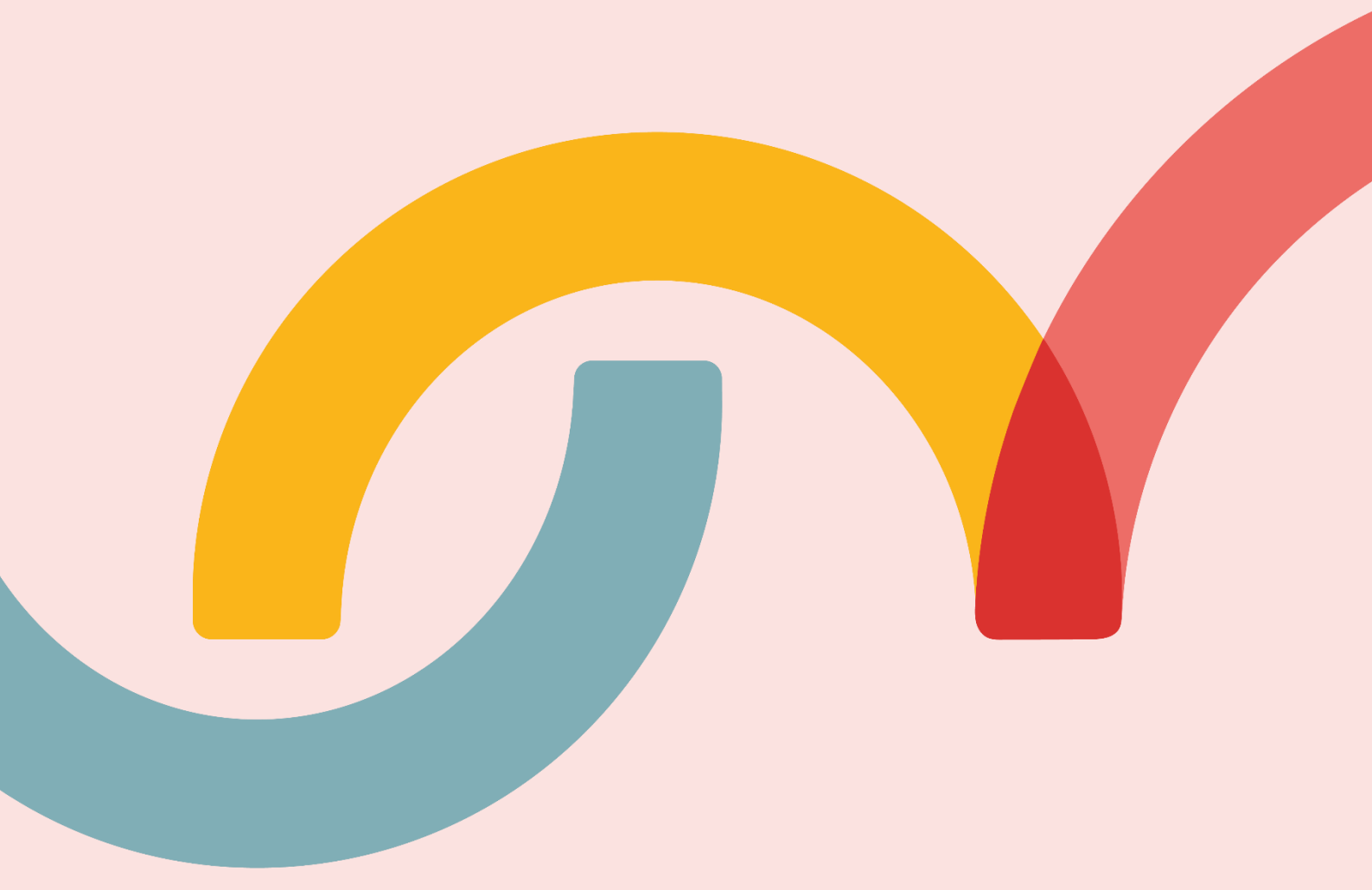


Understanding referral pathways and diversionary support for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales

Exploratory study report

Authors: Dr Jade Farrell, Dr Angela Collins, Kam Kaur, Scarlett Whitford-Webb, and Ashna Devaprasad.

April 2025



About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activity.

And just as important is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together we need to look at the evidence and agree what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it [here](#).

For more information about the YEF or this report please contact:

Youth Endowment Fund
C/O Impetus
10 Queen Street Place
London
EC4R 1AG

www.youthendowmentfund.org.uk

hello@youthendowmentfund.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1185413

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About the research team

Cordis Bright were commissioned to undertake an exploratory study to understand the support and referral pathways available to children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

Cordis Bright (www.cordisbright.co.uk) believes that public sector services can change lives for the better. We collaborate with our clients to deliver improved outcomes for service users and their families. We provide research, evaluation, consultancy and advice aimed at improving public services. Our team has a unique combination of consultancy, research and evaluation skills with previous experience in practice, management, leadership and inspection. Cordis Bright offers a range of research and evaluation services which aim to improve the evidence-base from which public services are delivered.

The research team included Dr Jade Farrell (Project Manager, Senior Consultant), Dr Angela Collins (Principal Consultant), Kam Kaur (Director), Scarlett Whitford-Webb (Consultant) and Ashna Devaprasad (Researcher).

For further information about this study, please contact Dr Jade Farrell at jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk or Dr Angela Collins at angelacollins@cordisbright.co.uk.

Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Term |
|--------------|--|
| ACE | Adverse Childhood Experience |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services |
| CBT | Cognitive Behavioural Therapy |
| CPS | The Crown Prosecution Service |
| CR | Community Resolution |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| EHCP | Education, Health and Care Plan |
| FTE | First Time Entrants |
| JDMF | Joint Decision-Making Panel |
| HMICFRS | HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services |
| HMIP | HM Inspectorate of Probation |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| MoJ | Ministry of Justice |
| MASH | Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub |
| NPCC | National Police Chiefs' Council |
| NFA | No Further Action |
| OOCR | Out-of-Court Resolution |
| OPCC | Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner |
| PDAT | Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool |
| RUI | Released Under Investigation |
| SEND | Special Educational Needs and Disabilities |
| SALT | Speech and Language Therapy |
| VCSE | Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise |
| VRU | Violence Reduction Unit |
| VRP | Violence Reduction Partnership |
| YEF | Youth Endowment Fund |
| YJB | Youth Justice Board |
| YC | Youth Caution |
| YCC | Youth Conditional Caution |
| YJS | Youth Justice Service |

Glossary of Terms

Defining children – when saying ‘children,’ we are referring to children (10-17 years old) that may have been arrested for breaking the law and have been given out-of-court resolutions.

Children and vulnerability – this report takes the lens that all children under the age of 18 and therefore legally a child are considered vulnerable (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024; Davis, 2022). Furthermore, the College of Policing (2024) emphasises that children are a protected group with specific vulnerabilities, highlighting their treatment (while in detention) is governed not only by the domestic legislation but also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1989).

Outcomes

Out-of-Court Resolutions (OOCR) – refers to the different ways of resolving a situation without going to court. OOCRs can be either informal (non-statutory) or formal (statutory) and don’t involve a decision made through a court process (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2025; Youth Justice Board, 2024a). Formal diversions result in a criminal record. Informal diversions do not invoke a criminal record but may be disclosed as police intelligence on DBS checks (Youth Justice Board, 2024a). Most Youth Justice Services (YJSs) have OOCR panels to make joint multi-agency decisions (i.e., through Joint Decision-Making Panels).

Formal OOCR – includes Youth Cautions and Youth Conditional Cautions, which result in formal entry into the youth justice system and a criminal record. Reserved for children who would otherwise face a court sentence.

- **Youth Caution (YC)** – an OOCR requiring an admission of guilt. There is no statutory requirement for YJS intervention on the first YC, but it is best practice to offer voluntary support.
- **Youth Conditional Caution (YCC)** – an OOCR with conditions attached, requiring an admission of guilt. Youth Justice Services (YJS) assess and recommend suitable conditions, which must be achievable within 16 weeks.

Informal OOCR – includes Community Resolution (Outcome 8) and No Further Action (Outcomes 20, 21 or 22) outcomes. These do not result in a criminal record but may appear on enhanced DBS checks.

- **Community Resolution (CR)** – a diversionary outcome used when a child accepts responsibility for a low-level offence. Police should notify YJSs of any CR issued within 24 hours, and joint decision-making is recommended for subsequent CRs.
- **No Further Action (NFA)** – used when police decide not to pursue an offence due to insufficient evidence or it not being in the public interest. Voluntary support may still be offered.

- **Outcome 20 (NFA)** – used where action resulting from a crime has been undertaken by an agency or body other than the police, subject to the victim being made aware of the action being taken.
- **Outcome 21 (NFA)** – used when further investigation, which could provide sufficient evidence for charge, is not in the public interest.
- **Outcome 22 (NFA)** – used when diversionary, educational or intervention activity has been undertaken, and it is not in the public interest to take any further action.
- **Deferred Prosecution/Deferred Caution (Outcome 22)** – a prosecution or caution is deferred while the child undertakes a diversionary activity.

Relevant services and organisations

Youth Justice Services – formerly known as Youth Offending Services, are multi-agency partnerships that work to prevent offending and reoffending behaviour in children, focusing on addressing the underlying causes of their behaviour and supporting them to make positive choices.

Children’s services – a range of services within a Local Authority to meet the needs of children and their families.

Systems of support – the functionality of different services (e.g., schools, social care, youth justice) working individually or together to support children, as opposed to the delivery of a discrete intervention.

Youth Justice Board (YJB) – a non-departmental public body responsible for overseeing the youth justice system in England and Wales, sponsored by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

College of Policing – a professional non-departmental public body for policing in England and Wales, supporting officers, police staff and volunteers to deliver the best service to the public.

National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) – brings UK police leaders together to set strategy and drive progress for the public through coordination, collaboration and communication.

Guidance documents and national frameworks

Crime Outcomes Reporting Framework – a system for categorising and reporting police investigation outcomes in England and Wales to improve transparency.

Child Gravity Matrix – a triage tool to assist decision makers in relation to children and young people to assess the severity of a child’s offence by considering aggravating and mitigating factors. It promotes fair, consistent responses and encourages early intervention and diversion where appropriate.

Case Management Guidance – a framework for police officers and YJSs to decide on appropriate outcomes for children who offend, including joint decision-making processes for OOCRs.

Child First Framework – a framework, guide and checklist, supporting the YJB’s vision for a child first youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society.

Nationally-funded programmes

Turnaround Programme – an MoJ funded programme (£56.5 million) for YJSs, which started in December 2022 and originally ending in March 2025. In January 2025, MoJ extended funding for an additional year, until March 2026.

Child and Young Persons Policing Strategy 2024-2027 – a strategy, developed by the NPCC, to improve policing for children by focusing on prevention, early intervention, and safeguarding. Including a best practice framework for child-centred policing.

National Vulnerability Action Plan – a framework, developed by the College of Policing and the NPCC, to enhance the policing response to vulnerability by unifying efforts across police forces and identifying gaps.

Executive summary

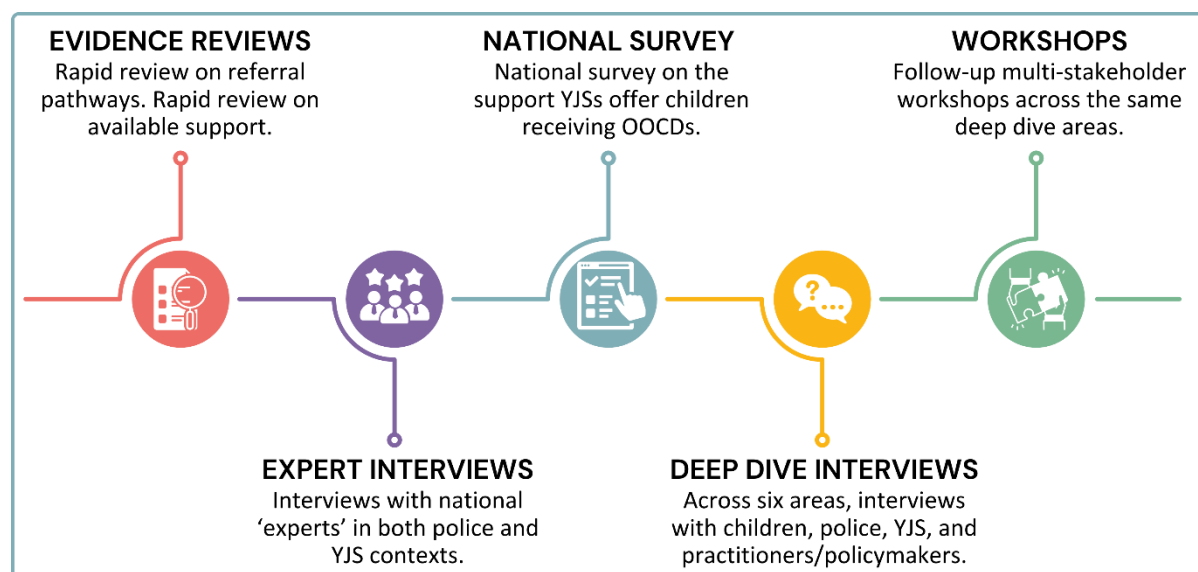
The project

This exploratory study aimed to examine police safeguarding practices, referral pathways, multi-agency collaboration, and diversionary support provided by Youth Justice Services (YJSs) and other agencies for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

Defining children - For the purpose of this report, when saying ‘children,’ we are referring to children (10-17 years old) that are considered vulnerable (Davis, 2022) and have been given an Out-of-Court Resolution (OOCR). These children may have been arrested in the course of this process. They can be either informal (non-statutory) or formal (statutory) and don’t involve a decision made through a court process (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2025; Youth Justice Board (YJB), 2024a).

This project included a four-phase, mixed method approach to understand ‘breadth’ of practice through national insights, as well as ‘depth’ through deep dive insights across a number of local contexts. Figure 1 highlights the five methodological approaches employed.

Figure 1. Method overview



Data analyses were conducted iteratively, drawing on multiple sources and using a coding framework. This approach ensured emerging themes captured the realities of practice and what challenges persist for local areas, across both referral pathways and support.

Key findings

Findings from this study highlighted key strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement across four discreet stages of a child’s involvement in the youth justice system, as highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of key study findings

| Research questions | Summary findings |
|---|--|
| Referral pathways | |
| How well do the police act to safeguard vulnerable children they arrest? | Findings from the deep dive sites show that police's safeguarding practices for children suspected of committing an offence and given an OOCR can vary widely. Some officers apply child first principles effectively, but this is inconsistent, especially among frontline staff. There are concerns about missed safeguarding opportunities due to limited access to children's health and education records at the point of arrest. |
| What awareness do the police have of the available referral pathways and services, and do they use them? | Survey findings indicate that while police are generally aware of referral pathways, awareness varies depending on officer training, experience and staff movement. 86.2% (n=100) of YJSs survey respondents mentioned having a dedicated officer to support them with referral processes. This was mentioned in all the deep dive sites. This mechanism helps streamline referral pathways for children. |
| What are the barriers and challenges to safeguarding children? | There are gaps in officers' ability to identify children's neurodiversity and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in custody. This challenge is exacerbated by not having prior information about the child's needs (especially for some children not yet diagnosed) and challenges accessing data from healthcare services. This means officers often do not know if the child has additional needs and may require information to be shared in an alternative way. There are delays in referrals for children under investigation, typically due to bottleneck of demand for digital and forensic teams. While Turnaround is supporting many of these children, some miss out on timely support. |
| Are the police aware of the National Vulnerability Action Plan and is it having an impact on practice? | Awareness of the National Vulnerability Action Plan is mixed. While senior officers demonstrate familiarity with this policy, frontline staff awareness and application of its principles remain inconsistent across areas. |
| What support is available for children? What are the eligibility criteria? How are children referred to them? | Children can access YJS services, Turnaround, mental health support (e.g. Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)) and external support (e.g. Barnardo's, local mentoring schemes etc.). Often, YJSs look at onwards referrals as part of the safe exit criteria when internal support for a child is ending. However, the |

| Research questions | Summary findings |
|---|--|
| | breadth of opportunities for children is inconsistent across the country, with some rural areas having less opportunities compared to their urban counterparts. With the exception of Turnaround, YJSs did not specify there being eligibility criteria for interventions, given the package of support for each child is bespoke. YJSs can refer children to additional services during the support period. |
| How do the police, children's services, schools and community organisations collaborate and share information to best support children? | Collaboration is strongest between YJSs, children's services and police, typically due to co-located services or formal multi-agency case reviews (e.g., Redbrooke, Glyndale). However, data sharing remains a challenge, particularly regarding access to healthcare and education data for both police and YJS staff. While Stonewood cited education colleagues within the local authority can access attendance records, most other areas highlighted challenges accessing this data from schools when trying to support children (e.g. Foxleigh, Redbrooke). |
| How quickly do children proceed to support after being arrested? How is this impacted by ongoing police investigations? | Many deep dive YJSs cited receiving daily arrest information. Typically, referrals take 2-4 weeks to make their way from arresting officers to the seconded YJS officer and the YJS team. However, inconsistencies exist, particularly in Glyndale, where high police workloads and disagreements among inspectors over OOCR authorisation can cause delays. Children under investigation for long periods of time can also create delays, unless eligible for Turnaround. YJSs typically take 3-4 weeks to complete the initial assessment in preparation for the Joint Decision-Making Panel (JDMP). |
| What structural changes could ensure children diverted from the criminal justice system access timely and effective support? | Structural changes could include expanding and/or formalising mental health provision within YJSs, formalising data sharing protocols with health and education services, and implementing national guidance on multi-agency case formulations. Additionally, developing a formalised custody suite intervention to engage children and reduce 'no comment' interviews may strengthen diversion and early intervention. Encouraging the Home Office to promote Outcome 22 as a positive outcome could further enhance diversionary pathways and reduce unnecessary criminalisation. |
| Support for children | |
| What support is available to children that come into contact with the police | YJSs provide a range of support, including speech and language therapy, mental health interventions, and education support. Survey findings revealed that 84.5% (n=98) of respondents value practitioner experience, |

| Research questions | Summary findings |
|--|--|
| for an offence through their local YJSs and to what extent does the support align to the evidence-base? | while 76.7% (n=89) consider child feedback essential in shaping support. Commonly used evidence sources include statutory guidance, YJB resources, and internal assessments. Despite this, deep dive sites highlighted inconsistencies in how evidence-based practices are monitored and applied by YJS staff. For example, Stonewood partners with local universities to evaluate intervention engagement, whereas Millgate and Glyndale reported limited capacity for formal evaluation. Most YJSs rely on internal monitoring data and practitioner expertise rather than external research, leading to variability in practice and impact assessments. |
| What barriers and challenges do YJSs, and other relevant organisations face in delivering evidence-based support for children that come into contact with the police for an offence? | Barriers include long waiting lists for CAMHS, gaps in specialist provision for neurodiverse children, and resource limitations, particularly in rural areas where access to specialist services is more restricted. Inconsistent cultural competency across services affects how practitioners engage with children and families from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds, often contributing to lower levels of trust and participation in these communities. Deep dive sites highlighted challenges in adapting support to meet children's diverse needs, with some areas lacking practical training and feedback mechanisms to improve cultural responsiveness. These gaps leave children without the targeted interventions they need, further widening inequalities. |
| What changes could made to ensure all children diverted from the criminal justice system can access effective, tailored support? | Key changes include expanding the availability of mental health and SEND or neurodiverse support through embedded mental health practitioners and specialist SEND roles within YJSs. Formalising and improving data sharing agreements, particularly with healthcare services, would ensure that key information is accessible for timely intervention. Embedding trauma-informed practice requires ongoing reflective supervision, practical training for all frontline staff, and a focus on measuring the impact on children's outcomes. Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure YJSs are implementing evidence-based practices. This may include drawing on the new HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection framework to assess how well services align with the current evidence base. To support YJSs in engaging with and adopting evidence-base interventions, the YJB could reinforce support over YJSs, update the Resource Hub with guidance and practice tools. |

Key recommendations

Key recommendations, at both a national and local level have been summarised in Table 2 below. Symbols have been used to highlight the relevant actor at a local level.

Table 2. Summary of national and local recommendations

| National recommendations | Local recommendations |
|--|--|
| Children's interactions with the police | |
| Systemic top-down changes to improve frontline officers use of child first and child-centred approaches. This could include child-centred safeguarding in HM Inspectorate Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspections, and child-centred policing key performance indicators (KPIs) for Chief Constables from the Home Office. | Prioritise alternatives to custody to prevent traumatisation, and enhance support when custody is unavoidable, including child-friendly, co-produced resources and embedded health professionals in all custody settings to support children through this experience. |
| |    |
| The National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) and College of Policing should align safeguarding messaging to emphasise professional curiosity as a key tool for officers, with clear guidance and training on best practice, discretion, and using contextual information to prevent unnecessary criminalisation while maintaining public safety. | A systemic shift is needed to equip officers with training, leadership support, and practical guidance to proactively safeguard children at risk through professional curiosity and child-centred policing. Prioritise training for officers working with children, ensuring regular refreshers to address staff turnover. |
| |  |
| Children referred from the police into local YJS | |
| Establish a national protocol to fast-track investigations by creating dedicated teams to process cases involving children. This would prevent delays and enable timely intervention, particularly for children at risk of exploitation. | Enhance cross-agency communication on referral outcomes to improve referral form quality. Establish a structured feedback loop between YJSs and police, enabling YJSs to update arresting officers on referral outcomes and highlight gaps affecting assessments. This will in turn enhance confidence in the use of Outcome 22. |
| |   |

National recommendations

Review and adapt referral mechanisms to accelerate decision making. Explore improvements to data management systems, potentially supported by artificial intelligence, to enhance efficiency for police, YJS, and children services. For instance, improving the way data is visualised (e.g. through dashboards) so that officers have access to key information (e.g. previous outcomes) to inform referrals and decision-making.

Local recommendations

Have dedicated officers who work collaboratively with seconded YJ officers to advocate for child centred policing across the force and are responsible for improving experiences for children through checking referrals to YJSs (and other services), reviewing custody practices, and streamlining process to expedite investigations. Enhance professional knowledge around identifying neurodiverse and SEND behaviours.



Inter-agency working to support children

Establish a national data sharing framework to standardise practice across agencies. Provide clear policies and example data sharing agreements for each partner agency.

Streamline referral processes across agencies by establishing clear points of contacts with regular touchpoints to maintain engagement and standardised data sharing agreements.





Build on national guidance to promote co-located teams, standardised communication channels, and regular multi-agency meetings to enhance coordination and timely interventions.

Children offered support from local YJS and other agencies

Strengthen YJB oversight, support and consistency in practice through local YJB Oversight Teams to ensure alignment to evidence-based approaches. Enhance YJB Resource Hub with up-to-date research, HMIP thematic inspections, guidance, best practice case studies, and practical tools. Ensure data on diversion – such as the number and demographics of children diverted, the support children receive, length of time from arrest to support, and re-offending rates – is published. Consider nationally rolled out training on embedding child first principles.

Ensure a diverse workforce and train staff on culturally responsive practice. Recognise how cultural perceptions shape service design and engagement and tailor services to meet the needs of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and children with SEND or neurodiversity. To improve community trust in services, invest in community-based interventions to better support at-risk children and families, particularly those from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds.



| National recommendations | Local recommendations |
|--|---|
| Prioritise psychological support for children to meet rising demand. Ensure all YJSs have the funding and capacity to establish clear referral processes and strong partnerships with CAMHS and speech and language providers. | Develop local pathways to fast-track mental health support for (undiagnosed) children, such as prioritising children identified through YJS assessments and improve access for those awaiting diagnosis. Embed speech and language or mental health professionals within all YJS teams to address rising SEND and neurodiversity needs and tackle racial disparities. |
| |   |

Note. The actors responsible for implementing each recommendation in this table are aligned to the symbols. See key below:

| | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|
| KEY | Police | YJS | Wider practitioners | Strategic funders |
| |  |  |  |  |

By implementing these recommendations from both the top-down and bottom-up, stakeholders can work towards a more equitable and effective youth justice system that prioritises children's needs and safeguards their futures.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Children who come into contact with the criminal justice system are some of the most vulnerable in society. Their involvement in offending behaviour often masks significant underlying challenges, including early childhood trauma and ACEs, poor mental health, and experiences of growing up in poverty (Adjei et al., 2025; Clemmow et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2023; Gray et al., 2021; HMIP, 2017; Jahanshahi et al., 2020; Liddle et al., 2016). Despite improvements in recognising vulnerabilities, research indicates that the police and other frontline services continue to miss opportunities to identify and respond to these needs (Barton et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2019; HMIP and HMCFRS 2018). This failure can result in children being criminalised for behaviours that are rooted in complex personal and societal circumstances, rather than being offered the support they need. The Lammy Review (2017) highlighted that Black children in particular were disproportionately drawn into the criminal justice system, often due to a mistrust of authorities, harsher charging decisions, and fewer diversionary opportunities.

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) and the Department for Education (DfE) have commissioned this research as part of their joint serious youth violence research programme, the overarching aim of which is to examine how a child's journey through the different systems of support, and the different qualities of the experiences along the way, serve to protect or expose them to involvement in serious youth violence, as either victim or perpetrator. This research specifically focuses on the role of referral pathways and the support available to children that received an OOCR, highlighting a critical opportunity to intervene and prevent future harm.

Policy and practice context

Timely and effective support for children following an offence is crucial in reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Research suggests that the faster support is provided, the more likely it is to have a positive impact on outcomes for children (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022). However, unclear or unreliable referral pathways can delay access to essential services, such as Youth Justice Services (YJSs), education, health, and voluntary organisations (YEF, 2023). These delays not only reduce the effectiveness of interventions but also increase the risk that children will disengage entirely (Children's Commissioner for England, 2024). Clear, well-structured referral processes are therefore critical in helping children transition from commission of an offence to the right support at the right time.

Out-of-court resolutions (OOCRs) are a key mechanism for diverting children from formal court processes. They can be either informal (non-statutory) or formal (statutory), offering an alternative to court proceedings. Evidence shows that when diversion is coupled with an effective intervention, this can help target the underlying causes of a child's offending

behaviour (Brennan et al, 2018; Choo et al, 2018). However, ensuring these interventions are evidence-based and tailored to the individual needs, strengths, and aspirations of each child remains a major challenge in practice especially when children are being dealt with in an adversarial process.

Local authorities and YJSs play a central role in coordinating this support. Yet, findings from previous research suggest that access to evidence-based interventions varies geographically (Barlow-Pay et al., 2021; Corr et al., 2024). Service leaders often report difficulties in accessing reliable research on effective interventions, while practitioners struggle to gather sufficient information to tailor diversion offers appropriately (Open Innovation Team, 2023). This study seeks to explore challenges in accessing and implementing evidence-based interventions in more depth and identify potential solutions.

Theoretical and scientific background

This study is positioned within the broader policy framework set by the National Vulnerability Action Plan (National Police Chiefs' Council (NCP) and College of Policing, 2020) and the Child-Centred Policing Strategy (NPCC, 2022a), which both aim to improve outcomes for vulnerable children through early intervention, prevention, and partnership working. By examining referral processes and the range of support available to children across multiple agencies, this study aims to contribute to the growing evidence base on how to improve outcomes for children in contact with the youth justice system.

1.2 Approach

This project included a four-phase, mixed method approach to gain national and local insights. With a focus on both the referral process and support available for children, a number of research methods were employed. These included:

- Rapid evidence review on referral pathways
- Rapid evidence review on support for children
- Interviews with 'national experts'¹ across England and Wales
- National survey for all YJSs across England and Wales
- Multi-stakeholder interviews across six deep dive areas, including: YJS staff, police officers, practitioners or policymakers (e.g., Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), education, Early Help), and children with lived experience of the youth justice system.
- Multi-stakeholder follow-up workshops across the same six deep dive areas.

¹ Experts were defined by being individuals in either the police and YJS space with national practical and/or policy-based expertise on ways of working, considering referral pathways and support for children.

1.3 Research questions

The aim of this exploratory study was to examine police safeguarding practices, referral pathways, multi-agency collaboration, and diversionary support provided by YJSs and other agencies for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Table 3 includes the list of research questions explored by this study.

Table 3. Research questions

| Number | Referral pathways research questions |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1 | How well do the police act to safeguard vulnerable children they arrest? |
| 2 | What awareness do the police have of the available referral pathways and services, and do they use them? If not, why not? |
| 3 | What are the barriers and challenges to safeguarding children? |
| 4 | Are the police aware of the National Vulnerability Action Plan and is it having an impact on practice? |
| 5 | What support is available for children as part of the OOCR process? What are the eligibility criteria? How are children referred to them? |
| 6 | How do the police, children services, schools and community organisations collaborate and share information to best support children? |
| 7 | How quickly do children proceed to support after being arrested? How is this impacted by ongoing police investigations? |
| 8 | What structural changes could ensure children diverted from the criminal justice system access timely and effective support? |
| Support research questions | |
| 9 | What support is available to children that come into contact with the police for an offence through their local YJSs and to what extent does the support align to the evidence-base? |
| 10 | What barriers and challenges do YJSs, and other relevant organisations face in delivering evidence-based support for children that come into contact with the police for an offence? |
| 11 | What changes could be made to ensure all children diverted from the criminal justice system can access effective, tailored support? |

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

This study used a mixed methods approach to examine how the youth justice system in England and Wales responds to and supports children. A summary of the methods is provided in Table 4. Data analysis was conducted iteratively, drawing on multiple sources and using a coding framework that was refined over time. This approach helped ensure that emerging themes captured the realities of how referrals are made and how support is delivered in practice.

Table 4. Methods overview

| Research methods | Data collection methods | Participants / data sources | Data analysis method | Research questions ² | Period |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Qualitative | Targeted searches and papers shared by YEF and DfE | 38 papers met inclusion criteria (2013-2024, UK, published in English) | Thematic synthesis | 2, 7, 9, 10 | June 24 |
| Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | 15 'experts', known to YEF and DfE networks | Thematic analysis, | 1-11 | July 24 |
| Quantitative and qualitative | National survey | 116 Youth Justice Services | Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis | 9, 10, 11 | July – Nov 24 |
| Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews | 32 YJS staff, 27 police staff, 30 practitioners and policymakers | Thematic analysis using a structured coding framework | 1-11 | Oct – Dec 24 |
| Qualitative | Journey mapping interviews | 13 children with lived experience of police contact and OOCRs | Thematic analysis of key touchpoints in children's experiences | 1, 5, 7, 9 | Oct – Dec 24 |
| Qualitative | Multi-agency co-production workshops | Police, YJS staff, practitioners or policymakers | Thematic synthesis triangulated with abovementioned data | 1-11 | Dec 24 – Jan 25 |

² Aligning to research questions in Table 3.

2.2 Rapid review approach

2.2.1 Aims and approaches

Two rapid evidence reviews were conducted to identify and synthesise findings from existing literature. The first review looked at referral pathways, including how children are signposted to services after coming into contact with the police for an offence. The second looked at the types of prevention and diversion support available to these children, and the extent to which these are informed by relevant research and evidence-based practice.

2.2.2 Inclusion criteria

Figure 2 shows the key search terms used while identifying relevant literature. However, a flexible approach was taken during the search process to ensure all relevant research findings were captured.

Both reviews used the following inclusion parameters while sourcing literature:

- All sources must have been published in English; and
- Produced in the last 11 years, i.e., 2013-2024; and
- Produced in the UK.

Based on the above criteria, 38 papers were identified – these formed part of the final evidence review guiding the first phase of this study, 19 papers were received from the YEF and DfE. The remaining 19 papers were identified through Google Scholar searches using the keywords in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Search terms for referral pathways

| TERMS | REFERRAL PATHWAYS SEARCH TERMS | SUPPORT SEARCH TERMS |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Primary term | Police | Youth justice FTEs Children Young people or person |
| Secondary term | Arrested Vulnerable OOD | Support systems Interventions |
| Tertiary term | Children Young people or person | Effectiveness Evidence-based |
| Quaternary term | Safeguarding Diversion Informal Formal | Evaluation Informal Formal |

2.3 Expert interviews

2.3.1 Recruitment

YEF and DfE supported the identification of national experts through existing connections.

2.3.2 Data collection

An interview topic guide was developed iteratively with feedback from YEF and DfE, aligning with the research questions listed in research questions in Table 3 (see the full topic guide in Appendix A: Expert Interview Topic Guide). Topics covered policy expectations, enablers and barriers, and systemic issues such as data, inspections, and funding across four key areas: identifying vulnerable children, referrals, inter-agency working, and support for children. Interviews were conducted virtually on Microsoft Teams after verbal consent was obtained. Data was collected through notetaking and subsequently organised in an analysis framework for comparative analysis.

2.3.3 Participants

This resulted in 15 interviews with individuals with expertise in both police and YJS contexts.

2.4 National survey approach

2.4.1 Recruitment

The online survey was distributed to all 155 YJSs in England and Wales to gather national-level data on the types of support provided to children.

The survey was hosted using the online platform SmartSurvey and was live for two months (6 August to 6 October 2024). To maximise engagement, the project team distributed the survey through key networks, including YJB Heads of Regions, Ministry of Justice colleagues, and the Centre for Justice Innovation bulletin. Cordis Bright emailed all YJS contacts, offering personalised follow-ups and alternative participation options, such as phone interviews. Weekly response monitoring helped identify incomplete responses, prompting targeted follow-ups near the deadline to encourage completion.

2.4.2 Data collection

The survey aimed to address gaps in national understanding of the support YJSs provide to children receiving OOCRs, capturing both the range of services and the factors influencing decision-making. Questions were developed iteratively, aligning with the study's research aims and incorporating feedback from YEF, DfE, Centre for Justice Innovation, and YJB. While individual survey responses were confidential, they were linked to the specific area/region of the respective YJS to explore geographic variations in OOCR support. Respondents were also given the option to provide their names and email addresses if they were willing to participate

in deep dive interviews (see section 2.5). The survey was split into seven sections (see Table 5), and contained both closed and open-ended questions to generate quantitative and qualitative insights.

Table 5. National survey question sections and themes

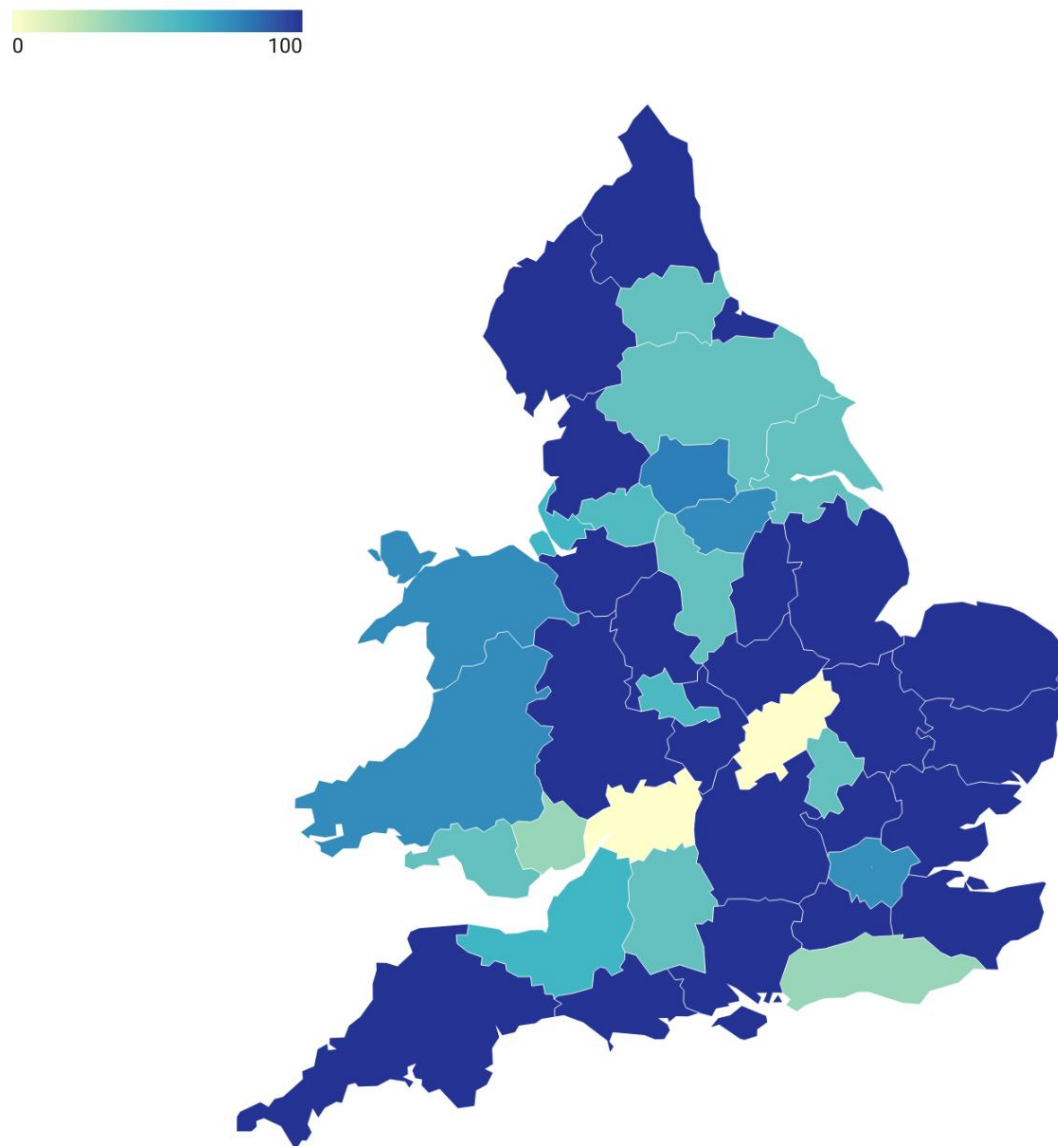
| Section in the survey | Main themes/areas covered | Types of questions |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name of YJS area, respondent's role Types of OOCRs offered and presence of dedicated support for each Presence of a dedicated police officer for diversion scheme Partnership-working between police and YJS Presence and functioning of Joint Decision-Making Panels or alternatives | Multiple-choice (role, outcomes, yes/no). Likert scale ratings. Free text |
| Accessing support from the YJS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature and levels of support for formal and informal OOCR outcomes Time taken for YJS assessment of OOCR referrals Time from OOCR decision to accessing support Mechanisms in place when a child does not engage | Multiple choice (numerical range, time). Free text |
| Types of interventions and decision-making around support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factors considered in tailoring OOCR support Perceptions of and/or reasons for disparities in support for children from minority ethnic groups Specific interventions on offer for children in YJS | Multiple choice (factors, yes/no, intervention types) |
| Alignment of support with evidence base | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether OOCR support available is informed by evidence base Sources informing practice and professional learning | Multiple-choice (alignment level, evidence sources). Free text |
| Enablers and barriers to delivering support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key factors supporting effective delivery Key challenges hindering effective delivery | Multiple choice (enablers and barriers). Free text |
| Recommendations (optional questions) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top three recommendations for improving children's access to and delivery of support | Free text |
| Conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest in follow-up participation or findings Contact details if opted in for future participation Opportunity to attach relevant documents | Yes/no. Free text (with option to upload attachments) |

A full list of questions included in the survey can be found in Appendix B: National Survey Questions.

