



Standing Committee for Youth Justice

'SCYJ says breaking up the YJB is a retrograde step'

Friday, February 24th 2017
For immediate release

SCYJ is disappointed by the Justice Secretary's announcement that the Youth Justice Board (YJB) is to be broken up, believing it to be a retrograde step.

The transfer of all youth custody responsibilities from the YJB to the Ministry of Justice and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, risks the development of an adult-centric and fragmented approach to children who offend. Charlie Taylor's recent review for the government called for a *'integrated, seamless and coordinated'* response to the challenge of reducing offending by children. We agree. This announcement will make this harder.

This is all the more concerning given the increasing levels of violence and solitary confinement in youth custody; now, more than ever, a child-focused approach is needed as the UK's human rights obligations require. Most of the reforms to youth custody in the past fifteen years were led by the YJB; many were resisted at the time by the Prison Service.

Added to this, our adult estate is experiencing a crisis on an unprecedented scale, in response to which government yesterday announced major changes. Our fear is that children's custody will simply be an add-on for an adult prison service, whose attention is bound to be on its own crisis.

The division of community and custodial services amongst three national bodies risks creating further barriers to the effective resettlement of children in trouble.

We are also fearful about the consequence of giving decisions about the placement of children to the Prison and Probation Service. We would welcome

early confirmation about how the new Service will operate.

We welcome, however, the appointment of Charlie Taylor as the new Chair of the YJB. We firmly support the principles asserted in his review, as well as many of its recommendations, and hope that he will have the opportunity to put them into practice. We would encourage an early statement from Taylor regarding the direction in which he will lead the YJB. We remain convinced of the importance of retaining such an expert body, even with the proposed greatly reduced authority in operational matters.

The Standing Committee for Youth Justice (SCYJ) is a coalition of over 40 third sector organisations campaigning for a better youth justice system.

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