

Zoe Davies looks at some recent developments in criminal justice.

Quiet scrapping of the respect taskforce

The quiet scrapping of the Respect Taskforce and the creation of a new Youth Taskforce in the Department of Children, Families and Schools has gone mainly unnoticed and unreported on.

In October, the Department for Children, Schools and Families announced that the Respect Taskforce would be replaced by a new Youth Taskforce. The Taskforce, to be headed by Anne Weinstock who was previously responsible for establishing the Connexions Service and has been director of the supporting children and young people group since 2003, will be the delivery arm of the government's ten-year strategy, Aiming High for young people. It will focus on delivering 'positive outcomes' for this group with a focus on prevention, and will sit within the Young People's Directorate.

Anne Weinstock said: 'With support from government, community and parents, young people will have an opportunity to give, and get respect from our communities.'

Meanwhile, a cross-departmental review on how best to engage communities in the fight against crime has been commissioned by the government. The work will be led by Louise Casey, who previously led the Respect Taskforce and will

report its findings to a new ministerial group.

PM announces consultation on Bill of Rights

In a speech delivered to human rights group Liberty at the University of Westminster, Gordon Brown announced the start of a national consultation on a Bill of Rights to run alongside, rather than replace, the Human Rights Act and which will reform the constitution.

The speech, which was mostly concerned with praising the historical human rights record and tradition of liberty in England, went on to describe how the Prime Minister wanted to "entrench and enhance" individual freedoms while also detailing the responsibilities "that flow from British citizenship".

The consultation will be headed up by Jack Straw who is launching three documents; the first is concerned with lifting restrictions on protests near parliament, the second with changes to the way judges are appointed and the third with giving MPs the final say on sending troops to war.

New PSA targets published in the comprehensive spending review

The Labour government's fifth comprehensive spending review was published in October 2007 and included new Public Service

Agreement (PSA) targets agreed by each government department with the Treasury. PSAs are the most important outcomes the government wants to achieve in the next spending period (2008–2011). Those relating to criminal justice are detailed in Table 1.

Developments in youth justice

The past few months have seen various developments in the field of youth justice and below are details of some of the more striking ones.

UK young offender institutions 'hotbeds of violence'

Figures have been published by the Howard League for Penal reform, detailing the number of assaults that occur in young offender institutions (YOI). The total number of assaults occurring during the period 2003–2006 was 18,331, with Feltham YOI revealed as the most violent young offender institution, witnessing 2702 assaults in the same period, equating to just under two and a half assaults per day.

'Baton age limit may be lowered'

In late October 2007, the government announced that it would be reviewing the ban on the use of batons by prison officers on those under the age of 18. Currently, officers are not allowed to use them on children in the secure es-

tate, but Glyn Travis, assistant general secretary of the Prison Officers Association (POA), has claimed that batons are needed for officers to protect themselves against violent children. He said that 'there is a serious violent problem within the criminal justice system and we believe it's out of control.'

Martin Narey, chief executive of Barnardos and former director general of the prison service, said the use of batons on children would 'promote a sense of deep mistrust and suspicion' and added that children in custody should be rehabilitated by '... treating child prisoners firmly but with dignity, by educating them and making them employable, not by beating them with truncheons.'

Interim chair of the youth justice board, Graham Robb, was less impassioned in his response, but admitted that he was 'yet to be convinced' that using batons on children would make prison officers jobs easier, and that 'research shows that where staff work hard at engaging with young people there is a reduction in aggression. This is the best way for young people to learn not to use violence.'

