

## **Speech by AYM Chair @ House of Lords 20<sup>th</sup> birthday reception 9<sup>th</sup>**

**March 2020.**

My Lords, AYM Members, Life Members and other distinguished guests.

As the Chair of the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers please accept my sincere thanks for coming along this evening to celebrate the AYM's 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. We are truly grateful to Lord Norman Warner and Lord Tom McNally for hosting us in such a fantastic setting and for the support they have both given us over the years.

Alongside Norman and Tom, we are also delighted to welcome all other former Chairs of the Youth Justice Board, Prof Rod Morgan, Frances Done, Charles Pollard and Graham Robb as well as current YJB Chair Charlie Taylor. We think this may be the first time you have all been in the room together at the same time. If so, we take it as an enormous complement and a sign of the constructive relationship we have had with the YJB. We also look forward to working with the new YJB Chair in due course.

We are also grateful to Lucy Frazer MP, the newly appointed Minister for Prisons and Probation which includes responsibility for youth justice for finding the time to attend and look forward to hearing from you.

When a letter from the late Kumar Mehta, YOT Manager from Kent went out to all YOT Managers in 1999 inviting them to form an Association for YOT Managers no one really knew if there was much appetite for it and whether it would thrive. The first meeting took place in March that year in Shropshire and

it is lovely to see AYM Life Member David Stonehouse here who along with Kumar was one of our founding members.

I think it is fair to say it took the first ten years to really get going in a meaningful way. Several AYM Members will remember an AGM at Stratford upon Avon about 10 years ago when there was a good deal of naval gazing to assess as to whether it was worth continuing as we didn't seem to be getting very far and our membership levels had stagnated.

But continue we did and led in particular by the drive and commitment of former AYM Chair Gareth Jones, Head of Cheshire YJS who clocked up countless miles on behalf of the AYM zig zagging the country on his motorbike arriving at meetings clad in motorbike leathers to promote the AYM cause and membership. As a result we eventually began to thrive.

One of things we clearly needed at that time was to give the Association a higher profile so our Treasurer at the time Adrian Quinn from Bristol YOT suggested we held a competition for our members to promote innovative youth justice practice in memory of John Hawkins. John was Adrian's predecessor as AYM Treasurer who had passed away shortly after retiring as Head of East Sussex YOT.

Another AYM Life Member Pete Dennis approached John's family for their support for the Award which they have wholeheartedly given since the off. The Award is presented at the annual Youth Justice Convention and we are privileged that all 3 of John's sons are with us today. I understand that none of

you have followed the same career as your father, but want to say that the award represents the very high regard in which he was held in the youth justice world.

Whilst we'd like every YOT Manager in England to be members of the AYM, over the last 10 years our membership has risen from just over 50% to over 90% so we now speak with increased authority on behalf of YOT Managers. When needed we work closely with our friends YOT Managers Cymru and it is nice to see my welsh counterpart Gill Adams here along with Alun Michael the current Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, who as a Minister was very supportive of YOT.

Over the last few years we have developed fruitful partnerships with the likes of Solace and Andrew Odgers who do a great job of delivering accredited course and training for Aspiring YOT Managers, Achievement for All and the irrepressible Marius Frank who along with the AYM's Phil Sutton have done a great job promoting SEND awards to YOTs across the country. Our latest venture is with Unitas led by Martin Stephenson and the new Youth Justice Institute chaired by Rob Allen both of whom we have known for many years from their time as founding Board members of the YJB.

In terms of current issues, we welcome the significant reduction in young people in custody over the last few years from a high of over 3000 in 2003, to 859 as of last year, but would like it to be even lower. It is important as well to recognise the massive reductions in First Time Entrants from a high of over 100,000 nationally to under 12,000 last year. We believe the work of YOTs has made a

major contribution to this and YOTs will continue to be key players in this regard. We are very concerned about the state of Young Offenders Institutions and Secure Training Centres being reported by the Inspectorate and will watch the opening of the new Secure School at Medway with great interest.

We also stand by to play our part in the forthcoming Royal Commission into Criminal Justice and hope that youth justice is a central issue considered by the Commission, as YOTs have a significant role to play in engaging and preventing young people involved in serious youth violence. We sincerely hope the voice of AYM and YOTs with their knowledge, skill and expertise is heard by the Royal Commission.

We are also using today as an opportunity to launch our paper on YOT governance which arises out of a survey of our members. We're calling on all YOT partner agencies to restate their commitment to working together for the next 20 years.

There is a concern amongst our members that the successful multi agency model of YOTs has been watered down in recent years, and we hope new YJB guidance will help local partners to ensure their local YOT continues to thrive.

Lesley Tregear my predecessor as AYM Chair would often say '*YOTs are the multi-agency success story of the century so far*' so we hope this guidance will help local partners to ensure their YOT continues to thrive.

So please raise your glasses to toast the success of the AYM to date and may it flourish over the next 20 years!