

3 Service planning

At a glance

Background

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy emphasised that a whole-of-government approach should be taken to service planning and coordination to reflect the shared responsibility of government agencies for addressing young offenders' needs.

Key findings

While the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy has clearly stated goals and defined outcomes, this strategy was introduced over seven years ago and has not been evaluated to determine whether its stated outcomes have been achieved or whether its goals remain relevant. While a range of independent reviews and evaluations have been conducted and selected data suggests some of the reforms have been effective, the strategy has not been evaluated and reported to the Parliament and the community.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice have developed a joint policy framework and action plan for the management of young offenders across the departments, which outlines a joint approach to introduce a range of system improvements, including information sharing, research and evaluation, data collection and performance reporting.

In the strategic planning for the delivery of services to young offenders there are a number of areas for improvement, including the need to develop:

- outcome measures and targets linked to key youth justice objectives
- performance measures and targets that link to key strategic and operational activities and initiatives for juvenile justice.

Key recommendation

- DHS should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved. **(Recommendation 3.1)**

3.1 Introduction

If services to young offenders are to maximise rehabilitation and reduce reoffending they must respond to the complex social and behavioural needs of young offenders. The behaviour of many young offenders is affected by factors such as drug use, mental health issues, disengagement from education, fractured family lives and a lack of community and social supports.

Given the number of factors that result in offending behaviour, multiple agencies are involved in providing services for young offenders. The audit examined whether services delivered to young offenders were strategically planned at the whole-of-government level and agency level.

3.2 Service planning

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy emphasised that a whole-of-government approach should be taken to service planning and coordination to reflect the shared responsibility of government agencies for addressing young offenders' needs.

3.2.1 Whole-of-government approach

A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria, introduced the government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy in August 2000. This strategy introduced a number of initiatives aimed at consolidating the government's approach to youth justice, which included crime prevention and the rehabilitation of young offenders with complex behaviours. The goals of the strategy are:

- diverting young offenders from entering the youth justice system, or from progressing further into a life of crime
- providing better rehabilitation of high-risk young offenders
- expanding pre-release, transition and post-release support programs for custodial clients to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.¹

The implementation of the reform strategy and its associated initiatives were anticipated to contribute to the following outcomes:

- an increased diversion of 17 to 20-year-old young offenders away from the criminal justice system
- an overall reduction in the number of young offenders held in custody
- greater responsiveness to the rehabilitation of young offenders by providing youth-focused, gender and culturally specific management of young offenders
- a positive response to the drug issue affecting young offenders.²

¹ *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, Ministerial Statement, Minister for Community Services, August 2000, pp. 3 and 18.

² *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*, Ministerial Statement, Minister for Community Services, August 2000, p. 18.

This strategy was introduced over seven years ago and has not been evaluated to determine whether its stated outcomes have been achieved or whether its goals remain relevant. Data on young offenders in custody reviewed by audit indicates that the strategy has been successful in diverting young offenders from custodial sentences. While this strategy has clearly stated goals and outcomes, there are no details regarding:

- who is responsible for the achievement and measurement of the strategy's stated outcomes and objectives
- outcome targets or how outcomes would be measured
- timeframes for the assessment of the initiatives introduced through the reform strategy
- how and when the strategy would be evaluated to determine its ongoing relevance and success.

The audit identified a number of fora across government in relation to youth justice issues, including the Youth Justice Ministerial Roundtable, the Interdepartmental Committee on Children and Youth, the Aboriginal Justice Forum, and the Youth Services, the Youth Justice Branch Advisory Group. Collaboration takes the form of information sharing, providing input into the planning of service initiatives and meeting periodically to monitor and review service delivery. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DoJ) have developed a joint policy framework and action plan for the management of young offenders across the two departments and outlines a joint approach to introduce a range of system improvements including information sharing, research and evaluation, data collection and performance reporting.

However, there is no whole-of-government strategic planning of services to young offenders. This collaboration would be enhanced by the development of a whole-of-government approach to the strategic planning of services to young offenders that included Victoria Police, courts and other agencies providing services to young offenders that clearly states the:

- roles, responsibilities and initiatives of the key government agencies involved in service planning and delivery
- performance measures and outcomes that reflect the government's strategic objectives for the provision of services to young offenders.³

³ There should also be consistency with the Government's overall strategic directions as articulated in *Growing Victoria Together* and *a Fairer Victoria*.

