



Minister's Office  
Castle Buildings Block B  
Stormont Estate  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast  
BT4 3SG

Christine Darrah  
Clerk to the Committee for Justice  
Room 242  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast BT4 3XX

3 February 2022

Dear Christine,

## **YOUTH JUSTICE AGENCY 2022-25 DRAFT BUDGET**

Thank you for your letter of 28 January. The Committee's letter raises three issues – CAMHS, energy costs and the costs of early intervention – and we'll cover each in turn.

### CAMHS

For a number of years, the Youth Justice Agency has commissioned and funded in-reach Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) within the Juvenile Justice Centre at an annual cost of £138,000 (2021/22 figures). It is our intention to protect these services, as far as possible, from the impact of the draft budget for 2022-25.

Unfortunately, this may not be the case for community-based CAMHS. To address a gap in service provision for young people in the justice system, the Youth Justice Agency, along with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, co-funded a dedicated communitybased CAMHS service on a pilot basis beginning in March 2019. This was welcomed by the cross-Government and cross-sectoral Children and Young People's

Strategic Partnership as an innovative approach to working effectively across agencies to deliver better outcomes for children.

Given the success of this pilot, YJA entered into a similar service in the Western HSC Trust area in October 2021. The cost to YJA of these two services in 2021/22 is £55,000 (representing 50% of the total cost of these services). It had been our hope to continue to extend this service to the other three YJA area teams over the next three years. Given the draft budget, maintaining the service in the existing two areas will be difficult and extending the pilot to the other areas very unlikely.

In the two existing pilot areas, the service centres around a mental health practitioner dedicated to working with young people involved with youth justice, providing direct services to children, links to Trust services and direct engagement with YJA staff, building their knowledge, skills and confidence in dealing with the mental health needs of children.

The results have been remarkable with this previously hard to reach population. 63% of young people screened by YJA have historically been referred to 'core' CAMHS services funded solely by Trusts. Getting timely appointments and maintaining engagement was difficult and typically 60% of young people referred to core CAMHS dropped out of the service with only 14% completing the course with aim achieved. This compares to a drop-out rate of 12% from the dedicated YJA service with 88% completing the course with aim achieved.

Young people involved with YJA are 22 times more likely to present in mental health crisis than the general population. The early and proactive approach in the YJA CAMHS service has been instrumental in reducing, over time, the need for crisis interventions. In the first six months of the pilot, 12 young people were referred by YJA to the Southern HSC Trust's Assessment Crisis Team (ACT). In the same six months the following year, no young people were referred to ACT.

Two YJA staff best summarised the impact of the pilot on young people when they said “the pilot has been an amazing way to reach those unreachable young people who don’t have the capacity or ability to deal with ‘office based’ appointments” and “my young people have been able to access the service that they would never have engaged with prior to the pilot.”

### Energy costs

Based on the current confirmed price increases for gas and electricity, the Agency’s energy costs are expected to rise by approximately £175,000 (64%). However, additional price rises are expected to be announced for 2022, and it is likely that this pressure will increase further.

### Costs of early intervention

The Committee has asked for a case study to show the costs of early intervention compared to the costs incurred later when the intervention has not taken place.

There are always methodological challenges with demonstrating the impact of early intervention because it is difficult to say for certain what would have happened had the intervention not taken place and to calculate the costs avoided for a range of public services. For these reasons we do not have a readily available broad-based case study of the type the Committee might have hoped to see. What we can offer though is a more limited case study taking one example. This illustrative example involves a young person who used the pilot community-based YJA CAMHS service. We have appended it to this letter.

Overall, we know that the number of young people in custody or referred by the Court or PPS for a statutory intervention through YJA has fallen over the last number of years as the number and range of YJA earlier stage diversion interventions has increased. However, we do not have robust evidence to demonstrate categorically that the two trends are directly correlated (although we strongly suspect they are and this view is supported by over 90% of both parents and children who tell us, post-intervention, that it

would help avoid further offending). We know that Health and Education have also been funding more early intervention work over the last five years and the relative impact of this on reducing youth offending is not known.

The Committee may be interested in the wider research literature that covers the benefits of early intervention across a range of public services and the cost of late intervention. The most directly relevant is “The Cost of Late Intervention in Northern Ireland” (May 2018) by Peter Fitzsimons and William Teager, published by the Early Intervention Foundation. It estimates the annual short-run cost to the public sector of late intervention in Northern Ireland at £536 million per year. This covers a range of services and not solely Justice. It also notes some of the methodological challenges in identifying costs and causality (i.e. which early services reduce the need for intervention later) which face all such studies.

I trust that you will find this response helpful.

Best Regards,

**CLAIRE MCCORMICK DALO**

**Encl: Appendix A - YJA case study**

**Appendix A – YJA case study**

**Situation**

Young person (14) was on remand in Woodlands JJC and was the alleged perpetrator in a serious incident. The young person had long-standing behavioural difficulties at school and problems with relationships. They had poor sleep and sensory difficulties.

The young person had had three previous referrals to ‘core’ CAMHS (i.e. Trust run) but had disengaged and so had been discharged each time without completing the course.

### What YJA did

Through the YJA-Trust co-funded CAMHS service, the young person was seen within 10 days of her release from Woodlands.

With the support of her YJA worker, the young person attended CAMHS appointments.

These interventions identified social and communication difficulties and traits of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Assessment for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD were initiated.

### Impact of YJA intervention

Young person was diagnosed with ASD and ADHD and started on ADHD medication. She also attended ASD services.

Understanding of ASD has changed the parents' attitude and approach to the young person's behaviour. This has improved relationships. Mother describes relief following diagnosis.

Information was shared with Education and the young person now has a statement of special educational needs.

The young person has stopped offending.

### Imputed savings

It is difficult to impute savings with any degree of accuracy and the material below has been supplied for illustrative purposes.

The young person had previously spent time in Woodlands JJC on remand. Assuming she had re-offended in a way similar to the initial offence, it is likely that she could have returned to Woodlands on remand. The annual cost of a place in Woodlands is £253,608.

Assuming she spent 2 months on remand, the cost would have been £42,268. She may then have received a community sentence involving a youth justice conference. The cost of this to YJA is around £6,000. That gives a total indicative cost to YJA of one further offence of **£48,268**. This does not include the costs to other Justice services (PSNI, PPS, legal aid and the Court) or to other public services. Nor does it consider the longer-term costs to the individual and other public services had further offending taken place

