvantage into solutions that support their transition into independent adulthood. We develop transformational programmes and campaigns that fill gaps in community services and inspire policy and decision makers to make a more effective investment in young people.

We work mainly through a network of over 100 integrate learning and accommodation centres, known as Foyers, who provide accommodation linked with education, training, health and other services to around 10,000 young people a year.

Foyers now operate in over 130 urban and rural communities across the UK, providing safe, quality assured environments, where experts reconnect vulnerable young people with personal development opportunities.

The Foyer Federation is now exploring how the holistic Foyer approach can be stretched and targeted to improve services for those young people whose journey to adulthood is particularly difficult; e.g. care leavers, young offenders and other vulnerable young adults.

For further information and all press enquiries please contact Laura Parker on 020 7430 2212.

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