2.4.3 Participants

74.8% (116/155) of YJSs in England and Wales participated in the national survey. See Figure 3 for YJS coverage stratified by police force in England and Wales (number of YJSs that completed the survey over total number of YJSs within police force area). Table 6 highlights YJS coverage by YJB-defined regions. Additional survey findings can be found in Appendix I: National Survey Findings.

Figure 3. Coverage of police force areas across YJS responses



An interactive map of Figure 3 is available here: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/rks7y/1/>

Table 6: Regional breakdown of responses to national survey

| Region | Number of responses | Total YJSs in this region | % coverage of region | Missing responses | % of missing coverage |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| London | 23 | 31 ³ | 74.2% | 8 | 25.8% |
| South East & South Central | 17 | 19 | 89.5% | 2 | 91.5% |
| Midlands | 14 | 19 | 73.7% | 5 | 26.3% |
| North East & Cumbria | 12 | 13 | 92.3% | 1 | 7.7% |
| North West | 12 | 18 | 66.7% | 6 | 33.3% |
| Wales | 10 | 17 | 58.8% | 7 | 41.2% |
| Yorkshire & Humberside | 10 | 15 | 66.7% | 5 | 33.3% |
| South West | 9 | 13 | 69.2% | 4 | 30.8% |
| East | 9 | 10 | 90.0% | 1 | 10.0% |
| Total | 116 | 155 | 74.8% | 39 | 25.2% |

2.5 Deep dives

2.5.1 Site selection

The selection of the six deep dive sites was conducted in collaboration with the YEF, DfE, and Centre for Justice Innovation. The selection process followed an iterative approach, considering the following factors:

- Geographic location and population diversity – to ensure broad representation across England and Wales,
- Existing contacts – to facilitate faster engagement with potential participants, and
- Current performance – to achieve an unbiased sample, sites were chosen based on a range of inspection outcomes and first time entrants (FTE) rates.

Additionally, YJSs or police forces already involved in YEF research or preparing for an inspection were excluded from consideration, as their capacity to participate would likely have been limited.

Sites were given pseudonyms, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, minimise potential risks to individuals or services and encouraging honest reflections from stakeholders to inform learnings across the system. Identifiable references to all individuals and organisations – including YJSs and police forces – have been removed in this report.

³ Towler Hamlets and City of London are counted as 1 YJS area in our data.

2.5.2 Recruitment

Four key stakeholder groups were identified across the six deep dive sites. These were:

1. YJS staff involved in OOCRs.
2. Police staff across departments.
3. Practitioners and policymaker. This includes children services, Violence Reduction Units, and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) and private sector organisations who receive referrals or commission support for children.
4. Children with lived experience of the police and the youth justice system.

YJS staff

20 virtual in-depth interviews with 32 YJS staff were planned across the deep dive sites. These interviews aimed to explore YJS perspectives on effective practice and areas for improvement in safeguarding and referring children to support. The specific roles of YJS staff recruited for this research are detailed in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Roles of YJS participants

| YJS role | Rationale |
|--|--|
| Head of Service | Can provide strategic oversight of local partnerships, identify barriers and highlight key areas the YJS is working to improve. |
| Operational Lead or Team Leader | Can offer insights into the day-to-day functioning of the YJS and the support offered to children. |
| Caseworkers | Can offer first-hand experience of working with children and processing police referrals. This may include delivering interventions to children. |

Police staff

20 virtual in-depth interviews with police staff were conducted with 27 police staff across the deep dive sites. Due to the close proximity of two deep dive sites, these interviews spanned five police forces. These interviews aimed to gather insights into how police safeguard children and refer them to support services, with a focus on identifying effective practice and areas for improvement. The specific police roles targeted for this research are detailed in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Roles of police participants

| Police role | Rationale |
|--|--|
| Seconded YJS Officer | Receives referrals for children from arresting officers and sergeants. |
| Sergeant overseeing seconded YJS officers | Likely participates in multidisciplinary joint decision-making panels for children. |
| Neighbourhood Officer | Engages with children in everyday interactions, often serving as their first point of contact with the police. |
| Chief Inspector | Provides strategic oversight of local partnerships and key areas the police force is working to improve. |
| Public Protection or Safeguarding Lead | Oversees safeguarding training within their police force. |

Practitioners and policymakers

A total of 26 virtual in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 practitioners and policymakers across the deep dive sites. These interviews explored police referral practices, the speed of referral processing, and the availability of tailored support for children. Specific roles of interviewed stakeholders and policymakers are detailed in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Roles of practitioner or policymaker participants

| Practitioner or policymaker role | Rationale |
|---|--|
| Early Help or Front Door or MASH practitioner. | Triages safeguarding referrals for children. |
| Local authority inclusion, welfare or education lead | Works closely with the YJS, particularly when alternative education provision is required. |
| OPCC or VRU/VRP policymaker | Commissions regional and local interventions for children. |
| Exploitation Lead in Children Services | Will have expertise in complex child safeguarding cases. |

Children with lived experience

In-depth journey mapping interviews were conducted with 13 children who had lived experience of being arrested and referred to support services across four deep dive sites. These interviews, held face-to-face or virtually based on preferences, aimed to:

- Gain an understanding of the referral process and how streamlined collaboration is between the police and other involved organisations from the child's perspective, and

- Examine the effectiveness of support services in providing efficient and compassionate support to vulnerable children from the child’s perspective.

Participation required children to be on an OOCR and receiving YJS support. Efforts were made to ensure diverse representation. For more information on the demographic breakdown of child interviews, see Table 12. Interviews were not conducted in Stonewood or Foxleigh due to a lack of eligible participants.

Children were given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

Participant identification and recruitment

Multiple recruitment and methodological factors were considered to engage deep dive sites. The YEF used connections with senior police officials, Chief Constables, and VRUs to introduce Cordis Bright to key contacts. Cordis Bright engaged YJS Heads of Service through existing networks. Tailored strategies included completing vetting processes and sharing infographic briefs with stakeholders. Once senior buy-in was secured, a convenience sampling approach was used to recruit participants, with police and YJS staff facilitating introductions to relevant individuals.

2.5.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

To ensure structured and effective data collection, interview topic guides were drafted for each stakeholder group. These guides were based on key research questions and were shared with the YEF and DfE for feedback. An overview of themes covered in the topic guides is visible in Table 10 below. To see the full guides, see Appendix C: Police Topic Guide Appendix D: Practitioners and Policymakers Topic Guide and Appendix E: YJS Staff Topic Guide. Verbal informed consent was obtained at the start of each interview. Data was collected through notetaking and recorded in an analysis framework, allowing for comparison across interview responses.

Table 10. Topic Guide theme coverage by stakeholder group

| Stakeholder group → Themes ↓ | YJS staff | Police | Practitioners & policymakers | Children |
|---|-----------|--------|---------------------------------|----------|
| Safeguarding children | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Making referrals | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Inter-agency working to support children | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Support for children | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

Journey mapping interviews

Journey mapping interviews were arranged through YJS caseworkers, with children receiving consent forms and information sheets beforehand (see Appendix F: Children's Consent Form and Information Sheet). Children were informed – both in the information sheet and at the beginning of the interview – about confidentiality, including anonymity and data sharing after the interview. Children were reassured everything they said during the interview would be kept private, the only exception being if the child disclosed something that made the research team think the child, or someone the child knows, is at risk of harm. If such information were disclosed, or if a child started to look or sound distressed recalling difficult experiences, the research team would inform the YJS caseworker of their concerns. The YJS caseworker would then follow internal safeguarding processes. In addition, the research team would speak to Cordis Bright's safeguarding lead.

The journey mapping interviews took place either face-to-face and online, depending on the YJS and child's preferences.

Journey mapping interviews are a qualitative research method which visually represents key events and emotions in a person's life over time. Journey mapping interviews were selected as a research method for children with lived experience of the youth justice system, as emerging evidence suggests they can help children better articulate their experiences (Endfield and Waldock, 2024). As journey mapping interviews are participant-led, they can provide children with a voice and sense of agency in research (Endfield and Waldock, 2024). For this study, children were provided with either a blank paper-based or virtual journey map with the following key touchpoints:

- What happened with the police?
- What happened after contact with the police?
- What happened when the YJS got in touch?
- Getting support from your YJS caseworker?

Children were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences for each touchpoint. Previous research suggests in-person journey mapping sessions allow children to work in a familiar, comfortable space and allows them to control the representation of their lives in ways digital maps (which are often edited by researchers) may not, and that this may improve overall engagement (Ergler et al., 2023). Furthermore, allowing children to format their maps themselves can help them better articulate their experiences (Endfield and Waldock, 2004). However, in this study, we found most children felt more comfortable when the interviewer wrote down their experiences and reflections on the map on their behalf. Only one child wanted to document their journey themselves. For children that preferred to meet online, an online whiteboard platform called Miro was used to create their journey maps virtually as a visual alternative to in-person approaches. A discussion guide with prompts was developed to guide reflections during journey mapping sessions (full version in Appendix G: Children's

Topic Guide). To reduce the stress of recall on children, a sample journey map (Appendix H: Example Journey Map), available in printed or digital form, was also shared to support their understanding of the process and help guide their thinking (Connecting Care for Children, 2023; Connell et al., 2023).

Workshops

A multi-agency co-production workshop was organised and facilitated in each deep dive site following interview analysis. These workshops were attended by a diverse range of participants from the statutory, public and VCSE sectors, ensuring a broad range of perspectives. Each workshop explored effective practice and areas for improvement within each deep dive site across three key areas (police response and referral, inter-agency working, and receiving support) to mirror a child's journey to support. Five workshops were conducted virtually, with one held in person.

2.5.4 Participants

For the deep dive areas, the research team spoke to stakeholders within the YJS, police, practitioners or policymakers, and children (see Table 11). The selection of sites ensured insights were drawn from ethnically diverse areas and a range of geographical contexts, including inner-city, urban, and rural settings. As mentioned, sites have been given fictitious names for confidentiality purposes. As police and YJS stakeholders in multiple deep dive sites were interviewed together, the figures per stakeholder group were higher than expected.

Table 11. Deep dives participant numbers by stakeholder group

| Stakeholder → ↓ Pseudonym area | Area description | YJS (n) | Police (n) | Practitioners & policymakers (n) | Children (n) | Total (n) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-----------|------------|----------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| Crosden | Urban and rural | 4 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 18 |
| Millgate | Urban | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 19 |
| Redbrooke | Inner-city | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 18 |
| Foxleigh | Inner-city | 5 | 8 | 3 | 0 | 12 |
| Stonewood | Urban | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 15 |
| Glyndale | Rural | 6 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 20 |
| Total | | 32 | 27 | 30 | 13 | 102 |

The research team spoke to 13 children across four of the deep dive sites. Demographic information about the children can be found in Table 12. As previously mentioned, children have been given pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 12. Children’s demographics⁴

| Child | Area | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Any disclosed SEND, mental health, or neurodiversity? |
|----------------|-----------|-----|--------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Omar | Redbrooke | 15 | Male | Turkish British | No |
| Hugo | Redbrooke | 15 | Male | Black British | No |
| Aisha | Redbrooke | 16 | Female | Black British | Awaiting ADHD diagnosis, speech and language difficulties |
| Alex | Millgate | 13 | Male | White British | Not disclosed |
| Priya | Millgate | 14 | Female | White British | Not disclosed |
| Sam | Millgate | 15 | Male | White British | ADHD |
| Riley | Millgate | 13 | Trans Female | White British | Not disclosed |
| Noah | Crosden | 15 | Male | White British | Not disclosed |
| Leila | Crosden | 16 | Female | White British | Not disclosed |
| Yasmine | Crosden | 13 | Female | White Traveller | Completing speech and language assessments |
| Luciana | Crosden | 13 | Female | White British and Black Caribbean | Completing CAMHS assessments |
| Amara | Glyndale | 17 | Female | White British | ADHD |
| Elias | Glyndale | 13 | Male | White British | Not disclosed |

2.6 Analysis

2.6.1 Rapid review analysis

Preliminary analysis was conducted by searching for the keywords (as highlighted in Figure 2). Relevant content aligning with the research questions (listed in Table 3) was extracted and organised under each research question. This process ensured a structured data collection approach across all documents. Extracted findings were then synthesised to summarise existing evidence.

2.6.2 Survey analysis

Survey data was cleaned in Excel by removing incomplete responses, coding variables, and aligning YJS areas with regions. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were

⁴ We wanted to engage a diverse group of children in this research. However, the gender split in this study is not representative of the national YJS caseload in England and Wales, in which only approximately 15% of children identified as female (HMIP, 2023).

used for analysis. Quantitative analysis, conducted in RStudio, included descriptive statistics and pattern identification. Free-text responses underwent thematic analysis, identifying key trends and outliers linked to the project's research questions. Data was stratified by region and police force area to explore geographic differences, though uneven response rates limited the production of regional conclusions. Visualisations were created using tables, graphs, and Datawrapper.⁵ Findings were iteratively reviewed for consistency and alignment with project objectives.

2.6.3 Interview analysis

Data analysis for the expert interviews and deep dive multi-stakeholder interviews both took an iterative approach of identifying descriptive patterns. These patterns were then turned into themes and mapped across the four discreet timepoints as mentioned when different agencies typically interact with children. For the deep dive interviews, a coding framework was developed and refined to support theme identification within each site, whilst being able to consider cross-cutting themes. Since the multi-agency workshops took place after interview data analysis, notes taken during the workshops were reviewed and added directly to the overarching analysis framework to ensure findings were integrated with emerging themes (see section 2.6.4 below).

2.6.4 Overarching analysis

Overarching analysis was completed by adding data from multiple sources into an overarching analysis framework based on the child's journey from arrest to support. The triangulated analysis included data from the rapid reviews, expert interviews, national survey, site-level interviews, multi-agency workshops and children's journey maps.

This method allowed the integration of multiple perspectives rather than presenting data from different groups of stakeholders as isolated 'silos.' Commonalities and differences were identified between high-level perspectives, such as those from the rapid reviews and expert interviews, against the realities observed by frontline services through our survey and deep dive site interviews. This allowed for comparison between broader assumptions and conditions at the local level.

This approach prioritised high relevance evidence with strong consistency across multiple sources of evidence. However, notable outliers were also analysed to highlight site-specific findings. The team iteratively discussed and reviewed the sub-themes to ensure final analysis was rigorous and reflected all collective evidence.

⁵ Datawrapper is an interactive and responsive data visualisation online tool.

3 Findings

3.1 Overview of themes

For this study, a ‘journey’ approach was taken, including four discreet timepoints when different agencies typically interact with children. The four timepoints are:

1. Children’s interactions with the police.
2. Children referred from the police into local YJS.
3. Inter-agency work to support children.
4. Children offered support from local YJS (and external agencies).

The following section provides a summary of the sub-themes that sit within the four timepoints mentioned, drawing on the expert interviews, rapid review findings, the national survey, and deep dive stakeholder interviews, children journey map interviews and multi-stakeholder workshops.

Throughout this section, pictures of some of the children’s journey maps have been included to provide detail on their experiences with the police, YJS and other agencies.

3.2 Children’s interactions with the police

This section examines key findings on children’s interactions with the police, highlighting successes and challenges in child-centred policing. It explores five sub-themes: (i) using a child first approach, (ii) professional curiosity to safeguard children, (iii) using trauma-informed approaches, (iv) responding to neurodiverse children, and (v) impact of policies in practice.

3.2.1 Using a child first approach

The child first approach prioritises placing children at the centre of policing, addressing the factors linked to offending, and promoting pro-social behaviour (YJB, 2022). Its principles emphasise recognising children as children, fostering their development of a positive pro-social identity, and ensuring their voices are heard through meaningful collaboration (YJB, 2022). Additionally, the child first approach prioritises diverting children from formal criminal justice processes to reduce stigma and promote positive outcomes (YJB, 2022). The YJB’s child first approach is complemented by child-centred policing approaches. Notably, The NPCC’s Child Centred Policing Strategy (2024a) emphasises *‘offending by children is often a symptom of other challenges they are facing in their lives. We need to be professionally curious to make sure we don’t miss opportunities to intervene to prevent harm’* (NPCC, 2024a).

Expert interviews suggest that some police forces in England and Wales are adopting child first or child-centred principles, ensuring that children are recognised as vulnerable and prioritising diversion from the criminal justice system (NPCC, 2024a). In three sites, police

demonstrated this approach by offering children the lowest-level outcome possible where appropriate. Interviews in these areas highlighted a prevention-focused approach, aiming to prevent children entering custody and the criminal justice system by treating arrest as a last resort. Police also emphasised ‘seeing children as children’ – making decisions based on their age and level of maturity. However, our research indicates that the adoption of child first approaches remains inconsistent across police forces. This is partly due to cultural differences between police departments, whereby frontline officers may adultify children, particularly older children aged 16-17, making it harder to recognise their vulnerabilities.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution when responding to children to ensure they receive the most appropriate outcome. One approach may be that when a child is arrested, they are usually taken to the police station for questioning. However, there is a national steer to reduce the use of police custody, as highlighted by the NPCC (2024), stating *“this child first approach recognises the need to reduce the number of children entering police custody and to use detention only as a last resort. Police interviews of child suspects outside of police custody should be prioritised and voluntary interviews therefore play a crucial role in delivering this child first approach”* (NPCC, 2024b).

Furthermore, recent evidence suggests Black and Black Mixed Heritage children are disproportionately adultified in the youth criminal justice system compared to their white peers; perceived as culpable and threatening adults rather than vulnerable children (Davis, 2022; YJB, 2024). Adultification is when *“notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias”* (Davies and Marsh, 2020). In this study, sites only referred to adultification on the basis of age, rather than race or ethnic background.

In three sites, high turnover among both junior and senior officers disrupts the implementation of child first, with police noting knowledge is often lost before it can become fully integrated into practice.

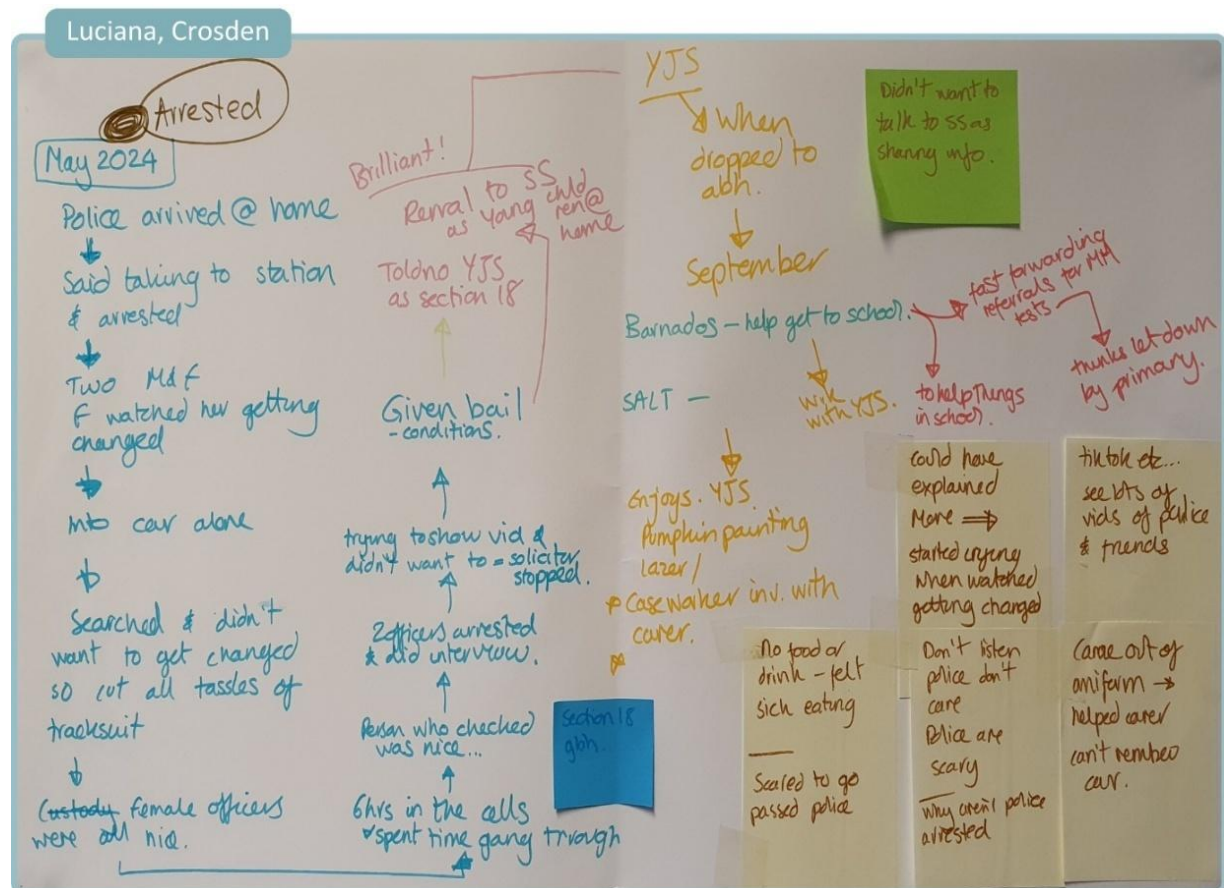


Areas for improvement

Across the deep dive sites, police emphasised the need for a top-down shift to embed child first principles more effectively at the frontline. Expert interviews reinforced this, highlighting the need for systemic change, such as introducing KPIs for Chief Constables to drive child-centred policing. This recommendation is explored further in section 4.2.

Figure 4. Luciana's journey map (Crosden)

Luciana talked about her experience being arrested, describing each step in detail (as visualised below). She found her experience with the police scary, saying they don't listen or care. She said they could have explained a bit more about what was going to happen. Luciana also touched on her experience with the YJS, explaining the different activities and support she received, as well as support from other agencies to help fast track mental health assessments.



3.2.2 Professional curiosity to safeguard children

A wealth of research suggests that offending by children is often a symptom of broader challenges in their lives such as childhood trauma, ACES, poor mental health, and experiences growing up in poverty (Adjei et al., 2025; Clemmow et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2023; Gray et al., 2021; Jahanshahi et al., 2020; HMIP, 2017; Liddle et al., 2016). As a result, officers are encouraged to exercise professional curiosity, defined by the College of Policing as challenging assumptions and exploring the potentially complex dynamics of a situation, to identify safeguarding concerns and intervene early to prevent harm (College of Policing, 2025; NPCC, 2024a).

However, our research indicates that the application of professional curiosity remains inconsistent within police forces. Professional curiosity in relation to policing children

includes: (a) exploring and understanding what is happening by asking questions and maintaining an open mind, (b) not necessarily accepting things at face value, enquiring more deeply and challenging your own assumptions, and (c) understanding your own responsibility to investigate and knowing when and how to take action (College of Policing, 2021). Evidence from Foxleigh suggests that while some officers effectively identify safeguarding needs, others rely on assumptions rather than exploring a child's circumstances. For example, during stop and search procedures, some officers may fail to consider key contextual factors, such as who the child is with, the time of day, their age, or whether this is their first interaction with the criminal justice system. As a result, safeguarding risks can be overlooked, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention. In contrast, other officers in Foxleigh reported making efforts to engage children sitting in stairwells of housing estates at night, building up rapport with children through casual conversation to gain context, before offering to transfer them to a safe space.

Our expert interviews emphasised that a cultural shift in policing is needed to embed professional curiosity as a core safeguarding practice. This could take the form of leadership support or training to help officers identify underlying risks and understand what may have led a child to commit an offence. This shift is particularly important for children involved in serious offences, as officers may struggle to recognise these children as vulnerable because of their role as a perpetrator.

Furthermore, HMIP (n.d.) highlights the importance of drawing on the four key principles of procedural justice – voice, neutrality, respect and trustworthy motives – which have been found to increase compliance, trust and confidence in the police and youth justice system (Hunter and Jacobson, 2021; HMIP n.d.). This complements the College of Policing's emphasis on professional curiosity in responding to vulnerability-related risks, encouraging officers to look beyond the offence to understand the child's wider needs and circumstances – reinforcing a compassionate, trauma-informed approach to policing. However, maintaining professional curiosity in practice remains challenging for frontline police, as officers often face high caseloads and crisis situations, making it difficult to prioritise safeguarding concerns:

"I keep banging on about professional curiosity, but it's landing that with frontline colleagues who deal with a whole range of cases/crises - that's the challenge." – Police, Foxleigh

Moreover, officers in Foxleigh reported that while they attempt to engage with children in custody, many are reluctant to talk due to legal advice emphasising 'no comment.' The Centre for Justice Innovation (2021c) found that there is often a lack of clarity and understanding amongst practitioners around diversion processes and the impact of non-admissions on a child's pathway beyond the police station. Training around diversion schemes was recommended for defence solicitors to help equip them with relevant information when informing children about their options (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021c). Survey findings

revealed how children from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds can have lower levels of trust and confidence in the police, with their solicitors sometimes advising no comment interviews, even when diversion and non-formal outcomes would be in the best interest for their client and the public. Similarly, children from Black or Gypsy, Roma Traveller backgrounds have been found to be less likely to admit an offence and more likely to give ‘no comment’ interviews, citing akin reasons around poor legal advice from solicitors and mistrust of the criminal justice system (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021c). Concerns around breaching children’s rights and safeguards in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Code E (Home Office, 2018) may also discourage officers from starting informal conversations, even when these interactions could provide valuable insights into a child’s situation.



Areas for improvement

Embedding professional curiosity within and across police forces requires a systemic shift to ensure officers are equipped with training, leadership support, and practical guidance to proactively safeguard children at risk.

Locally, police forces could implement:

- Professional curiosity champions within each team to promote best practice and generate opportunities for reflective learning, ensuring police officers have a clear understanding around contextual risk and how this could lead to children coming to police attention.
- Develop dedicated teams to retrospectively quality assure and review interactions with children, in addition to language used in children’s arrest records and referrals.
- Supervisions of frontline officers when interacting with children, providing feedback on their approach to professional curiosity.
- Multi-agency training, with local YJSs presenting effective techniques for engaging and speaking with children.
- At the national level, the NPCC and College of Policing could align their child-centred safeguarding messaging to include professional curiosity. Both organisations could deliver specific training to police forces.

3.2.3 Using trauma-informed approaches

Trauma-informed policing approaches frame interactions with children around the question ‘what happened to you?’, rather than ‘what is wrong with you?’ (Revolving Doors, 2022). Such approaches are essential since poor treatment at arrest is considered traumatic and an ACE (HM Prison & Probation, 2024; NPCC, 2022a). Findings across the deep dive sites indicate that police are making positive progress in integrating trauma-informed practices when working with children. Children shared both positive and negative experiences of interacting with the police, specifically at the police station:

“Arrest was scary, but the police were kind, told me what was going to happen and tried their best to make sure I didn’t get sent to court.” – Riley, Millgate

“[The police] explained everything before interview and then were kind during it.” – Leila, Crosden

“They shouldn’t put children in custody and should do community service instead.” – Aisha, Redbrooke

“Started crying when watched getting changed. Police don’t care; police are scary.” – Luciana, Crosden

The College of Policing (2024) highlights that children who have been detained are more likely to exhibit a range of characteristics or have experienced a number of difficult life events which can increase the risk of their safety and wellbeing while in custody. There is a wide range of factors (including but not limited to experiences physical or mental health problems, are in care or eligible for leaving care services, have a history of abuse, neglect or trauma) that staff should be aware of when considering how to support, observe or care for children who are detained or in custody (College of Policing, 2024). That said, for many children, the experience of being in police custody is a traumatic event, and many will be reluctant to recall these painful experiences (Becan, 2022; Kemp, 2021). This was seen with some of the children we spoke to, specifically Aisha, who struggled to talk about anything to do with custody or the police.

Resultantly, it is important to recognise the vulnerability of children brought into custody and identify as many ways as possible to minimise trauma. In four deep dive sites, custody suites have been adapted to better support children, ensuring separation from adult custody wings. These modifications include:

- Crosden – an exercise room and breakout area with puzzles and toys.
- Glyndale – larger cells equipped with blankets and reading materials.
- Millgate – designated glass rooms for children.

- Stonewood – equipped with video technology to connect children to appropriate adults overnight.

That said, understanding the impact these modifications are having on children's experiences is hard to attain. Additional research by Kemp et al. (2023) highlights disparities in how legal safeguards are applied to children, whereby children perceived as 'deserving' – those in custody for the first time for low-level offences – are more likely to be offered certain protections compared to 'undeserving' children facing more serious charges.

Five of the six deep dive sites highlighted additional efforts to improve custody experiences. This included children in custody being met by dedicated custody workers, who provide immediate safeguarding support, such as emotional reassurance, and discuss their experiences. In Redbrooke and Foxleigh, YJS caseworkers adopt this role by attending custody suites to offer children specialised support, such as making referrals to CAMHS. These findings align with expert interviews, which emphasised the importance of improving child custody environments.

Further efforts in this area include vulnerability and trauma training being provided for frontline police officers in three deep dive sites. Police reported this training enhanced their understanding of the importance of minimising trauma for children and that they found the learning valuable. In Crosden, this training has led to a shift towards trauma-informed language in police referral forms to the local multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), removing problematic terms like 'promiscuous' when referring to children.



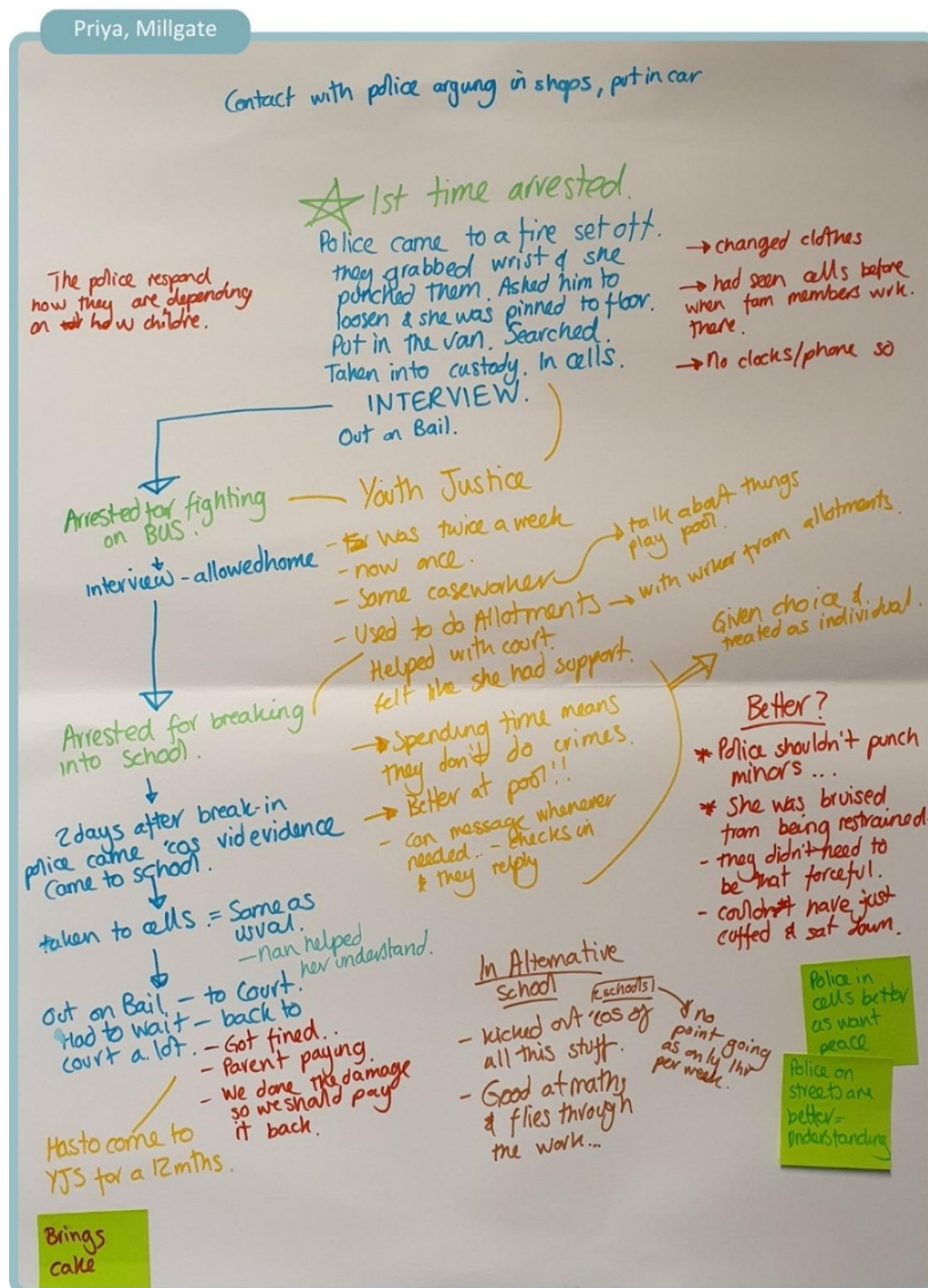
Areas for improvement

When bringing children into custody is unavoidable, the following steps could be taken to improve the experience of custody for children:

- Ensure a form of dedicated support, such as custody workers, is available for children in custody and operates separately from police processes. This may encourage children to open up about their experiences without fear of incriminating themselves.
- Embed regular, ongoing trauma-informed training, particularly training that accounts for how children's behaviours evolve during adolescence and adjustments that may be required when supporting children with SEND or neurodiversity. Focus training on frontline officers and custody staff who engage with children, ensuring refreshers to support staff turnover. This will help to ensure children receive clear, transparent explanations of police processes from frontline officers.

Figure 5. Priya's journey map (Millgate)

Priya shared her experiences with the police, including being taken into custody. Reflecting on what could have been better, she felt officers were too forceful – she was bruised from being restrained – and believed there were safer ways to calm children down. Priya also spoke about her time with Millgate YJS, meeting her caseworker twice a week. They talked, played games, and, most importantly, she felt heard. Having someone who treated her as an individual and gave her choices helped her stay out of trouble.



3.2.4 Responding to neurodiverse children

Police forces across multiple deep dive sites reported challenges in recognising and responding to neurodiverse children, particularly when conditions are undiagnosed. This issue is especially pronounced in areas like Millgate, where police estimate that approximately 70% of the children they interact with are neurodiverse. However, gaps in services and trained staff mean that children in custody often lack access to comprehensive mental health and neurodiversity assessments and support, leaving their needs unidentified and unaddressed. Furthermore, even when children have been assessed and diagnosed, data sharing challenges with health services can prevent police from accessing this information and adapting their practice to best suit children's needs (explored further in section 3.4.2).

A lack of police understanding of neurodiversity further complicates responses, as frontline officers may struggle to recognise neurodiverse behaviours or know how to respond appropriately. For example, police in Redbrooke noted that neurodiverse children may have difficulty maintaining eye contact during interviews, which can be misinterpreted as evasiveness or non-compliance, increasing the risk of miscommunication and undue criminalisation (Bond-Taylor, 2021; Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022; YJB, 2024b).

To address missing information, stakeholders in Redbrooke proposed implementing an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or 'vulnerability' marker on the Police National Computer (PNC) to help officers identify and better support neurodiverse children in custody, as well as on the street. However, as this intervention is yet to be implemented, its effectiveness remains uncertain and untested. In addition, without dedicated custody staff to assess needs, facilitate accurate data sharing and ensure information remains up to date, adding such markers to the PNC are unlikely to facilitate change. That said, in Stonewood, the Liaison and Diversion team⁶ have been seen to proactively share information regarding any concerns they have about a child, or the risk they might pose. Conversely, Crosden feel they cannot rely on the Liaison and Diversion team or other practitioners in custody as they do not work 24/7 meaning when children come into custody out of hours, this additional access to information is removed.

In addition, police explanations and legal processes are often inaccessible to children, particularly those with SEND or neurodiversity. As a result, police in Millgate note that neurodiverse children may struggle to understand the consequences of their actions or the outcome of their case.

⁶ The Liaison and Diversion services identify people who have mental health, learning disability, substance misuse or other vulnerability then they first come into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects, defendants or offenders (NHS England, n.d.).



- Figure 6. Sam's journey map (Millgate)**

Sam, Millgate

Youth Justice

- Went to activities & out for the day
- Laser quest
- Climbing & canoe
- Group of people & case worker
- knew one person
- Case worker picks & can decide if they want...
- chat to chat back
- YP DAAT team trusted
- talk about mean to coming about effects...

The Police need to stop pecking

Don't want it change - Maybe more time at the beginning

MTB # building things Begins, Pinball - Soft units hobbies.

Have a laugh & nice time.

VSS made it better at home. Don't say you're in the wrong

Mum & him understanding not taking sides

After arrested can't see what's right & wrong

Need some police space after prison

Misuse of drugs but it.

Searched by police - 10 bag & saw grinder.

Let place go to.

Nice & asked when they would stop.

Calmed & listened

Went to Mans + Don't mess and with him about mum She calms him.

Didn't want to understand ADHD.

Police called 28 times to home.

Main called police after an argument over game. Got heated. Police chased & said as thought he was on drugs.

Kept in cuffs after search until I saw a print!

Cuffs to search - got to mans house & pain

Police pack your head after stress situation

Threats to arrested next time

HOT heads ADHD - told me is wrong

Bad relations with Police has to avoid

Only bothered about cutting mum

felt horrible

Just hanging out no damage

Bloons & cars for 3 teenagers

2 pals

Old school security guard smelled weed.

went in through broken windows

Police came ...

Caught & cuffed.

Searched & alien key found.

Dog out → scary

tooth phones.

took home.

Did it ask Qs. Just read rights.

no further unless something else.

3.2.5 Impact of policies in practice

The implementation of recent changes to police policies, including the updated Child Gravity Matrix, knife crime policies, and associated guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), has created challenges in balancing child safeguarding with law enforcement. While these policies aim to provide structured decision-making frameworks, stakeholders across the deep dive sites raised concerns that their rigid application, coupled with gaps in police training, may lead to unintended consequences for children. This issue is particularly evident with Outcome 22, which is not formalised as a positive outcome.

Findings from expert interviews indicate that this lack of formal recognition can discourage police from using Outcome 22, creating further uncertainty in decision-making and reducing opportunities to divert children from the criminal justice system. For example, police expressed mixed views on the practical application of the NPCC's updated Child Gravity Matrix (NPCC, 2023). Some officers stated that the updated matrix provides clearer guidance for officers, promotes consistency in referral decisions and has introduced more flexibility for serious offences, allowing for OOCRs with senior approval (NPCC, 2023). However, others highlighted that the updated matrix's strict application may result in the unintended criminalisation of children. Expert interviews highlighted a case where extensive work was required to prevent a child from being criminalised after inadvertently bringing a penknife to school following a scouts camping trip. Under the new matrix, children must be charged for knife possession on school grounds, despite the child having voluntarily reported the knife to their teacher. The best outcome secured in this case was a Community Resolution (CR), raising concerns that the matrix limits officers' discretion in assessing the context of each case.

Concerns were also raised about the updated matrix's new requirement for senior-level sign-off for specific offences, such as robbery, or cases where an officer disagrees with the matrix's suggested outcome. Stakeholders warned that this additional layer of approval could slow decision-making. For example, two children involved in the same offence were reported to have received different outcomes — one was charged while the other was not, due to variations in how officers applied the matrix. This case study raises fears of a 'postcode lottery' effect, whereby outcomes for children vary based on discretionary differences rather than the circumstances of their offence.

Similar challenges have emerged with the introduction of a new knife crime policy which focuses on taking more punitive response in one of the deep dive sites. This policy contradicts efforts within YJSs to reduce the number of children entering the criminal justice system. Stakeholders cautioned that a blanket enforcement approach does not account for the complex reasons why children may carry knives, stating some children bring knives to school out of fear of bullying or even to self-harm.

Without flexibility, such policies risk criminalising vulnerable children rather than providing the support they need, reinforcing concerns that top-down governance does not always align with frontline realities.



Areas for improvement

For senior police decision-makers and organisations – such as the NPCC and College of Policing:

- Provide officers and YJSs with clearer guidance on when and how discretion can be applied to prevent unnecessary criminalisation of children while maintaining public safety. This guidance should include providing scenarios of how to use discretion and apply contextual factors with new policies to improve police confidence when interacting with children. Cases should be reviewed against this guidance in JDMPs, providing YJSs with the confidence to counter police decision-making if appropriate.
- Adopt a ‘test and learn’ approach to implementing enhanced technology such as IT systems, to support frontline officers and JDMPs in achieving more consistent outcomes.

3.3 Children referred from the police into local YJS

This section examines key findings on the referral process from the police into local YJSs and other agencies. Four sub-themes were identified: (i) referral process and timeframes, (ii) effective referral process, (iii) delays in referrals, and (iv) variability in referral form quality.

3.3.1 Referral process and timeframes

Referral times are generally comparable across areas (see Table 13 below), with five key steps, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Overview of the referral pathway for OOCRs from the police to YJS



Across all deep dive sites, police officers write up all referrals for incidents before the end of the shift. Police forces have automated systems or routine mechanisms to inform YJSs of daily arrests for children. This includes referral forms automatically being shared with seconded youth justice officers, daily emails to YJS staff for any children that have been arrested and

automatic notifications from the police system to the YJS for any arrests. Safeguarding referral forms go through the MASH police officers, who typically allocate cases to children's services within 48 hours (unless coded more urgently) to ensure any safeguarding concerns are reviewed imminently. Concurrently, the referrals for children that require an OOCR, are received by a seconded youth justice officer, typically within two to four weeks. Some areas reported that OOCRs would be passed over in two to three days, while others have said this may take four weeks. These variations in time frames may be due to internal scrutiny over referral forms before being sent through.

In some areas, inconsistencies exist, particularly in Glyndale, where high police workloads and disagreements among inspectors over OOCR authorisation can cause referral delays beyond four weeks. Millgate highlighted that informal OOCRs are often deprioritised due to a focus on formal OOCRs and court orders combined with funding constraints, causing further delays. In Redbrooke, the arresting officers send referrals to the evidential review officer, which is then shared with the YJS seconded officer. These processes were not explicitly confirmed in other deep dive sites, meaning there may be different or additional police processes that take place prior to the YJS seconded officer reviewing the referral. Typically, each YJS has a seconded youth justice officer/s who receives the referrals and has time to gather additional information on the child, drawing from multiple sources – such as children's services or the YJS – and reviewing the Child Gravity Matrix (2023) before sharing an outcome rationale with the YJS. Four of the deep dive sites suggested the seconded YJS officers take around three to six working days to complete this process (the other two areas did not explicitly share this information).

YJSs then prepare for the JDMP and conduct an initial assessment, which typically takes three to five weeks. National survey findings indicate that 63.8% (n=74) of YJSs complete assessments within three to four weeks, and 97.5% (n=113) have a JDMP in place. Glyndale reported that OOCR assessments are particularly challenging to complete due to capacity issues, as caseworkers must balance conducting assessments with delivering ongoing support. As a result, assessments in Glyndale are taking up to 15 weeks. Contrastingly, Stonewood assigns cases every Friday, mitigating any backlogs. Similarly, Foxleigh and Redbrooke allocate cases within one to two working days, stating initial contact with families is generally efficient. Crosden aims to contact families within 24 hours and arrange a face-to-face meeting within five days. Foxleigh reaches out to families within five working days. This supports the overall timeframes of completing the assessment within 15-25 working days. While sites did not specify how quickly support begins, national survey findings indicated 89.7% (n=104) of YJSs commence support within one to two weeks after the JDMP. The YJS assessment involved speaking with the child and their family in-person, which ensures the child's voice is taken into consideration during the JDMP meeting.

Figure 8. Omar's journey map (Redbrooke)

Omar talked about his experiences with Redbrooke police and YJS. He felt the police treated him well and understood the circumstances and wider context of what was going on. He felt the police respected him and advised him to stay away from a friend seen as bad influence. Omar enjoyed the support he received from his YJS caseworker, stating that some of the sessions around the law and what is legal and illegal really helped him in understanding his actions and behaviours.

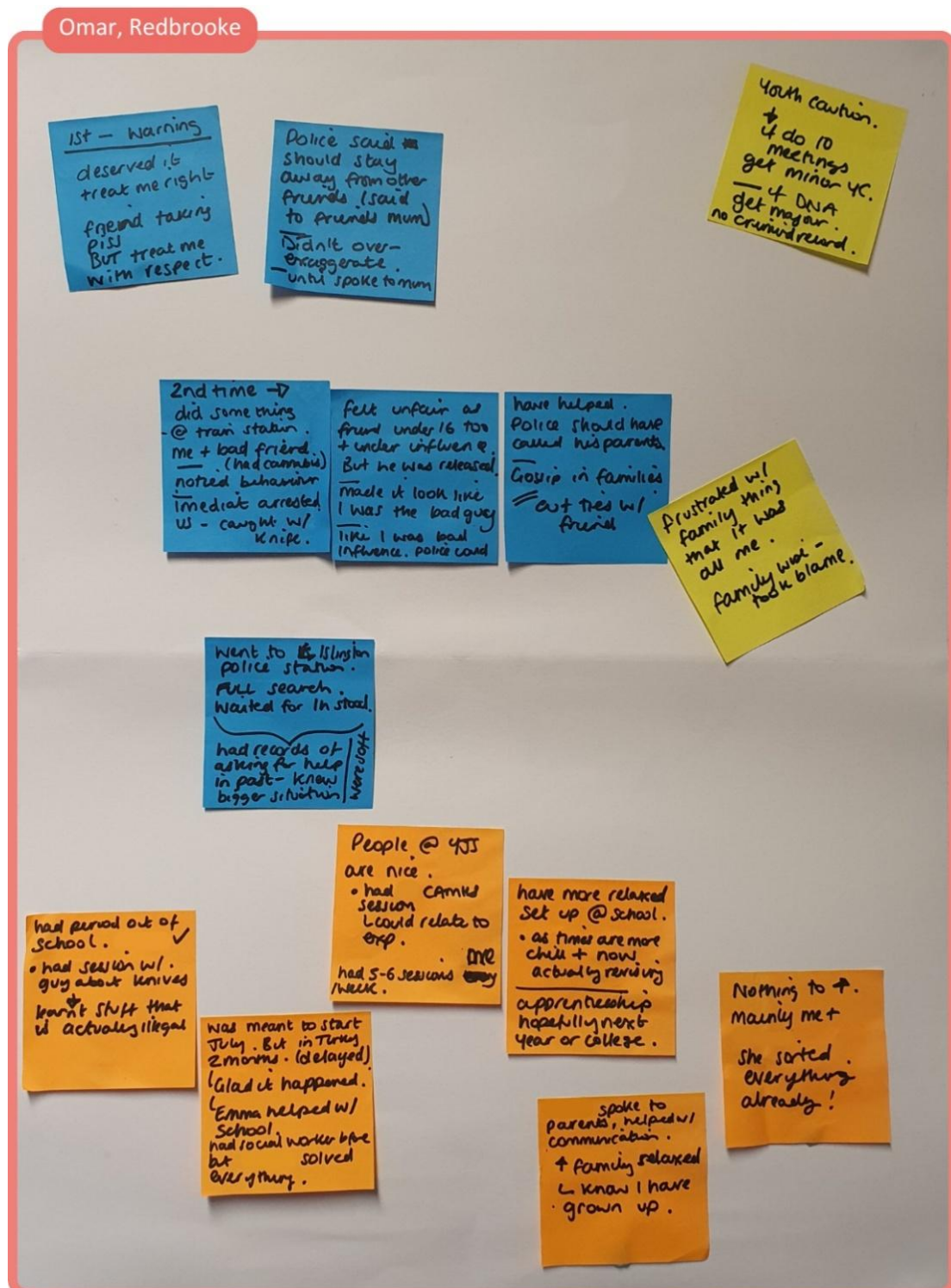


Table 13. Referral process and timeframes across YJSs for OOCRs

| Process | Survey | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood |
|--|--|---|--------------------------------------|------------------|--|--|--|
| YJS informed of all arrests | | Daily. | Automated daily. | Daily. | Daily custody notifications. | Not specified. | Not specified. |
| Police referrals for OOCR sent to YJS | | Two weeks. | | Four weeks. | A month, some OOCR two to three days. | Triage within 24 hours. Four weeks. | Two to three weeks. |
| Seconded youth justice officer reviews OOCR referrals before sharing with YJS | | Within five days | Processed in a few days | Five to six days | Five-day target | N/A | N/A |
| YJS completes OOCR assessments | 32.8% one to two weeks, 63.8% three to four weeks, 3.4% five to six weeks. | Formal OOCR 3 weeks. | 4 weeks. | Three weeks. | Four to five weeks. | Three to four weeks, Three weeks to panel, challenges due to capacity. | Three working days for assessment, and five working days for JDMP. |
| Use of JDMPs for OOCRs | 97.5% have JDMP. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| YJS provides support access post-OOCR decision | 89.7% one to two weeks, 8.6% three to four weeks, 1.7% five to six weeks. | Within 10 weeks for informal processes. | Often delays due to statutory focus. | Not specified. | Allocated two working days, contacted five working days. | Not specified. | Within four weeks (excluding knife crimes). |

Note. These are typical timeframes and do not account for cases that may require further investigation. JDMP: Joint Decision Making Panels.

3.3.2 Effective referral process

The faster support is provided to children, the more effective it is likely to be in reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021a; 2021b). The effectiveness of referral pathways from the police to local YJSs appears to be functioning well, despite experts highlighting inconsistent processes. Findings from the national survey indicate that 87.9% (n=102) of YJS respondents identified effective referral pathways as an enabler for OOCR. Factors supporting effective referrals include:

- Having multiple referral mechanisms in place.
- Embedding clear processes for reviewing referrals such as internal triaging.
- Accessing other systems, such as children's services.
- Being able to make onwards referrals for children to receive additional support while being supported by their local YJS (e.g. CAMHS).

Timely referrals are critical to leveraging the '*teachable, reachable moment*' for children – a concept recognised by all stakeholder groups across the deep dive sites. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of officers engaging with YJSs and children's services immediately, regardless of the offence, to ensure interventions are delivered within an impactful moment. At present, there is not clear evidence to suggest a caseworker, who is often at this time-point a stranger, can capitalise a teachable moment intervention within a reachable moment (McDaniel et al., 2024). As highlighted in section 3.2.1, there is a national steer to reduce the use of custody suites, which is supported by the NPCC (2024b). That said, Foxleigh currently supports children in custody with additional follow-up sessions, stating engagement from children and families is high. Such approaches may be warranted for children still being processed through custody and in need of timely support.

The presence of multiple referral mechanisms supports effective referrals. All deep dive areas reported having a referral form used by the police to submit cases to a seconded YJS officer. These forms typically include details on the offence, the child's history, and their personal circumstances. In addition to the OOCR referral process, many YJS mentioned receiving a daily list of children who have been arrested. This information is shared through either automated systems or emails to the YJS via the seconded youth justice officer. Many of these children may already be known to the YJS and/or may already have orders, in which case, this intel may support caseworker to child communication. If previously unknown, the YJS will follow the same assessment process to understand if and what support may be offered.

Some areas also use informal pathways. For instance, Crosden YJS accepts referrals via email or telephone for lower-level charges, while Glyndale YJS has a preventative referral mechanism for any public agencies to submit a referral for children not yet at the age of criminal responsibility. This has developed a working relationship with schools to facilitate preventative referrals for children aged 8 and above. The YJB defines prevention as 'support

and intervention with children (and their parents/carers) who may be displaying behaviours which may indicate underlying needs or vulnerability’ which involves a tiered approach of early and targeted prevention (YJB, 2021). The approaches highlighted in Glyndale may cause net-widening if these children are brought into contact with the YJS compared to a universal service for children. While universal approaches to early prevention are needed, there needs to be a limit on involving or drawing children into the criminal justice system to avoid criminalising children unnecessarily.

Embedding clear processes for reviewing referrals is critical. In some areas, this is addressed through a triaging process for all referrals within the local authority, which helps reduce duplication and increase efficiency. In Redbrooke, referrals are reviewed and processed within 24 hours by a MASH police officer. The MASH management team then triages these referrals, acting as a central point of contact for partner agencies. This approach has been reported to improve communication and reduce referral delays.

Access to children’s services systems further enhances referral effectiveness. Crosden and Stonewood YJSs have access to children’s services data, enabling them to review previous referrals, including those made to Early Help. Similarly, Redbrooke’s seconded officers can access information on children through YJS and children’s services teams both verbally and through shared systems, which supports case processing.

“Safety referral happened quickly and that was because of YJS.” – Leila, Crosden

The ability of YJSs to make onward referrals to specialist services also contributes to the overall effectiveness of referral pathways, allowing children to receive additional support whilst undergoing the formal outcome assessment processes. Crosden YJS has established direct referral pathways into external services such as CAMHS and substance misuse support, including a designated trauma-informed pathway through CAMHS. Stonewood YJS has a similar system in place, using an electronic referral form to facilitate neurodevelopmental CAMHS support. However, not all areas have streamlined processes. Millgate YJS reported challenges in referring children for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), describing the process as overly lengthy and burdensome. While Millgate YJS has an in-house SALT professional available on certain occasions, the referral process remains time-consuming due to the length and complexity of the referral form and can contribute to delays in service access (see section 3.5.6 for more information on this).

3.3.3 Delays in referrals

Delays in OOCR referrals present significant barriers to timely intervention. While the evidence-base suggests referrals should take no longer than four weeks (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021a; YEF, 2023; YJB, 2024a) and most deep dive areas reported this typically takes 2-4 weeks, ongoing police investigations frequently extend beyond this timeframe.

Survey data found that 35.3% (n=41) of YJS respondents identified lengthy referral periods as a key challenge in referring children to support. Police processing delays, investigations, and lengthy referral processes were major barriers to engaging children at the right time. Alex, a child the research team spoke to from Millgate, highlighted his worries about going to prison, after ‘waiting for ages’ whilst on bail and breaking his bail out of worry during this period.

In some instances, children experience delays of 6–9 months before accessing support. This is a considerable length of time during which they may have difficulty recalling the events that led to their referral or may become involved in further potentially criminalising behaviour, especially where exploitation is a factor. Experts and YJS staff highlighted that delays – particularly for children who receive No Further Action (NFA) outcomes – diminish the relevance and impact of diversionary interventions for children.

"The longer it takes, the less families are connected with what's happened; so, our [YJS] ability to reflect on the circumstances surrounding that arrest (with both the child and their family) is diminished, resulting in a less impactful intervention." – YJS, Redbrooke

Conversely, the Turnaround programme provides support to children Released Under Investigation (RUI), which prevents delays and enables support in a potentially critical time point for eligible children. Some areas also have custody-based programmes, allowing children to be supported by staff from YJSs and VCSE organisations during the potentially traumatic period of being in custody.

Systemic issues further exacerbate delays, particularly in cases involving extensive evidence gathering such as forensic analysis and digital investigations. For example, downloading digital evidence includes reaching out to social media companies to obtain Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, meaning the police have no authority to process the case in a timely manner. Furthermore, police reported bottlenecks in technical units such as digital forensics teams and challenges with case prioritisation difficulties. Redbrooke highlighted the benefits of strong senior leadership championing the prioritisation of children’s cases, expediting referrals, and allocating resources effectively, while other areas experience prolonged waiting times due to systemic inefficiencies and a lack of advocates in positions of power.



Areas for improvement

To improve referral delays locally:

- Ensure investigating officers provide regular and empathetic communication to families to reduce uncertainty, particularly where delays are unavoidable. Clear updates should be provided at key stages of the investigation.
- Strengthen custody-based support programmes where YJS staff engage with children during the custodial process, ensuring early intervention opportunities are maximised.

To improve referral delays at the national level:

- Increase investment in digital forensics and technical staff to reduce bottlenecks in processing evidence (e.g. social media data retrieval).
- Embed a dedicated process for fast-tracking investigations where timely intervention is crucial (e.g. children at risk of exploitation) to reduce unnecessary delays due to competing police demands.
- Sustain the Turnaround programme or equivalent early intervention schemes to ensure more children, including those on RUIs, receive immediate support.

3.3.4 Variability in referral form quality

The quality of police referrals to YJSs is inconsistent, with missing or incomplete information. Police officers have limited time to complete referral forms immediately after the interaction due to constant demands for their time, managing multiple emergencies and tasks. This means officers are often under pressure to complete the referral forms before they finish their shift. This process limits opportunities for officers to be inquisitive about a child's circumstances and needs, leading to referrals that often require follow-up from seconded YJS officers or YJS teams to obtain essential details (as discussed in section 3.2.2).

"Operational staff don't get feedback around what happens to the referral. This might encourage them to produce higher quality referrals." – Police, Crosden

Officers highlighted several challenges contributing to inconsistent referral quality. Many cited a lack of structured feedback, leaving them unsure whether the information they submit is sufficient or useful. Some also find the form difficult to complete under time pressure, and suggested structured training or recorded feedback would help. In Millgate, referral quality has improved following training on capturing the voice of the child, but limited capacity has restricted wider rollout. Other areas may require additional top-down support to build officers' understanding of the form and improve information quality.

Practice also varies. Some officers prioritise submitting referrals quickly to alert children's services, intending to add detail later. While this supports early intervention, it can result in incomplete information being passed to the YJS. In Foxleigh, safeguarding prompts have been added to referral forms to encourage officers to consider a child's vulnerabilities, with training underway. This has improved referral quality in some cases, but YJS staff were unaware of the changes, pointing to a communication gap between agencies.

Efforts to improve referral form quality include targeted training and procedural changes. Some areas have embedded training for officers on probation, which has enhanced their understanding of referral requirements. Others allocate cases at structured intervals to

prevent backlogs and ensure more thorough information gathering. However, full adoption of new processes has been slow, with some officers feeling uncertain about when and how to escalate referrals to YJSs.



Areas for improvement

Findings suggest that improving referral form quality requires a combination of structured training, clear feedback mechanisms, and systemic changes. Locally, this includes:

- Protecting arresting officers time – advocated and embedded by leadership – to allow for purposeful and thoughtful completion of referral forms.
- Sharing anonymised, good practice examples within and across police forces.
- Embedding referral form improvements into daily policing practices to help enhance the quality and timeliness of information shared with YJS.
- Increasing cross-agency communication and transparency around referral outcomes could further strengthen multi-agency responses to children's needs.
- Ensuring police officers understand the impact of their referrals. Training on capturing the voice of the child and trauma-informed approaches seems to be working in some areas, and is likely to benefit other police forces.

3.4 Inter-agency working to support children

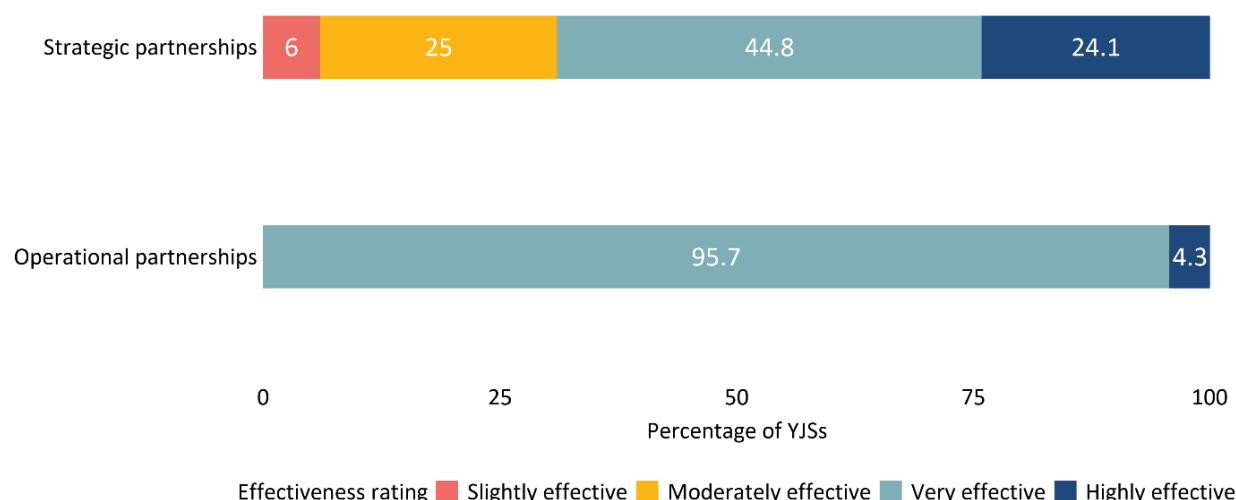
This section examines key findings around inter-agency working to support children, encompassing three sub-themes: (i) mechanisms supporting positive working relationships between agencies, and (ii) data sharing challenges.

3.4.1 Mechanisms supporting positive working relationships between agencies

Effective multi-agency partnerships between the police, YJS, MASH, Early Help, and other agencies enhance safeguarding practices and improve referral processes (Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HMICFRS & HMIP, 2024). Experts highlighted that the most effective partnerships are built on trust, regular communication, and relationship-building, with timely information-sharing between agencies enabling early intervention for children. Survey findings reinforced this, with 78.4% (n=91) of YJSs identifying partnership working as an enabler for OOCR. As highlighted in Figure 9, YJSs felt operational partnerships were either highly (4.3%, n=5) or very (95.7%, n=111) effective. While broadly positive, strategic partnerships showed more variability – with ratings reported as either highly (24.1%, n=28), very (44.8%, n=52) or moderately (25.0%, n=29) effective. Similar findings around effective multi-agency partnership work were cited in a joint target area inspection, highlighting examples of effective partnerships through shared understanding of children's backgrounds

and experiences (including trauma and abuse), however, this was inconsistent across areas (Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HMCIFRS & HMIP, 2024).

Figure 9. YJS ratings of operational and strategic partnerships with the police



A number of mechanisms were reported to support effective partnership working:

1. Co-located staff across agencies.
2. Established data sharing agreements between YJS, police and children services.
3. Access to other teams within the local authority.
4. Multi-agency meetings including JDMPs.
5. OOCR and custody decision scrutiny panels.

Co-location of agencies fosters stronger relationships, facilitates real-time information sharing, and improves decision-making. In some areas, co-location has removed historical reluctance to share information, allowing instant communication between YJSs, police forces, and children's services. Having multiple services within the same space, such as youth prevention officers, school officers, drug and alcohol teams, and third-sector workers has enabled faster, more informed responses to safeguarding concerns. Redbrooke highlighted the ability to verbally share information about children during regular multi-agency meetings has expedited the assessment process for YJS caseworkers.

Strong data sharing agreements between police forces, YJSs, and local authorities have been identified as key to reducing duplication and expediting support for children. In some areas, seconded officers play a critical role in bridging information-sharing gaps and ensuring children can be referred to services like CAMHS more quickly. However, there may be room to further improve access to data systems from other teams, for example, officers in custody being able to access data systems from Liaison and Diversion services. Mechanisms supporting effective data sharing include:

- YJS receiving daily updates on arrested children.
- YJS staff having secure access to police systems or shared council platforms.

- Structured protocols clarifying the type of information YJS can share with partners.

While data sharing agreements generally function effectively and in line with Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (UK Government, 1998), Stonewood YJS highlighted difficulties in reaching arresting officers to clarify information when officers may have competing priorities. Although YJS colleagues have strong working relationships with seconded youth justice officers, underpinned by a shared commitment to a child first approach, this understanding does not always extend to frontline officers responsible for arrests and completing safeguarding forms. To mitigate delays in sharing information with YJSs colleagues, in Stonewood, police officers working in the same team as the arresting officer have stepped in to support their colleagues during busy periods by responding to YJS queries. While this helps maintain progress, it is not a sustainable or efficient long-term solution.

Inter-agency communication is further strengthened through access to shared online platforms and direct communication channels. Some YJS teams use online platforms (e.g., Teams, Google Chat) to engage with council-wide services, ensuring consistent updates and reducing misunderstandings. Others have established close working relationships between YJSs, MASHs, and the police by promoting and welcoming direct calls to address concerns and questions promptly. Informal communication, such as direct calls between teams, has also proven effective in strengthening relationships. Children also highlighted this positive inter-agency working by mentioning the support they received from additional agencies:

“I also saw someone from Barnardo’s, they spoke to me about the dangers of taking drugs and other substances.” – Elias, Glyndale

“Fast forwarding referrals for mental health tests.” – Luciana, Crosden

“CAMHS, social services and YJS – they were speaking with each other and coming up with things to help me get through it.” – Leila, Crosden

Regular multi-agency meetings provide opportunities for collaborative decision-making, particularly around referral pathways and strategic planning. Almost all YJS respondents (97.5%, n=113) reported having JDMPs for OOCRs, with 90.1% (n=104) rating them as ‘highly effective’ or ‘very effective.’ These meetings typically involve representatives from the police, the YJS, social care, education, health services, and VCSE organisations. Some areas have also established multidisciplinary boards to discuss safeguarding concerns, while others hold daily operational meetings to ensure up-to-date information is shared on arrested children.

Understanding there is no one-size-fits-all solution when responding to children means recognising there is inherent complexity in ensuring that a child receives the most appropriate outcome. This includes considering the severity of the offence, aggravating and mitigating factors, the views of victims, and whether diversionary activity can address a child’s needs. Resultantly, OOCR and custody scrutiny panels should provide oversight and ensure

proportionality in decision-making. These panels typically include representatives from the YJS, police, health practitioners, social care, and education professionals, with some also involving third-sector organisations. They offer external feedback and challenge decisions where necessary to maintain accountability and fairness. National survey findings highlighted that YJSs value external feedback and scrutiny panels that involve the police, CPS and judiciary representatives, which adds an additional layer accountability and alignment of decisions at higher strategic levels. In some YJSs, staff mentioned if scrutiny panels have challenged a JDMP decision, the JDMP has to reconsider and review this outcome as part of the process.

Areas with well-functioning scrutiny panels reported:

- Increased transparency and a focus on victim inclusion.
- Panels reviewing cases to ensure OOCRs are used appropriately and proportionately.
- Collaborative discussions incorporating child development perspectives and family history considerations.



Areas for improvement

While operational relationships between agencies are largely effective, challenges remain at the strategic level. Recommendations to enhance collaboration and build on existing good practice include:

- Expanding co-location where feasible or implementing joint training to strengthen relationships.
- Ensuring all agencies are aware of data sharing agreements and have necessary access to streamline processes at both senior leadership levels and for professionals working on the ground.
- Encouraging ongoing feedback loops between the police and YJSs to improve referral quality and communication. This will help police officers understanding in what information YJSs need, why and what they do with the information.

3.4.2 Data sharing challenges

While data sharing agreements between YJSs, police and children's services generally function well (as discussed in section 3.4.1), accessing health, education and cross-police force data remains a challenge, limiting agencies' ability to make timely, informed decisions. Fragmented data systems across health, education, police, and local authorities contributes to delays in decision-making and potential gaps in support for children.

Both police and YJS teams struggle to engage with education and health staff, particularly in custody, where police often lack key health information on children. Some officers can obtain

this information, but this is inconsistent and relies on individual officers rather than a structured process.

“If the young person hasn’t been to custody before it’s such a daunting experience because it’s such a sterile environment. As police, we can only flag information to agencies once we have it after arrest.” – Police, Crosden

Health data sharing is particularly challenging due to the use of separate systems and administrative barriers. While records are easier to obtain for Children with Protection Plans (CPP), access remains difficult for others. In Stonewood, YJS staff noted that access often depends on individual relationships, caseloads, and knowledge of the system rather than a consistent process. Additionally, police must submit separate NHS referral forms, but this data is not automatically shared with MASHs, creating further delays.

Education data sharing is equally inconsistent, particularly when YJS teams need access to attendance, isolation, or exclusion data. Some schools share information readily, while others cite privacy concerns as a barrier. In contrast, Stonewood’s dedicated education worker within the YJS facilitates real-time information exchanges, preventing delays in accessing school data. This allows the education youth justice worker to understand patterns in a child’s behaviour and make more informed decisions for support. Some localities, such as Foxleigh, have identified the need for cross-locality data sharing agreements between schools to improve early identification of children at risk of exclusion.

Cross-border data sharing challenges are particularly concerning for exploited and Looked After Children (LAC), who frequently move between placements and schools, and for inner-city and urban areas, where children may be involved in offences outside of their local authority or school area. Accessing records from out-of-area schools is often difficult due to a lack of established relationships between agencies. Similarly, data sharing across police forces remains inconsistent, as each force has its own policies, leading to unclear responsibility and accountability. Officers suggest this uncertainty stems from a lack of clear guidance, while YJS teams believe it is also linked to low officer confidence in what they are permitted to share with YJS staff, making processes dependent on individual competence rather than structured protocols.



Areas for improvement

To improve information-sharing, agencies should:

- Standardise health practitioners within YJS or custody settings and lean on health practitioners to support timely information sharing. This may require strengthening communication and data sharing with Liaison and Diversion services.

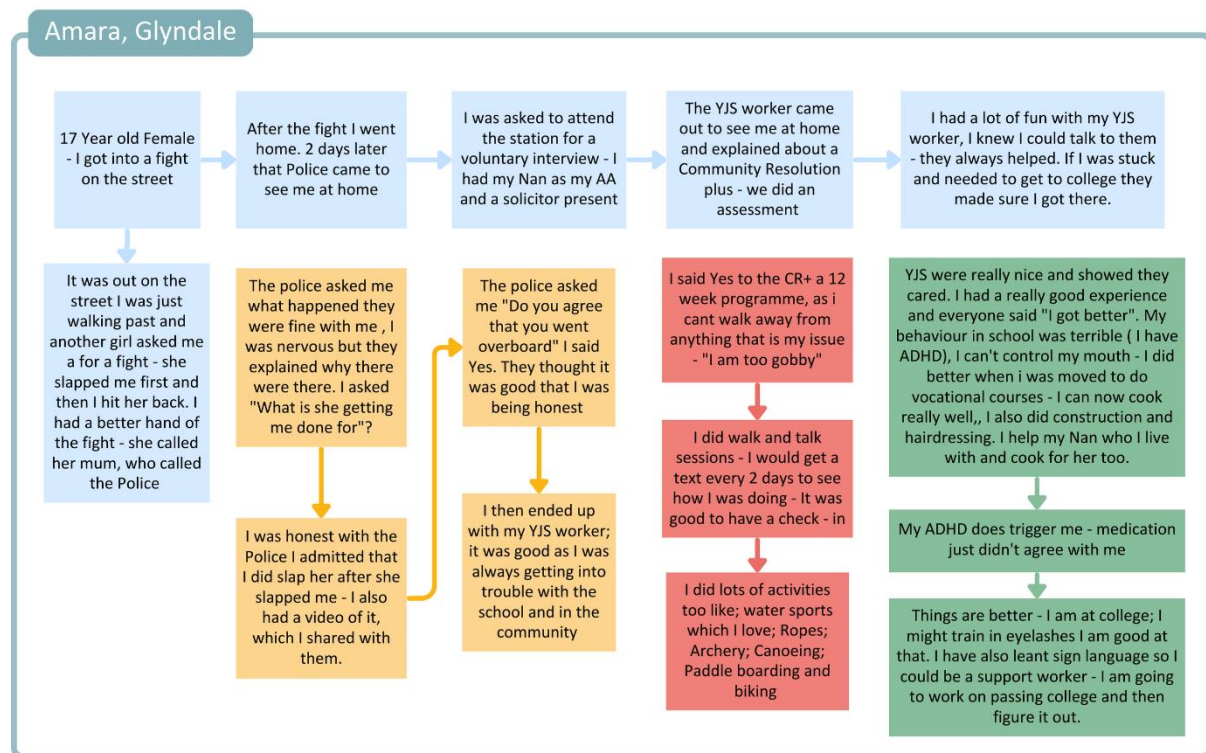
- Given healthcare use separate systems, establish points of contact across police, YJS and health services and have regular touch-points to share information and reflect on if processes are working efficiently and effectively.
- Strengthen cross-border coordination between police forces and local authorities. To begin, senior leaders across police departments and local authorities could collaboratively map out existing contacts within their teams across borders and start to identify gaps before reaching out to adjacent forces to identify key contacts for future use.

To improve information sharing, nationally,

- Develop a national data sharing framework with clear policies and example data sharing agreements for each partner agency (police, YJS, health, social care, and education). This would ensure consistency in what can be shared, reduce duplication, and provide clarity on legal parameters, alleviating concerns that hinder information exchange.

Figure 10. Amara's journey map (Glyndale)

Amara shared her experiences with Glyndale police, feeling nervous at first but relieved when officers seemed pleased with her honesty. This led to a CR and a 12-week programme with Glyndale YJS. She described it as a positive experience, particularly in helping her behaviour at school. Living with ADHD often made things difficult, but with YJS support, she's now completing vocational courses – something she sees as a big improvement. Amara is starting to think about her future and what she wants to do next.



3.5 Children offered support from local YJS and other agencies

This section examines key findings on support available for children from YJSs and other local agencies. Six sub-themes were identified: (i) a wide range of interventions available, (ii) child first approaches taken by YJS staff and working with partners, (iii) drawing on the evidence base to inform support for children, (iv) monitoring the impact of support for children, (v) implementing Turnaround, (vi) more demand than resource for supporting children with SEND or neurodiversity, and (vii) unequal access to support across different areas.

3.5.1 A wide range of interventions available

Research indicates that support for children works best when it is tailored, responsive, and gives children a sense of agency and autonomy (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022; Gibson, 2022; YJB, 2024b). In practice, the types of support available for children that receive an OOCR through YJSs varies widely. Expert interviews described the landscape of diversionary support as a ‘patchwork quilt of offers’ across YJSs, with considerable variation in available interventions across England and Wales. While locally defined interventions can allow for bespoke support for children, they may also result in inconsistent implementation across areas.

Our survey findings and deep dive sites highlighted that YJSs across England and Wales offer a broad mix of interventions for both formal and informal OOCRs (see Appendix I: National Survey Findings). Some approaches have a stronger evidence base, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for children with unmet mental health needs (Case et al., 2022; YEF, 2023) and family therapy designed to support future desistance (Larkins et al., 2022; Kilkelly, 2023). Survey data suggests that just over half of YJSs in our sample offer CBT and family therapy (51.7%, n=60 and 55.2%, n=64 respectively), while four out of six deep dive sites provide CBT and two offer family-focused programmes. However, these findings likely underrepresent actual provision since some areas might offer these services more informally. Our analysis in Table 14 reflects only what stakeholders shared during deep dive interviews, meaning that reported gaps may not necessarily indicate an absence of support provision.

Programmes focused on skill-building, vocational training, and creative activities, including sports, music, and art programmes, have been shown to help children develop protective factors that reduce future involvement in crime (Case et al., 2022; Larkin et al., 2022). YJS staff in the survey and across deep dive areas reported offering a variety of such activities (see Table 14), including cooking sessions, sports interventions, music workshops, and community-based learning programmes, which are all designed to engage children positively.

The level of knowledge about available support from police officers was mixed. For seconded YJS officers, there was a strong level of understanding. While other officers we spoke to did not explicitly highlight a comprehensive understanding of the range of support available to children, there was a sense of familiarity with interventions the YJS offer. That said, where

officers did speak on support for children, there were mentions of early prevention work for both children that have received OOCR or those displaying potential risks of involvement with the criminal justice system (see section 3.3.2 for the YJB's definition of prevention). Police officers in Crosden and Millgate reported engaging in outreach efforts by running school assemblies, group sessions, and community talks in local gyms on an ad hoc basis. These sessions aimed to address topics related to the harms of substance use, raise awareness about knife crime and county lines, and discuss the dangers of malicious online communication. Similarly, officers in Millgate have responded to a rise in 10- and 11-year-olds coming into contact with the police by working with YJS staff to identify children early and bring them in through group referrals before they reach the point of formal justice system involvement. In relation to children with OOCRs, seconded police officers in Crosden encourage children to have open and honest conversations with them about their behaviour, aiming to build trust, develop rapport and positive relationships (YEF Toolkit, n.d.; Petrosino et al., 2012).

These early prevention approaches are similar to those used in other 'police in schools' initiatives across the UK (Gaffney et al., 2021a), though their impact on children's involvement in offending is unclear (YEF Toolkit, n.d.). Some recent evaluations suggest that police involvement in schools may help build children's awareness about harms of specific activities, improve perceptions of police legitimacy (Pósch and Jackson, 2021), and help children make safer choices (Evans and Tseloni, 2019). However, these studies do not provide evidence that such initiatives reduce offending or improve children's ability to assess the consequences of their actions. Other studies warn of potential harms associated with police presence in schools, such as, net-widening (see also section 3.3.2) and the risk of labelling pupils as 'offenders.' This could risk drawing more children into the justice system, particularly those already disadvantaged by racial or class-based disparities (Gaffney et al., 2021a). More evidence is needed in the UK context to understand how the police implement these approaches and whether they achieve intended outcomes.

Many YJSs that responded to the national survey reported piloting deferred prosecution schemes, where a prosecution or caution is deferred while the child undertakes a diversionary activity. Children completing diversionary activities through these schemes are commonly processed under Outcome 22, meaning no further action is taken in response to their offence. Although research on the use of such schemes is still emerging (YJB, 2024b), recent evaluations suggest that they may help reduce reoffending (YEF, 2023). Local data from three deep dive areas supports this, indicating that using deferred prosecution schemes has helped lower reoffending rates and provided children with an opportunity to move forward without a statutory criminal record (Millgate, Glyndale and Redbrooke). However, uptake varies across regions. Some police forces, such as in Foxleigh, have not changed practice to incorporate the use Outcome 22, resulting in regional variation in how Outcome 22 and deferred prosecution initiatives are implemented (NPCC, 2022b). Similarly, this variation in the use of Outcome 22 has been highlighted nationally (Transform Justice, 2024; YEF 2023).

YJS staff in deep dive areas and in survey responses emphasised that support offers for children are varied and highly individualised – selected to match the child’s needs, interests and experiences with the intervention and caseworker’s ways of working. Interviews with children reinforced this, with children placing high value on their relationships with caseworkers, noting different ways in which their support helped them grow. This aligns with wider evidence on relational practice, which suggests that when children feel listened to and accepted by caseworkers, they are more likely to build positive relationships and respond more meaningfully to support (Crest Advisory, 2025). Non-judgmental and trusted relationships are essential for safeguarding children effectively (Michel and Billingham, 2023).

