

Appendix A.

Agency responses

Department of Human Services response

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services

General comments

The Department of Human Services (the department) welcomes this report, which has reinforced the fundamental direction and operation of Victoria's youth justice system. The audit has provided a timely opportunity to take stock of our progress, and will assist in fine tuning the future direction and performance of the system.

The report acknowledges that the department has identified many of the challenges facing the system and that work is well underway to address these issues. The report has rightly identified the need for a whole of government approach to data collection and strategic planning for young offenders, along with improved performance and outcomes measurement, as areas of high priority.

In 2000, as part of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy, a range of diversion, rehabilitation, pre-release and post-release support programs were established. As the audit notes, while outcome and performance measures are currently underdeveloped, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that young people are being diverted from custody and that access to pre-release, transition and post-release support programs has increased. In addition, the department commissioned a major independent review of rehabilitation programs in 2003. This led to the development of the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth, which the audit described as "best practice" and is now adopted by several other jurisdictions in Australia.

A case management and planning framework and a range of additional rehabilitation programs have also been introduced which is indicative of the improvements forecast in the Juvenile Justice Reform strategy.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Detailed recommendations response

Recommendation 3.1 – Service planning.

The Department of Human Services should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved.

This recommendation is supported in principle.

It is timely that the department reviews the relevance of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy in light of new challenges facing the youth justice program. Given the major improvements that have occurred since the introduction of these reforms, it is not feasible to isolate and measure the impact of specific initiatives that commenced up to eight years ago. The reform strategy was a three pronged approach including improved diversion from custody, providing better rehabilitation and expanding pre-release, transition and post-release programs.

There is clear evidence to support that the department has met the first of these objectives. Since the introduction of the diversionary measures, the average daily number of sentenced young people in custody has reduced from 169 to 121, a fall of 28%. Victoria leads Australia in diverting young people from serious criminal lifestyles, with a rate of 0.5 per 1,000 in detention which is one quarter of the national average of 2.0.

The second objective being to provide better rehabilitation has also been met. In the past eight years, the department has: introduced a structured case planning and management system; increased rehabilitation programs including violence prevention, behaviour modification and a structured modular individualised offender program; improved staff training in rehabilitating young offenders; has undertaken a major independent review into rehabilitation programs; and has introduced the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth, which is now being adopted by many other states.

The third objective of the reform strategy has also been met. As the audit notes, there is sufficient evidence to confirm that there has been increased access to pre-release, transition and post-release programs.

The department acknowledges that a comprehensive evaluation of the reform strategy which identifies rehabilitation outcomes for individual young offenders was not undertaken but, nonetheless, there is substantial evidence to support the overall success of the strategy. The continued low number of Victorian young people in custody, in spite of changes in legislation that increased the youth justice client base, proves the success of the reform strategy and the Victorian approach to rehabilitating young offenders. Lower numbers of young people in custody represents a major benefit and saving for the Victorian community. The investment in rehabilitation and diversion programs is only a small proportion of the tens of millions of dollars that would be required to build and operate detention facilities, had the reform strategy not been implemented.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Recommendation 6.1 – Integrated case management and service delivery.

DHS should:

- *Ensure that young offenders agree and sign off against the goals and objectives identified in their client services plans*
- *Implement appropriate systems to clearly and consistently document a young offender's progress towards their case management*
- *Review the effectiveness of parole planning and post-programs to facilitate access to support services and the reintegration of young offenders returning to rural and remote areas*
- *Develop a standardised service plan for the management of young offenders on supervised bail.*

This recommendation is partially supported.

The audit identified good practice in the management of young offenders' cases and in the delivery of services. In the context of case planning the audit reports positively that; all young offenders have a Client Services Plan, all young offenders have an allocated case workers, the Client Service Plan details individual goals and provides a basis for the coordination of interventions and services, and that DHS ensures the active participation of young offenders in the development of these plans. The report noted that the additional practice, currently undertaken by Youth Justice staff, of seeking the young person's signature to the plan is considered better practice and should be further promoted across the program.

