



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee

Senedd Cymru

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1SN

13 September 2024

Dear Jenny Rathbone MS,

Thank you to the committee for your continued interest in supporting young people with speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system, following the publication of the '60% Giving them a Voice' report in April 2023. Please see below an update from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) on this issue.

This briefing;

- provides a short summary on the latest statistics on the speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) of young people within the youth justice system
- provides an update on the current position of the provision of the speech and language therapy within youth justice services in Wales
- discusses findings from HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) reports
- provides an update on discussions with Welsh Government
- suggests several key asks

We are also sharing this report with the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee as part of its inquiry on Children and Young People on the Margins.

As the briefing reveals, despite clear evidence of the overrepresentation of young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) within the criminal justice system, there remains

a postcode lottery of speech and language therapy provision within youth justice services in Wales and limited action from Welsh Government. We would be extremely grateful for the committee’s continued support in advocating for our most vulnerable young people.

Background

In the latest available statistics, 71% of children sentenced in the youth justice system in England and Wales (Apr 19 - Mar 20) had speech, language & communication needs¹.

At the most established speech and language therapy youth justice team in Wales at Neath Port Talbot and Swansea (which gave evidence before the committee in December 2022), the 2023-2024 annual service report revealed that 89% of the young people within the service have been identified with SLCN.

Update on speech and language therapy provision within youth justice services

Speech, language and communication need is mentioned in the foreword of the Youth Justice Board Strategic Plan 24-27. The plan notes the high level of need quoting the 71% statistic alluded to above². The table below highlights that whilst there has been an increase in the number of speech and language therapists employed within youth justice services since the inquiry, there continues to be no speech and language therapist posts funded by youth justice services in North Wales. Many of the newer posts in other parts of Wales have been funded on a fixed term basis via Turnaround Programme funding from the Ministry of Justice. This funding is due to end in March 2025 and no further funding stream has yet been announced.

| Youth justice service | Whole time equivalent (wte) speech and language therapists (SLTs) in December 2022 at time of Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee inquiry | Whole time equivalent (wte) SLTs as of July 2024 | Contract and Funding |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly | 0.4 WTE | 0.4 WTE | Annual service level agreement (Permanent NHS SLT employee covering this, backfilled by SLT on a fixed term contract) |
| Bridgend | 0.2 WTE Band 8A via | 0.4 WTE | 3 year contract (permanent staff) |

^{1 1} Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice (2021): ‘Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System 2019/20

² Ibid

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| | service level agreement | | member seconded into post) |
| Cardiff | 0 | 1 WTE | Substantive post; long-term funding from youth justice service (YJS). |
| Carmarthenshire | 0 | 0.6 WTE | Fixed term contract funded for 18 months |
| Ceredigion | 0 | 0 | |
| Conwy and Denbighshire | 0 | 0 | |
| Cwm Taf (Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf) | 0.4 Band 8a via service level agreement | 0.4 + 0.2 | 0.4 WTE – funded for 3 years (permanent staff member seconded into post) 0.2 WTE from Turnaround Programme funding |
| Flintshire | 0 | 0 | |
| Gwynedd and Ynys Môn | 0 | 0 | |
| Monmouthshire and Torfaen | 0.2 WTE | 0.2. WTE | Annual service level agreement (Permanent NHS SLT employee covering this, backfilled by SLT on a fixed term contract) |
| Newport | 0.4 WTE | 0.6 WTE + 0.2 Pupil Referral Unit | 18 month service level agreement. Of the 0.6 WTE in the YJS, 0.2 is from Turnaround Programme funding. Employment is fixed term based on the service level agreement. |
| Pembrokeshire | 0 | 0 | |
| Powys | 0 | 0 | |
| Swansea and Neath Port Talbot (NPT) (incl Hillside Secure Home) (combined arrangements) | 0.7 WTE 0.7 WTE | 1.91 WTE SLT 1 WTE SLT - Technical Instructor | 3 year service level agreement with NPT YJS and Hillside. Commitment made to secure SLTs. Majority funding from NPT YJS is core budget, with additional grant elements. |
| Vale of Glamorgan | 0 | 0 | |
| Wrexham | 0 | 0 | |

Inspection reports

We have reviewed recent youth justice inspection reports and youth justice plans in Wales. It is clear that HMIP actively considers speech, language and communication provision as part of the inspections regime despite it being a non-statutory requirement for youth justice teams. Services which employ speech and language therapists such as Carmarthenshire and Newport are commended. Conversely, those that do not provide speech, language and communication provision are criticised within reports. Access to speech language and communication support for children

was a theme across recent inspection reports from Conwy and Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn and Flintshire. All three youth justice partnerships had direct recommendations to address the gap in speech, language, and communication provision for children and ensure that services are provided which assess and respond to children's communication needs.

Update on Welsh Government discussions

Despite our disappointment at Welsh Government's rejection of the key recommendation within the 2023 '60% Giving Them a Voice' report to embed speech and language therapists within every Youth Justice Service in Wales, we have continued to engage with civil servants in this area. We were pleased to support the Welsh Government Youth Justice summit in January 2024. The summit, as recommended by the committee, brought together stakeholders working in youth justice to improve support for young people with speech, language and communication needs. The summit was a productive forum to discuss key barriers and was very well-attended. However, despite a number of enquiries, we have yet to see a post-event report or feedback on further actions. Our request to meet with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to discuss next steps was declined. We plan to write to the new Cabinet Secretary shortly.

There has been limited progress in terms of other report recommendations around improving awareness and early identification of SLCN by specialists working in frontline services, particularly schools. We were pleased that the recent Welsh Government guidance on school attendance included a section on SLCN and highlighted the necessity to have clear systems in place to ensure children develop their speech and language skills to their full potential. It is also positive that a speech and language therapist has been commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake interviews with school staff around the link between exclusions and SLCN.

We also welcome recent early intervention initiatives being trialled within youth justice services in Neath Port Talbot and Cardiff. The model is based on a project which has been in place within Milton Keynes Youth Justice Service since 2019 whereby the Speech and Language Therapists offer comprehensive assessments of the SLCN of the pupils identified as being at risk of exclusion, produce reports summarising any identified needs and suggest recommendations and resources to support this pupil. Training, if required, is then offered to schools to upskill education staff in how best to support the communication needs of the pupil. Initially, a small number of secondary schools in Cardiff and Neath Port Talbot have been identified as a pilot for this project with the aim of the project being upscaled if successful. We are anticipating that a high proportion of the pupils assessed will present with SLCN as in April 2021-April 2022, Milton Keynes Youth Justice Service PRRE project identified that 96% of the pupils assessed within the project had SLCN.

Key asks for the Senedd Equality and Social Justice and Children, Young People and Education Committee

- Continue to call for dedicated speech and language therapists to be embedded within youth justice services across as per the recommendations in the '60% Giving Them a Voice' report.
- Write to the Ministry of Justice for an update on Turnaround Programme funding post March 2025 and whether future funding streams will prioritise speech and language therapy.

We would be happy to discuss this briefing further. Please contact Caroline Walters on caroline.walters@rcslt.org, External Affairs Manager (Wales) or myself on philippa.cotterill@rcslt.org

Yours sincerely.



Pippa Cotterill

Head of Wales Office

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

cc. Buffy Williams MS, Chair, Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee