Government launches review of YOTs

By Neil Puffett

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A review of how youth offending teams (YOT) work will be held by the Ministry of Justice, the government has announced.

Youth justice minister Andrew Selous said the review will look at how YOTs meet the needs of young people

Appearing in a pre-recorded video address to the annual Youth Justice Convention, being held in Telford, youth justice minister Andrew Selous said the "stocktake" exercise is an "area of vital activity".

"If we are to make significant and sustainable improvements in outcomes for the young people we work with, the services we deliver must continue to evolve," he said.

"The number of young people in the youth justice system has fallen and your efforts and professionalism have played a key role in this success.

"But this presents new challenges in how YOTs and partners in the wider system respond to these young people."

Selous said that while YOTs have achieved "an enormous amount" and have provided a blueprint for effective partnership working, they have themselves changed since their introduction in 2000.
Appendix 1

He said: "The model is not one set in stone. We have seen local areas realising the YOT model in a wide range of ways.

"Some are taking on even greater responsibilities such as driving the troubled families programme while others have merged with neighbouring YOTs to reinvent how they deliver their services.

"It's for these reasons I believe now is the right time to take stock of how the YOT model is working and consider how best to ensure that local areas are able to tackle as effectively as possible the challenge posed by today's young offenders."

Selous said MoJ officials are working closely with the YJB on the review, and has written to chief executives of local authorities about it. He said the participation of YOTs is "absolutely critical" to the success of the work.

A CYP Now survey conducted in 2012, found that half of YOTs were run by managers with additional responsibility for services over and above youth justice.

As a result of ongoing funding cuts many YOTs have adapted the way they work to protect services.

Some have merged with other areas, some have introduced collaborative models of working, while others, such as Gloucestershire, have opted for privatisation.

Answering questions during a panel debate following Selous's address, MoJ official Paul Candler, deputy director of the youth justice policy unit, refuted suggestions that the review was "about privatisation".

"There is no secret plan in the MoJ about YOTs," he said. "It is about a stock take – getting information. What happens with that information I can't say.

"The alternative is not having the information ministers need about the performance of the youth offending system."

During his video address, Selous also emphasised the government's desire to take a "holistic approach" to ensure young people get the right start in life.

"Without the protection and support of a positive family network, the chances for children to succeed are significantly reduced," he said.

"That is why the government is continuing to do all it can to nurture and strengthen families."

He said a particular challenge for government is the impact of parental imprisonment on children, where "63 per cent of boys with a convicted father go on to be convicted themselves".

"We need to break this generational cycle of offending and I am overseeing work within government to improve support for these children and their families," he added.

Selous said next month he will be participating in a prison governors conference to consider
how positive family relationships can support desistance and reduce intergenerational crime, as well as what prisons can do to improve the services on offer to the families of prisoners.

The Labour Party has previously indicated its desire to take action on the issue of parental imprisonment, with Shadow Justice Secretary Sadiq Khan pledging to assess the scale of the issue should the party win the next general election.

- See more at: http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1148224/yot-stocktake-assess-services-evolve#sthash.41okwddI.dpuf