Youth Justice will develop further guidelines to promote this practice. The recommendation to ensure that all young offenders sign-off their case planning goals will be examined. It is, however, unlikely that mandating the signing of the plan would be legally enforceable and may not have a positive impact on rehabilitation outcomes for young people. Youth Justice encourages this practice in order to engage young people in the development of an individualised plan to address their behaviour. The engagement of the young person commences with their extensive involvement in the case management process. A young person's motivation or willingness to change is most impacted on by their individual circumstances, their participation in offender based programs and the relationship they form with the youth justice workers.

The department agrees with the need to enhance the systems to clearly document a young offender's progress towards their case management goals. The young person's progress is often re-assessed through; periodic updates of their risk and needs assessment (Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth), reviews of their client service plan or through progress reports such as those provided to the Youth Parole Board. It is important to have effective processes in place to monitor young people's progress.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

The department also supports reviewing the effectiveness of parole planning and post release programs. In recognition of the importance of the post release support services, Youth Justice has just redeveloped the model of post release support programs. This important reform, which will be implemented in 2008-09, will enable community sector organisations to form consortia or partnerships with agencies in each DHS region and become better integrated with other youth service providers to ensure more seamless access to services.

The recommendation to develop a specific plan for bail clients is also supported. In recognition of the need for a standardised approach, Youth Justice has begun improvement initiatives that include:

- *The development of a standard format for a documented bail plan for young people at risk of breaching bail or re-offending. This will be tailored to the support required for young people at this stage of their involvement with the criminal justice system. (Once completed this will be considered for incorporation into CRIS as a standard document.)*
- *Reviewing current bail assessment tools to develop a standard assessment for state wide application that is fit for this purpose.*
- *Targeted training for Adult Court Advice Staff (ACAS) in May 2008 focused on documentation and case file recording. Youth Justice has an established system of case file auditing by team leaders, and this will be reviewed to include ACAS staff more explicitly.*

Recommendation 7.1 – Information systems.

DHS should enhance the management reporting capability of the Client Relationship Information System to identify:

- *Trends in the needs of young offenders*
- *The effectiveness of interventions and services in meeting the assessed needs of young offenders and modifying their behaviour*
- *The extent to which interventions and services contribute to the rehabilitation of young offenders and reduced recidivism.*

This recommendation is supported.

The Youth Justice functionality provided by the CRIS system is much richer than the system it replaced. In recognition of the critical role the non-government agencies play in client service delivery, the electronic system has a component that allows use by agencies involved in case management services on the department's behalf to facilitate the sharing of common case management information. Implementation of this system has already occurred for a number of agencies. Planning is currently underway to prioritise further roll-out of this functionality. The community service organisations that provide youth justice related services are included in this planning process.

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

Recommendation 7.2 – Information systems.

DHS in conjunction with other State Government Departments and agencies involved in the delivery of youth justice services should develop a whole-of-government approach to data collection and analysis to support shared planning and service development. This should be complemented by arrangements to support effective information sharing within and across agencies.

This recommendation is supported in principle.

The Department recognises the value of data sharing and collection across other State Government departments and agencies. Youth Justice has included an identifier within the CRIS system to enable this to occur. The feasibility of this recommendation is yet to be assessed across government including consideration of legislative requirements and the compatibility of data collection systems.

Recommendations 8.1 and 8.2 – Cost Efficiency and Effectiveness.