3.2.2 Department of Human Services

DHS has a clearly articulated strategic planning framework governing services to young offenders. This comprises three levels of planning, including:

- the Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan
- regional plans for each of the youth justice units
- the Youth Justice Custodial Services plan.

The Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan

The draft Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan, which was released in September 2007, describes how services to young offenders are planned and delivered through youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres. The main features of the strategic plan include:

- clearly defined aims and objectives aligned with the strategic direction articulated in *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria*
- processes to review relevant trends and to identify emerging needs of young offenders, as well as articulating future directions for the program
- engagement of key government agencies and other stakeholders involved in youth justice, such as Victoria Police, DoJ, Aboriginal organisations, the judiciary, the Youth Parole Board, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- the assignment of key outcomes and milestones, against each objective within the strategic plan.

However, the plan does not specify:

- outcome measures and targets that should be linked to key objectives
- how outcomes would be measured and who is responsible for measurement
- performance measures and targets that should be linked to key activities
- when the draft plan will be officially endorsed by DHS management.

Youth justice units

Operational plans for youth justice units specify objectives and outcomes which are linked to Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan. The operational plans of youth justice units describe:

- the role of youth justice units in the delivery of services to young offenders
- the governance structure and assignment of management responsibilities for the delivery of youth services
- performance measures and progressive milestones that are established against key activities and initiatives. However, these performance measures were mainly descriptive and did not specify quantitative or qualitative targets to measure actual performance.

These operational plans could be improved by the development and linkage of:

- outcome measures and targets to key objectives
- quantitative and qualitative performance measures and targets to key activities and initiatives.

Youth justice custodial centres

The three-year *Youth Justice Custodial Services Plan* is a document describing the delivery of services in youth justice custodial centres. The plan articulates aims and objectives that are aligned with the strategic direction of the Youth Services and Youth Justice strategic plan.

While these plans specify performance measures, they are limited to statements of activities, and there are some quantitative measures. There are no qualitative measures of performance. Importantly, there are no measures of client outcomes or measures that demonstrate the effectiveness of initiatives introduced to improve services despite these areas being identified as priorities.

Conclusion

Overall, the youth justice strategic planning is linked to the government's Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy and has clearly articulated aims, objectives and outcomes for young offenders. These underpin the planning for youth justice units and youth justice custodial centres.

At the time of the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy's introduction, over seven years ago, the government stated that the achievements of the strategy would be evaluated and reported to the community. This has not occurred.

In the strategic planning for the delivery of services to young offenders there are a number of areas for improvement, including the need to develop:

- outcome measures and targets linked to key youth justice objectives
- performance measures and targets that link to key strategic and operational activities and initiatives for juvenile justice.

Recognising the need to measure outcomes achieved by individual youth justice programs, DHS has recently commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to advise on the development of appropriate outcomes-based measures for the youth justice system.

Recommendation

- 3.1 DHS should review the Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy to determine its relevance and the extent to which its objectives and outcomes have been achieved.

3.2.3 Magistrates' Court of Victoria

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

DoJ and the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (MCV) work together in the planning of the Criminal Justice Diversion Program (CJDP), with MCV delivering the diversion program to young offenders.

CJDP is reflected in MCV's strategic and business planning processes and details the program's:

- operational aims, objectives and outcomes
- major initiatives to support its delivery
- governance structure which includes reporting arrangements to DoJ and MCV
- monitoring of performance against output targets and program initiatives
- process to review trends and emerging issues.

At the local court level, action plans include details about CJDP, its objectives, key local initiatives, expected outcomes and staff responsible for its delivery.

MCV's strategic plan for 2005–2008 and court action plans refer to offenders generally, and limited references are made to young offenders specifically. Given that young offenders make up around 15 to 20 per cent of all CJDP clients, these plans should detail initiatives targeted at young offenders.

Conclusion

MCV's strategic planning documents should clearly describe diversion services and initiatives aimed at helping prevent young offenders from progressing through the justice system.