“YJS made it better at home, didn’t wait until you’re in the wrong. Got into hobbies.” – Sam, Millgate

During interviews, children spoke positively about having access to a range of activities such as go-karting, football, and music production, noting these activities gave them a sense of purpose and structure. Some children found practical skills-building opportunities, such as vocational training and Education, Training and Employment (ETE) support, helped them take their futures more seriously.

Children described a mix of structured and informal activities. Leila in Crosden continued training with the local football club after her time with the YJS ended. Meanwhile, Sam from Millgate felt that support from caseworkers improved his home life and encouraged him to pursue hobbies. Children mentioned a range of outdoor activities such as kayaking, archery, biking, rope courses and rock climbing. Elias, in Glyndale felt the combination of outdoor activities and informal check-ins with his caseworker made a difference:

“I liked seeing my YJS worker – we did kayaking, went to the [youth club], rock climbing. Sometimes we just go to McDonalds and just talk.” – Elias, Glyndale

Children also praised more formal support, including learning about the law, substance misuse and victim awareness. In Redbrooke, Omar said he learned about the law and his rights and *“stuff that is actually illegal.”* Elias mentioned getting support on substance misuse (Glyndale). Hugo reflected on how victim awareness sessions helped him understand the impact of his actions, stating:

“It made me realise it can affect someone badly. Heard stories of the impact.” – Hugo, Redbrooke

Hugo credited his caseworker’s kindness and approachability with making him feel more comfortable and safer to engage in these conversations. For many of these children, the most impactful part of their support journey wasn’t just the activities themselves but the opportunity to build trust and feel heard. As Amara described:

“YJS were really nice and showed they cared. I had a really good experience and everyone said I got better. My behaviour in school was terrible [due to ADHD] and I did better when I moved to vocational courses.” – Amara Glyndale

Alex in Millgate, who completed a programme about court, felt that working with caseworkers, helped him change his perspective and behaviours.

These findings show that there is no single ‘right’ or ‘best’ intervention. Feedback from children revealed different preferences regarding the activities involved in their support. While some interventions may be widely used, evidence has shown that even well-intentioned programmes can have adverse effects if not supported by a robust evidence base (Gaffney et al., 2021b; Petrosino et al., 2000). Feedback from children indicated that the most meaningful models of support were those that centred their needs, helped build trusted relationships with caseworkers and responded to their subjective circumstances (aligning with child first approaches in section 3.2.1). Some YJS staff in Redbrooke reinforced this:

“Good practice stems from adapting tools to fit local needs, rather than blindly applying external models. We regularly exchange ideas with other areas but are careful not to assume national trends will automatically work locally. Local evidence should be constantly compared with external data, but with an understanding of the unique needs of different areas.” – YJS, Redbrooke



Areas for improvement

To continue to support children, there is a need to balance what evidence suggests ‘should’ work with bespoke approaches that listen to the child, consider their needs, and incorporate local data to shape the delivery of interventions. These components should form the foundation of any model of support, with the specific activities delivered as a byproduct of this way of working.

- Strengthen consistency of support and adherence to evidence-based approaches, including child first and trauma-informed practices. Publishing data on diversion outcomes could help improve sector-wide understanding and equip YJSs and other agencies delivering support, with up-to-date research, guidance and practical tools.
- Enhance monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure YJSs are implementing evidence-based practices and assess how well services align with the current evidence base.
- Consider feeding back information on what support children have received, why, and what perceived impact this has had on the child, to the police. This may help spread awareness of what seems to be effective in helping to reduce reoffending.

Table 14. List of interventions across national survey responses and deep dive sites

| Intervention type | Survey (% of YJSs) | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood | YEF Toolkit (impact, evidence quality) |
|--|--------------------|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| Social skills training | 81.9% | | ✓*† ⁶ | ✓*† ⁹ | ✓*† ¹² Skills workshops by experts for children | | | Social skills training (High, 4/5) |
| Violence prevention lessons and activities/Focused deterrence | 95.7% | ✓*† ^{1,2} Exploitation support; psychological therapy for 18-month, intensive mentoring support for high-risk children | ✓† ⁸ Anger management and violence prevention; criminal exploitation by police; theft-related harms; sessions by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system | ✓ | ✓ VR headsets to show videos addressing issues like gangs and exploitation | ✓*† ¹⁷ Group work on peer pressure; Online safety work focused on females at risk of online exploitation; Equine therapy | ✓*† ^{18,19} Equine therapy; Masculinity and Me | Focused deterrence (High, 4/5) |
| Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) | 55.2% | ✓† ⁴ Forensic CAMHS | ✓* | ✓*† ¹⁰ Clinical psychotherapy | | ✓ De-escalation techniques and resilience sessions | | Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (High, 3/5) |
| Sports programmes | 81.9% | | ✓* Role model support at local football clubs | ✓ Midnight basketball; Climbing walls | ✓*† ^{11,13} ETE support with football/sporting clubs | ✓ Local gyms and martial arts groups | | Sports programmes (High, 2/5) |

| Intervention type | Survey (% of YJSs) | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood | YEF Toolkit (impact, evidence quality) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| Job and vocational skills training | 87.9% | ✓ ETE support; skill-building activities like gardening; bike maintenance | ✓*† ⁷ 16-week program (13+), offering community activities and skill-building | ✓*† ⁹ Local social enterprise initiatives, Employability training | ✓*† ^{11,12} Earning qualifications; skill-building (e.g. bike mechanic); paid apprenticeships | ✓ Earning qualifications | ✓ ETE support | Summer employment programmes (High, 1/5) |
| Trauma-focussed interventions | 85.4% | ✓*† ^{3,4} | | | | ✓*† ¹⁷ | ✓*† ¹⁸ | Trauma-specific therapies (High, 1/5) |
| Service-learning programmes | 83.6% | | ✓*† ^{5,7} Activities with the Dogs Trust | ✓ Youth Parliament; Youth clubs | ✓ Youth action group | ✓† ¹⁵ Fire and rescue initiative | ✓ Youth action group | Summer employment programmes (High, 1/5) |
| Deferred prosecution schemes | Not specified | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | Pre-court diversion (Moderate, 4/5) |
| Mentoring programmes | 66.4% | ✓*† ¹ | ✓† ⁶ YMCA mentoring service through a trusted adult | ✓ Specifically for children who may initially resist support | ✓*† ^{13,14} | ✓ Peer mentoring; Delivered by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system | ✓ Local charity mentoring delivered by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system | Mentoring (Moderate, 3/5) |
| Restorative justice | 97.5% | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓*† ¹⁶ Empathy work | ✓ | Restorative justice (Moderate, 3/5) |
| After-school programmes | 31.9% | | | | | | | After-school programmes (Low, 4/5) |
| Education and tutorial services | 81.9% | ✓* | | | | ✓*† ¹⁵ Interactive educational | | Interventions to prevent school exclusion |

| Intervention type | Survey (% of YJSs) | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood | YEF Toolkit (impact, evidence quality) |
|---|--------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | sessions on safety | | (Low, 3/5) |
| Mental health support | 96.5% | ✓* † ^{3,4} Local charity MIND providing confidential 1:1 mental health support | ✓* | ✓* † ¹⁰ | ✓* † ¹⁴ Mentoring services, for children leaving Early Help support | ✓* † ¹⁷ | ✓* † ¹⁸ | Interventions to prevent school exclusion (Low, 3/5) |
| Challenge-based activities in outdoor settings | 34.5% | | | | | ✓ Rope safety courses at local climbing centre | | Adventure and wilderness therapy (Low, 2/5) |
| Family support programmes | 51.7% | | ✓ Drop-in evenings for parents on substance-related risks; Early Help strand | | ✓ Systemic family therapist; Early Help—reducing parental conflict, school attendance | | | Parenting programmes (Low, 2/5) Multi-Systemic Therapy Functional Family Therapy (FFT) (Moderate, 3/5) Interventions to prevent school exclusion (Low, 3/5) |
| Positive activities including art, creative writing, dance | 87.1% | ✓* Cooking sessions; girls' and boys' group offering arts and crafts sessions | ✓* † ⁵ | ✓ Music clubs; film-making projects | | ✓ Graffiti project; Cook and eat sessions | ✓ INSPIRE day with external guest speakers | Arts programmes (Insufficient evidence, not enough research) |
| Summer schools | 38.8% | | | | | | | Summer schools (Insufficient evidence, not enough research) |

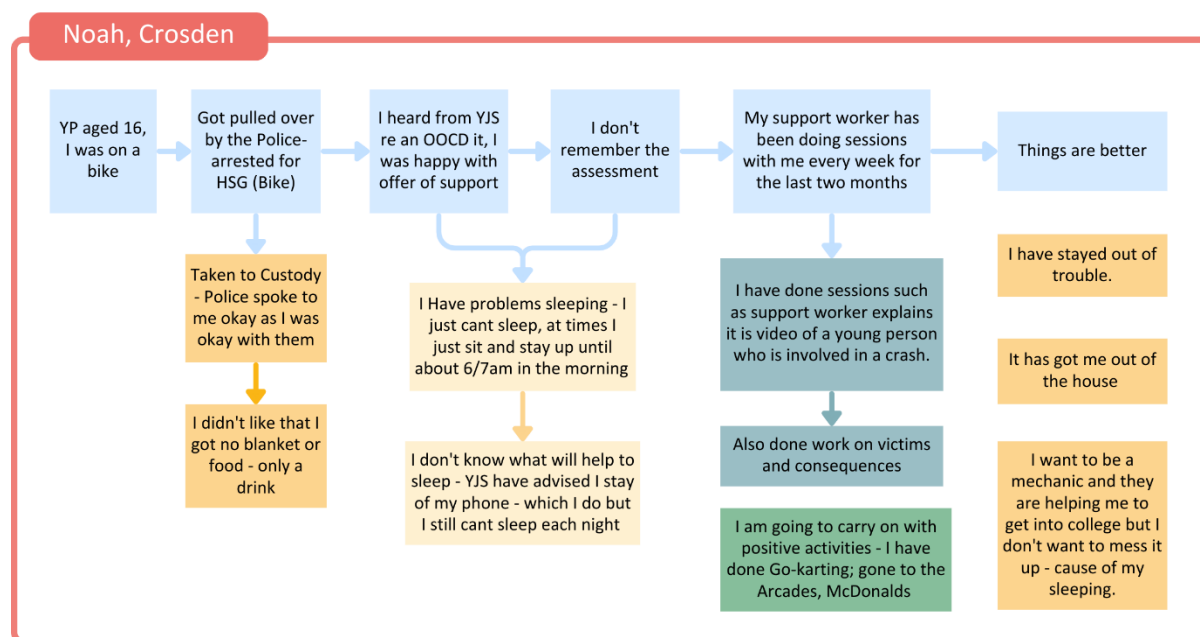
| Intervention type | Survey (% of YJSs) | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood | YEF Toolkit (impact, evidence quality) |
|---|--------------------|---|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| Weapon use prevention/education programmes | 95.7% | ✓* † ² Early interventions with the police | ✓* † ⁸ Interactive knife possession workshops; school assembly and local gym talks by YJS police officers | ✓ | | ✓* † ¹⁵ Interactive knife crime awareness sessions | | Knife crime education programmes (Insufficient evidence, not enough research) Knife surrender schemes (Insufficient evidence, not enough research) Media campaigns (Insufficient evidence, not enough research) |
| Crisis intervention | 89.7% | ✓* † ³ Bereavement services | | | | ✓ Safety mapping with family | | |
| Specialist support | Not specified | ✓ Digital resilience offer for online offences; Paid-for counselling for children involved in sexual offences | ✓* † ^{5,6} Sessions for Year 8/9 girls on resilience and violence against women and girls (e.g. boxing, youth clubs); supporting neurodiverse children better understand their diagnoses | ✓ Programme for Black and Caribbean boys around emotion and identity development | ✓* † ¹⁴ Supporting Black or mixed-heritage boys (15-18) on community feel; additional sessions for identity development/empowerment | | ✓ Identify sessions for Black and Mixed Heritage boys; intervention challenges young girls face; Neuro-developmental pathway at CAMHS | |

| Intervention type | Survey (% of YJSs) | Crosden | Millgate | Redbrooke | Foxleigh | Glyndale | Stonewood | YEF Toolkit (impact, evidence quality) |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|---|--|
| Speech and language support | 82.7% | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Substance use education and counselling | 100% | ✓ Substance misuse education service | ✓ Ketamine group | | | ✓ | ✓*† ¹⁹ Sessions on making positive choices | |
| Turnaround | Not specified | ✓ Offered externally | ✓ Offered internally | ✓ Offered internally | ✓ Offered internally | ✓ Offered internally | ✓ Offered internally | |
| Victim awareness classes and activities | 97.4% | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓*† ¹⁶ Reparative work with victims | | |

Note. Blue text relates to internal support in the YJS; Green italic text relates to external support; ✓* – this type of intervention overlaps with other intervention types; ✓ – this type of support is available; †¹⁻¹⁹ relates to techniques/interventions that map across multiple intervention types, whereby numbers are used to show similarities across each area. Deferred prosecution, Turnaround, and specialist support intervention types were not asked explicitly in the national survey, and therefore % of YJSs using these interventions was not captured. The bracket in the last column follows the format of i) the estimated impact of the intervention on violent crime (High, Moderate, Low, No Effect and Harmful) and ii) the estimated quality of evidence supporting its effectiveness, rated on a scale of 1 to 5, as per the YEF Toolkit (n.d.).

Figure 11. Noah's journey map (Crosden)

Noah talked about his experience with Crosden police and YJS. He was really happy with the support from his caseworker. He said the sessions he had taken part in – victims and consequences, car crashes – and outdoor activities have helped him stay out of trouble, and get out of the house. Noah also talked about his plans to get into college and wants to get a handle on his sleep to support these goals.

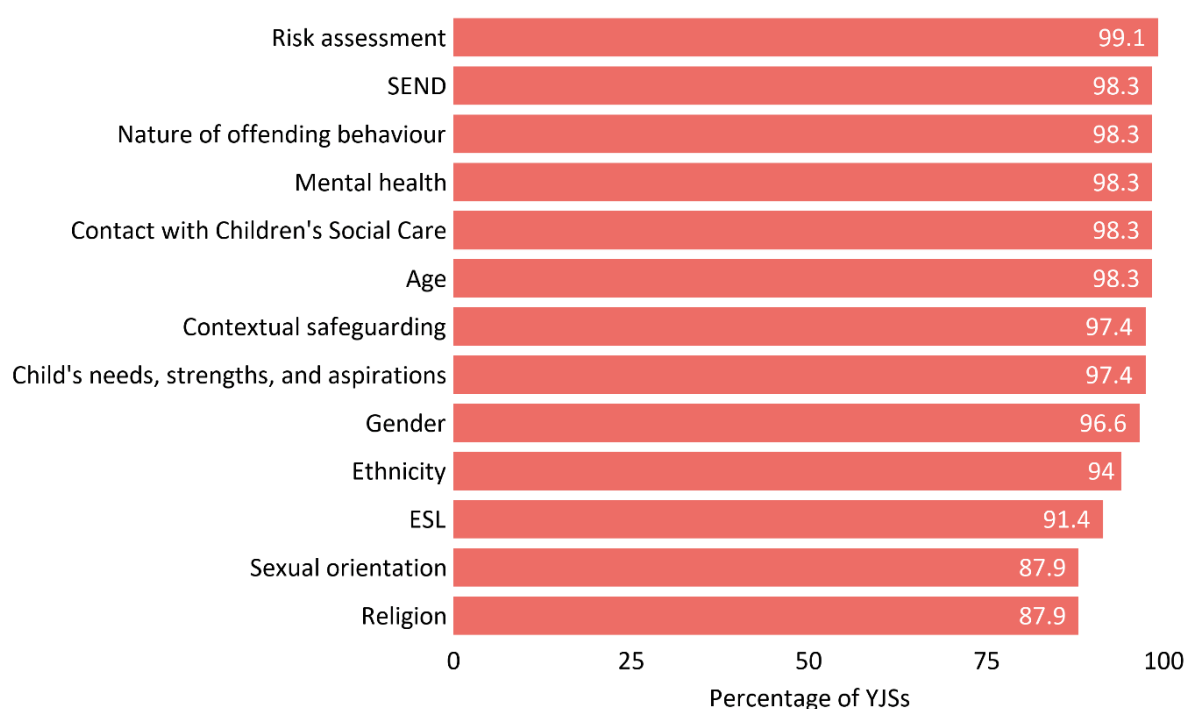


3.5.2 Child first approaches taken by YJS staff and working with partners

As highlighted in section 3.2.1, one of the four tenets of the child first approach is ensuring children actively participate in shaping their own support. However, the rapid evidence review identified a gap in how this is implemented in practice. While the YJB prioritised 'meaningful collaboration with children' in its Strategic Plan (2024-2027), there is no clear, structured model guiding how children's voices are embedded in youth justice processes (YJB, 2024b). The current-evidence base does not clarify how regularly, and to what extent, children influence the interventions and support they receive.

National survey findings suggest that child first principles are widely embedded across YJSs, though, they are applied differently across services. The majority of YJSs that responded to the survey (n=102 or ≥87.9%) adopt an individualised and holistic approach to assessing children's needs when tailoring OOCR support (see Figure 12). This includes looking beyond offence-related risks to consider mental health, SEND or neurodiversity speech and language needs, family dynamics, ethnicity, gender and educational background. Staff emphasised building on children's strengths, interests, and aspirations when creating support plans. For example, shaping support around the child's preferred ways of learning, promoting positive identity development, and referring to external agencies where appropriate.

Figure 12. Factors considered by YJSs when tailoring OOCR support



Examples of good practice in embedding child first approaches were seen across the deep dive sites. In Crosden, children complete self-assessment forms to reflect on their strengths and worries, which helps to shape their own support plans. Similar models are used in Redbrooke and Glyndale, whereby assessments incorporate children's perspectives on what type of support would be most beneficial for them, considering SEND or neurodiversity, long-term health needs, and broader developmental factors. Training on trauma-informed practice has also been introduced in some areas. In Glyndale, council staff receive training on recognising ACEs, and some YJS caseworkers are qualified social workers, meaning they are well trained in identifying safeguarding needs. Staff also participated in an immersive programme simulating the justice system from a child's perspective, highlighting barriers that children can face when accessing support. In Crosden, training on child first principles is planned for 2025 to reinforce trauma-informed practice.

Survey findings highlighted part of the decision-making process for YJS caseworkers involves considering factors like gender, ethnicity, age and other contextual information about the child to determine the most suitable form of support subject to diversionary outcomes (as highlighted in Figure 12). This is completed through needs assessment and support plans. Five deep dive areas highlighted a number of VCSE organisations they work with to provide tailored support. This includes specialist support for Black and mixed-heritage boys often delivered by Black adults, mentoring support for Year 8 and 9 girls around Violence Against Women and Girls, and support for children with neurodiversity to help them navigate challenges and feel positive about their future.

Ensuring support plans are co-produced with children and their families is key to increasing engagement in support activities. Deep dive areas reported actively involving children in

shaping their own support plans and considering parental input when identifying the child's needs. This allows caseworkers to gain a better understanding of the child's needs, while addressing wider family concerns such as substance misuse or familial conflict. One child, Priya, described feeling that she was *"given a choice and treated as an individual"* due to this approach. However, staff in Glyndale warned against overloading children with excessive interventions, particularly those that are classroom-based, as this can be counterproductive, especially for children who struggle at school. Crosden YJS highlighted the importance of building a positive and trusting relationship between the child and caseworker:

"Some of our young people have never had a positive relationship with an adult before. We can show them what a positive relationship looks like." – YJS, Crosden

While a myriad of interventions have been described to support children (as highlighted in section 3.5.1), the YJS caseworker-child relationship plays a crucial role in determining how effectively children engage (Bond-Taylor, 2021; Crest Advisory, 2025; Corr et al., 2024; West Yorkshire Combined Authority, 2021). Evidence from the rapid review suggests that when children feel they have a trusted adult who understands them, they are more likely to place higher value in diversion schemes (Bond-Taylor, 2021; Corr et al., 2024), develop a stronger sense of identity outside their offence, and open up about their support needs (Bond et al., 2017; Larkins et al., 2022; Open Innovation Team, 2023; YJB, 2019).