DHS, the Department of Justice and the Magistrate's Court of Victoria should:

- *Expedite the development of benchmark data to measure operational efficiency*
- *Incorporate output data into operational management reports that track output cost rates*
- *Review output and unit cost data to form a baseline against which current performance can be assessed. (Rec. 8.1)*

DHS should:

- *Ensure that outcomes measures being developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology adequately assess the effectiveness of youth justice programs and services in reducing reoffending and improving rehabilitation*
- *Assess the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders to be measured. (Rec 8.2)*

The recommendations to improve performance and outcomes measures are supported and the department has strategies in place to implement this recommendation. In recognition of the need for improvements to performance measurement youth justice has undertaken considerable work to improve information systems, reporting and performance measures through a range of activities, including;

- *The development, implementation and continuous refinement of the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) from 2004-2008*
- *Redevelopment of the design of the data reports available from CRIS*
- *Commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to explore the use of recidivism as the primary measurement of effectiveness and develop other potential outcome measure for young offenders*

RESPONSE provided by Secretary, Department of Human Services – continued

- *Led a project for the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators to develop an agreed set of key performance indicators for national reporting. It is anticipated that these will include measures relating to equity, efficiency and effectiveness domains*

Youth Justice has commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to assist in the development work required for this recommendation. The project will review the appropriateness of using “recidivism” as the primary measure of the effectiveness of the youth justice program and assist in the identification of a suite of other outcome measures that are suitable for young offenders taking into consideration their maturation level and the well researched finding that adolescence is the peak period for re-offending.

The department supports in principle assessing the feasibility of using the Victorian Offender Needs Indicator for Youth to enable the effectiveness and measurement of youth justice programs, services and interventions aimed at rehabilitating young offenders. Whilst this tool was developed for the assessments of individuals it is possible that a modified version could be applied for this purpose.

Recommendation 9.1 – Service improvement.

DHS should implement a structured client feedback mechanism for youth justice units and ACAS that provides young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community based services and supervision.

This recommendation is supported.

Youth Justice will establish formal mechanisms for collecting client feedback. It is pleasing to see the positive findings in the report related to the mechanism adopted in the youth justice custodial centres to seek input from young people. The recently established Aboriginal Community Visitors program will also provide an independent feedback mechanism for Aboriginal custodial clients. Regional youth justice units currently incorporate client feedback at a local level but not in a systematic way. A formal and system wide process for client feedback will be established and piloted in 2008/09.

Department of Justice response

RESPONSE provided by Acting Secretary, Department of Justice

While the Department of Justice supports in principle the recommendations it is noted that some of the recommendations will need to be carefully considered before the Department can commit to implementing them. Recommendations 8.3 and 8.4 may involve a considerable and currently unknown cost to the Department and recommendation 9.3 would require the Department of Justice to collaborate with Victoria Police. The implications of these issues will need to be considered before the Department can commit to implementing these recommendations.

Also, it should be noted that there are a number of activities currently underway or planned within the Corrections and Courts portfolios that address the some of the issues highlighted in the recommendations, including:

Corrections Portfolio

- Corrections Victoria (CV) is a member of the Youth Justice Outcomes Research Project Reference Group established to provide expert knowledge, information, advice and feedback to the Australian Institute of Criminology at key stages of the project. The Outcomes Research Project commissioned by the DHS Youth Services and Youth Justice (YS&YJ), will review conventional outcome measures for Youth Justice and propose additional and alternative measures that may enhance the understanding of the impact of the youth justice service.
- The YS&YJ and CV have worked together to develop the draft Framework for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Young Adult Offenders. This is a four year strategy to improve outcomes for young offenders managed by the Youth Justice Service and CV.
- The draft Framework supports a coordinated approach to data collection and analysis to enable the design and delivery of programs and activities for young offenders, in an improved way.
- The draft Framework has received in principle support within CV and Youth Justice and will be forwarded to the Ministers for endorsement following finalisation of the implementation plan and communication strategy.

RESPONSE provided by Acting Secretary, Department of Justice – continued

Courts Portfolio

- The criteria for the Criminal Justice Diversion Plan (CJDP), its governing legislation and the process for initiating referrals are part of the Victoria Police Manual. The Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) also conducts information sessions for all Victoria Police recruits, gives presentations to local police stations and has representation on the Victoria Police Caution and Diversion Working Party.
- The MCV currently compiles a range of data to measure the CJDP against the agreed targets. The MCV is happy to be involved in the development of benchmark data to measure the operation of the programs.”