Appeal victory for boy of 15 with an indeterminate sentence

The court of appeal has on 27 November 2007 overturned an indeterminate

sentence for public protection (IPP) given to a 15 year old boy for three counts of robbery. The court stated that the correct assessment for 'dangerousness' had not been undertaken in regard to the boy, and that the sentencing court had applied the rules set down for adults, which assumed dan-

gerousness. The boy's sentence was quashed, and he received a three and a half year fixed term sentence. Frances Crook, Director of the Howard League for Prison Reform, said:

This case emphasises the need for sentencers to be aware of the

rights of children, with good quality and rigorous legal representation in place for children in court. Where children are considered dangerous, the law says that the judge should also properly consider whether an extended sentence would be sufficient be-

fore imposing an indeterminate sentence for public protection

This section was compiled by **Zoe Davies**, Research and Policy Associate at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

Table 1: PSA targets relating to criminal justice

PSA target 14: Increase the number of children and young people on the path to success

Lead department: The Department for Children, Schools and Families

Indicators Reduce the number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10–17. A first-time entrant is defined as a young person who receives their first reprimand, final warning or conviction at the age of 10–17. The baseline year is 2006/2007.

PSA target 16: Increase the proportion of socially excluded adults in settled accommodation and employment, education or training

Lead department: Cabinet Office

Indicators Proportion of offenders aged 18 and over, under probation supervision living in settled and suitable accommodation at the end of their order or licence.

Settled accommodation is defined as: permanent, independent housing; bail/probation hostel; and supported housing. Suitable accommodation refers to the suitability of accommodation in terms of quality of residence, appropriateness of living arrangements, overcrowding, and relationships with rest of household, as well as suitability of the location of the accommodation.

The baseline is 77% (2006/07). The minimum level of change required for performance improvement is 0.4%.

Proportion of offenders aged 18 and over under probation supervision in employment at the end of their order or licence.

Employment includes those in full-time employed or self-employed (30 hours or more a week, on average) and part-time employed or self-employed (less than 30 hours a week, on average).

The baseline is 35 per cent (2006–2007). The minimum level of change required for performance improvement is 0.5%.

PSA target 23: Make communities safer

Lead department: Home Office

For full information and definitions see 'PSA Delivery Agreement 23: Make communities safer' at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/3/D/pbr_csr07_psa23.pdf

Indicators Reduce the level of most serious violence, including tackling serious sexual offences and domestic violence.

Reduce the level of serious acquisitive crimes by continuing to make progress on serious acquisitive crime through a focus on the issues greatest priority in each locality and the most harmful offenders – particularly drug misusing offenders.

Public confidence in local agencies involved in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.

Percentage of people perceiving anti-social behaviour as a problem.

Level of proven 're-offending' by young and adult offenders.

The success criteria is for both adult and youth 're-offending' to be reduced between 2004 and 2011.

Unlike previous 're-offending' targets there is no proportionate reduction specified.

Level of serious re-offending.

Again the success criteria is for serious 're-offending' to be reduced between 2004 and 2011.

PSA target 24: Deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public

Lead department: Ministry of Justice

For full information and definitions, see 'PSA Delivery Agreement 24: Deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive Criminal Justice System for victims and the public' at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/5/C/pbr_csr07_psa24.pdf

Indicators Effectiveness and efficiency of the CJS in bringing offences to justice.

Offences brought to justice will be measured as a rate of recorded crime and performance will be broken down by offence type and segmented into serious violent and sexual crime, serious acquisitive crime, and other recorded crime. Details of how this target will be measured are yet to be worked out.

Public confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the CJS.

This is measured through questions in the British Crime Survey and at the local level by indicators to be developed with Local Criminal Justice Boards.

Victim and witness satisfaction with the CJS and the police.

This target will be measured based on the outcome of police force user satisfaction surveys and the outcome of the Witness and Victim Experience Survey.

Understanding and addressing race disproportionality at key stages in the CJS

Recovery of criminal assets. The target is to increase the quantity of criminal assets recovered. The target will be achieved if, by 2009/2010 the value of such assets before expenses is, or exceeds, £250 million.

PSA target 25: Reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs

Lead department: Home Office

For full information, see 'PSA Delivery Agreement 25: Reduce the harm caused by Alcohol and Drugs' available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/A/4/pbr_csr07_psa25.pdf

Indicators Percentage change in the number of drug users recorded as being in effective treatment.

Rate of drug-related offending.

Percentage of the public who perceive drug use or dealing to be a problem in their area.