Five deep dive sites reaffirmed the influence of the caseworker-child relationship on engagement levels. In Crosden, caseworkers are often assigned to children based on compatibility, ensuring children are paired with someone they are more likely to engage with. Staff noted assessment processes commonly serve as a foundation for building trust and increasing children's willingness to engage. In Redbrooke, caseworkers reflected on how informal interactions, such as meeting children for a coffee or taking them on a walk or going for a drive, have had noticeable impacts on children's mental health, making them feel valued. Such approaches are backed by research showing that walking tours and map-making activities help with relationship building and allow practitioners to better understand a child's world (Larkin et al., 2022). End-of-intervention surveys consistently highlight relationships as the most important factor in shaping a child's support experience.

Partnership working plays an important role in ensuring support is tailored. All deep dive sites highlighted efforts to work closely with external agencies, including social workers, education providers, and health practitioners. In Foxleigh, caseworkers collaborate with social workers to review children's progress and identify key areas for action, while in Glyndale, joint supervisions with charities and family workers take place every five weeks to refine support strategies. These collaborative working practices, supported by strong interagency relationships, enable services to develop more tailored and effective interventions.

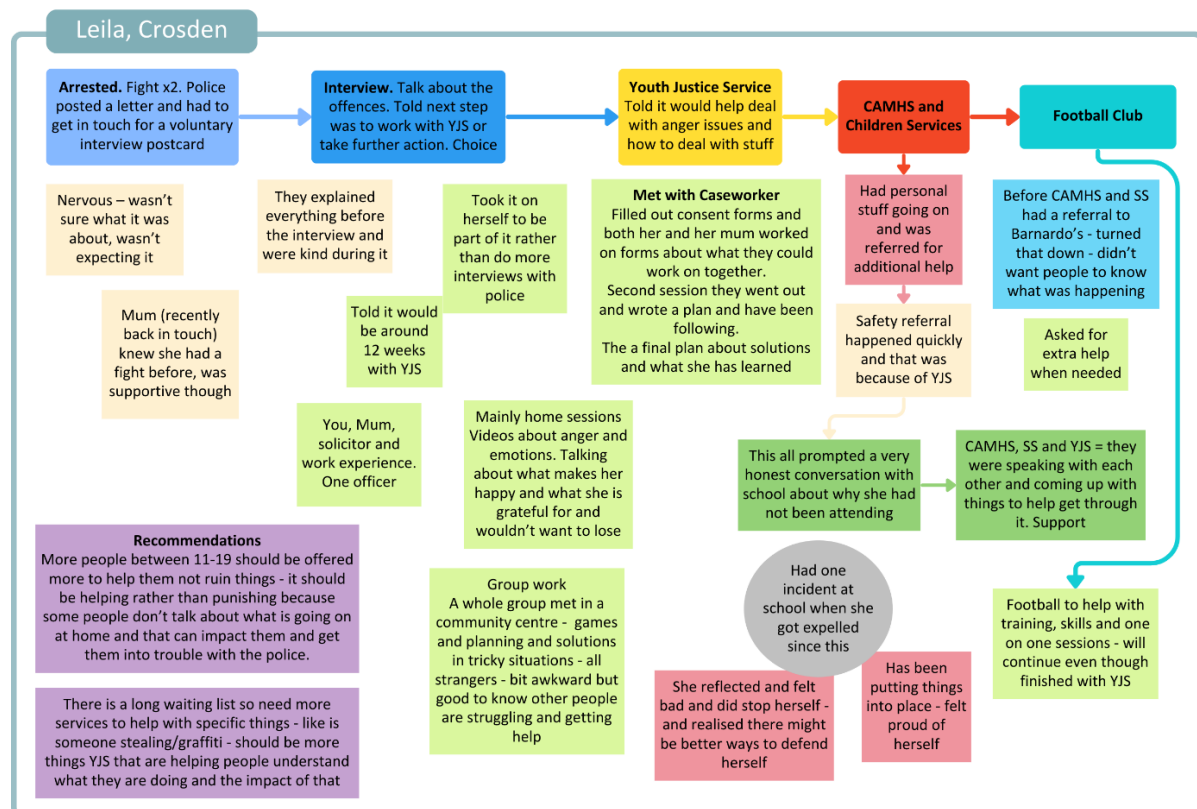


Areas for improvement

- Enhance formal training on child first and trauma-informed approaches across all YJSs. While deep dive sites demonstrated good practice adapting child first approaches, the survey findings suggested this is not embedded consistently. National-level training – delivered by the YJB or relevant agencies (e.g. Unitas) – could equip YJS staff with practical strategies for embedding participating in case management, developing child-centred support plans and improving relationship-based practice.
- Strengthen local multi-agency collaboration to tailor interventions. Deep dive sites highlighted strong joint working with social care, education, and health providers, but this varies across YJSs. Formalising structured case reviews or multi-agency supervision (as seen in Glyndale with Barnardo's and family workers) could help ensure interventions remain proportionate, relevant, and co-ordinated across services.

Figure 13. Leila's journey map (Crosden)

Leila talked about her experience, predominantly touching on the support she received from the YJS. She talked about reflecting on her behaviour and personal things that may have explained why she was acting the way she was. She received CAMHS support and felt all agencies were speaking together to support her. She thinks more 11-19 year olds should be supported rather than punished, to help them talk about things they might be bottling up.



3.5.3 Drawing on the evidence base to inform support for children

There is limited empirical research evaluating and comparing diversion programmes, with much of the existing evidence being either outdated or based on studies from the United States (Ackerley et al., 2015; YEF, 2023). Expert interviews highlighted that while many resources exist to inform practice, such as inspection reports, the YEF Toolkit, and policy research, there is limited knowledge sharing between areas, with not all professionals being aware of, or confident in, how to use these resources effectively. A clearer national understanding of what interventions are effective, for whom, and why, would support more informed decision-making while still allowing for local flexibility.

Findings from the national survey reinforced this variation, with 32.7% (n=38) of respondents stating OOCR support was “very well aligned”, while 55.1% (n=64) said it was “somewhat aligned” to the evidence-base. Free-text responses from the survey, illustrated efforts by some YJSs to align delivery of support for children with evidence-based practice. This includes drawing on the YEF Toolkit to promote the use of more evidence-driven interventions and collaborating with researchers from local universities to embed evidence-based approaches into interventions for children receiving OOCRs.

At the same time, some YJSs noted gaps in knowledge, highlighting many interventions are not well-aligned with the evidence base which may be due to a lack of access to or awareness of key research and resources. Some YJSs expressed a desire to access the evidence base and acknowledged there was room for improvement, but highlighted difficulties in doing so. These findings indicate that while many YJSs are working to integrate evidence-based practice, challenges relating to access and awareness of resources alongside training gaps, and operational constraints may impact how consistently evidence-based practices are adopted across services.

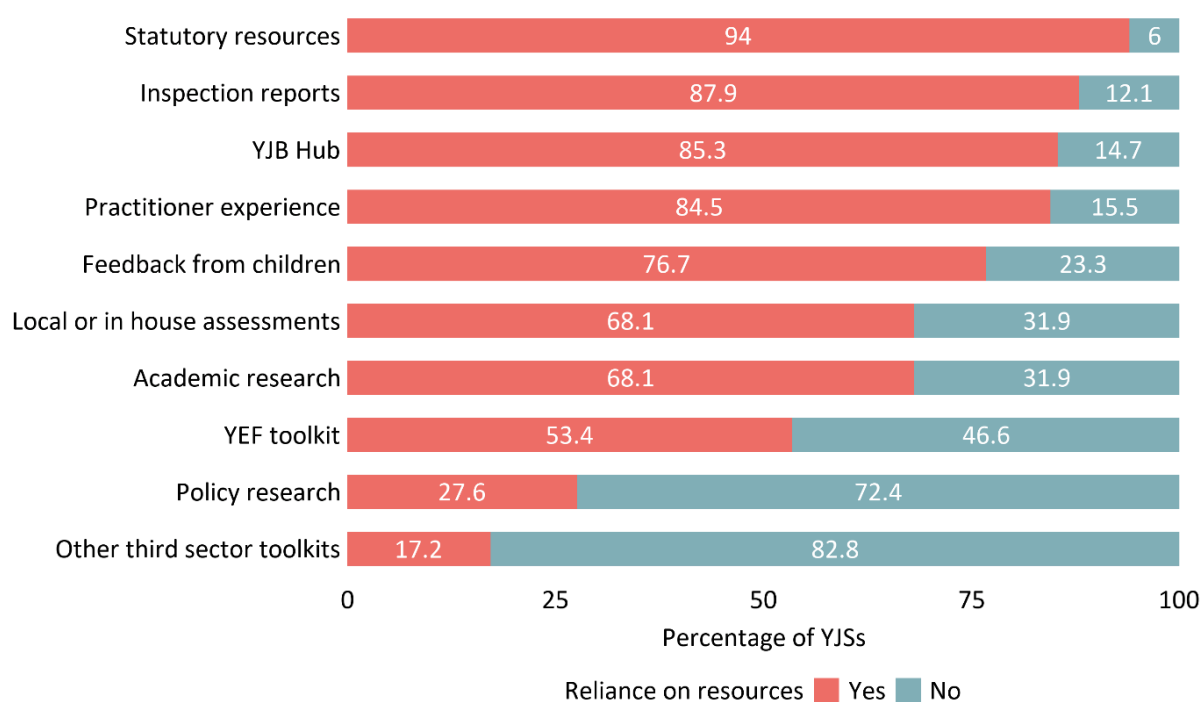
Deep dive sites suggest that many YJSs rely on internal monitoring data and practitioner experience to shape diversionary interventions. Several YJSs reported conducting their own evaluations to improve their support models. For example, Stonewood YJS partners with local universities to assess the impact of interventions, while Glyndale YJS is developing a policy document outlining the use of diversionary practices across the region.⁷ Staff in Redbrooke felt identifying what works locally should be prioritised, rather than replicating approaches in areas that likely have different population needs and demographics. While this approach poses a challenge in identifying nationwide trends, YJS staff suggested local modifications are needed to ensure support meets the needs of children in different contexts. However, this tailored approach can make it difficult for YJSs to measure the effectiveness of different

⁷ Key issues the policy is looking at includes a) avoiding 'justice by geography' which is the resulting in unequal access to OOCR support for children depending on location; b) addressing high FTE statistics, and c) training frontline officers on need to adopt a Child First approach that prioritises diversionary outcomes.

interventions to build a stronger evidence base, while accounting for regional differences (see section 3.5.4).

When asked about accessing the OOCR support evidence-base, deep dive sites highlighted a number of national resources. For example, Crosden highlighted the myriad of resources on the YJB website, while Redbrooke highlighted the YEF guidance, Centre for Justice Innovation best practice and inspectorate reports. Similarly, as highlighted in Figure 14, YJSs that completed the national survey reported using statutory resources (84%, n=97), inspection reports (87.9%, n=102) and YJB hub (85.3%, n=99) to inform OOCR support. This included using tools such as the Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool to inform decision-making, particularly for children with complex needs. In addition, YJSs highlighted the importance of a caseworker's expertise, case management guidance, and child feedback in shaping diversionary support. 84.5% of YJSs (n=98) said they valued practitioner experience, and 76.7% (n=89) noted the importance of considering feedback from children when making decisions about what support is offered. This indicates that both professional judgment and child-centred approaches shape diversion offers across YJSs in England and Wales.

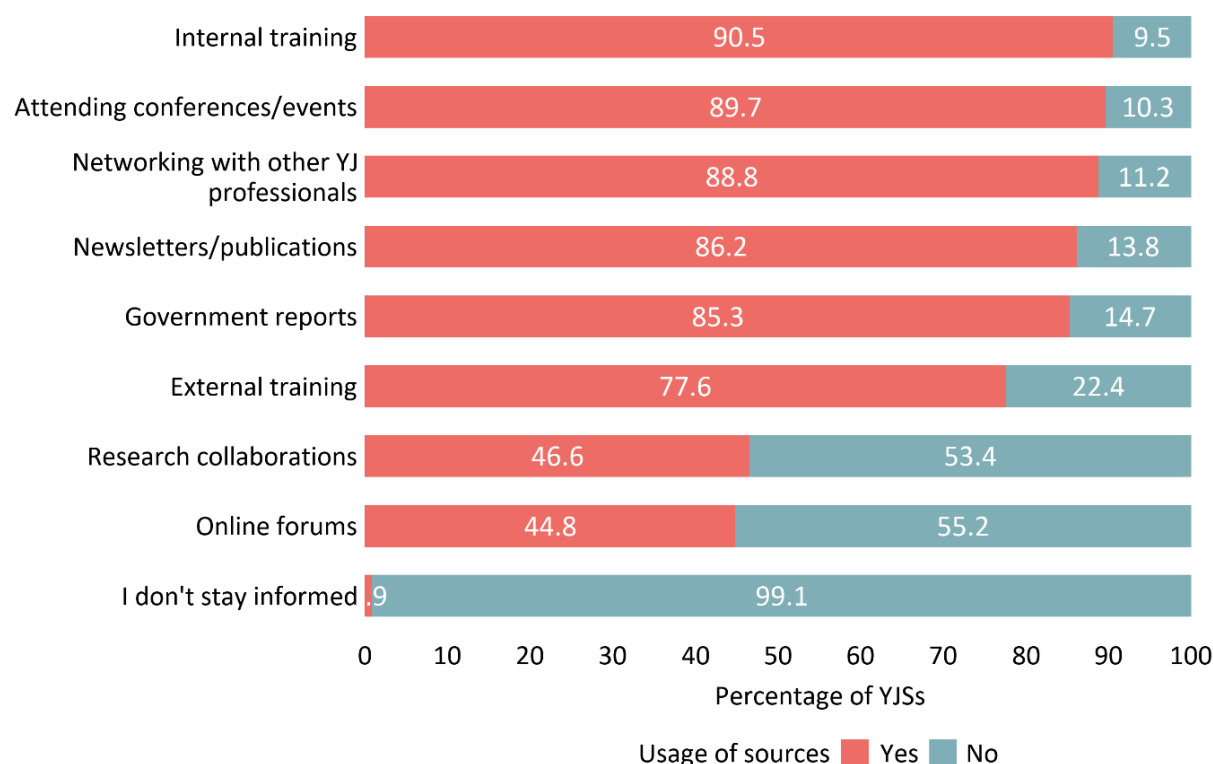
Figure 14. Resources used by YJSs to ensure evidence-based OOCR support



Despite the availability of these resources, there are barriers to offering evidence-based OOCR support. Staff reported that time constraints and capacity issues can make it difficult to engage with external research. Furthermore, a lack of confidence in applying external evidence to local practice can contribute to inconsistent implementation. While some services, such as Foxleigh, actively draw on both internal and external academic research, it was unclear what mechanisms were in place to support this process. Many YJSs, as

highlighted in the national survey, relied primarily on internal training (90.5%, n=105) and events (89.7%, n=104) as their main sources of information (see Figure 15). More broadly, there was limited clarity across deep dive areas on how interventions were developed. Practitioners often described what interventions they delivered but not always how content for these was developed or adapted, or where content was sourced from.

Figure 15. Information sources accessed by YJSs to stay informed with latest evidence



Areas for improvement

To improve YJS access to the evidence base, organisations that have evaluative information about interventions to share – such as the YEF, College of Policing and other evaluation partners – should focus on making resources more accessible, including:

- Providing clear guidance on both what the evidence indicates (i.e. intervention effectiveness) and what its delivery entails.
- Sharing information such as infographics in bite-size chunks to ensure accessibility and to spark initial interest.
- Ensure YJS staff and other partners know where to find the evidence. This may include providing regular communication to YJS to remind them of the YEF Toolkit and follow-on resources, as well as capturing the voices of children to help promote best practice evidence-base.

Taking the abovementioned approaches will enable YJS staff and other partners to make informed decisions about which interventions may be worth trialling or adapting for the children they support considering issues around proportionality and potential for net-widening, as well as how to implement them effectively.

To incentivise the use of evidence-base practice, HMIP could:

- Enhance the monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure YJSs are implementing evidence-based practices. This includes providing clarity around HMIP expectations for other agencies beyond the YJS offering support for diverted children, considering how this is being monitored and evaluated. The new HMIP inspection framework presents an opportunity to assess how well services align with the current evidence base, while considering child first.

3.5.4 Monitoring the impact of support for children

Assessing the effectiveness of support relies on robust data collection processes. However, poor data collection techniques and the absence of standardised monitoring practices historically led to gaps in knowledge about ‘what works’ (HMIP and HMICFRS, 2018). For instance, there is limited quantitative analysis of how individual schemes operate in practice (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022; Boden, 2019; Bond-Taylor, 2021; Farrington et al., 2021; HMIP and HMICFRS, 2018; YJB, 2021).

In practice, this means that while some interventions may appear promising, their effectiveness in terms of the outcomes for children and their efficient use of available resources, remains unclear. This gap in the availability of national-level evidence was compounded by the fact that, until April 2024, YJSs were not required to collect data on diversion programmes, including participation rates and outcomes (Bateman, 2020; Centre for Justice Innovation, 2019, 2021; Cushing, 2016). While the introduction of this mandate may improve national-level insights, its impact will depend on consistent implementation across YJSs.

Across all deep dive sites, staff highlighted the importance of capturing feedback from children to shape ongoing improvements. In Glyndale, co-production is embedded into practice through an engagement strategy, which ensures children's voices are presented to senior management.

“We have an engagement strategy where we meet with young people to present the child’s voice to our management board. One young person recently made clear they weren’t able to access health provision in the way they wanted – this has been raised now and we’re problem-solving.” – YJS, Glyndale

With the exception of two sites, which have dedicated data analysts or centralised data capture systems, YJS staff from deep dive areas widely agreed that monitoring approaches remain inconsistent and informal. Some sites noted that caseworkers rarely shared monitoring findings with other services, limiting opportunities for learning and sharing best practice regionally and nationally. Only Stonewood reported caseworkers actively contacting other YJSs to learn from their approaches. Staff reported calling other YJS teams to understand and adopt practice they found useful, with networking opportunities at YJB events likely prompting these conversations. These findings indicate a need for better knowledge exchange and evaluation frameworks to ensure evidence-based interventions are accessible and impactful. Some of the impact monitoring approaches discussed during deep dive interviews and workshops are summarised in Table 15.

Table 15. Mechanisms in place across YJSs for monitoring impact of support

| Data capture mechanism | Type(s) of data captured |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Monitoring data | Crosden, Foxleigh, Glyndale and Stonewood YJSs track quantitative data on reoffending rates, FTEs, and children’s participation in Education, Training and Employment (ETE), that YJS teams review on a monthly basis. Across areas, this data is used internally to monitor trends, inform service improvements, and conduct quarterly audits. Stonewood has input from key partners such as CAMHS and housing services to ensure children receive tailored support. Monitoring data was not reportedly linked to outcome decision making or police data. |
| Case studies | Foxleigh produce case studies on Turnaround, helping staff visualise programme outcomes and service needs. Millgate provide qualitative insights into what children value in support, and emerging caseload trends (e.g. increase in harmful sexual behaviour cases). |
| End-of-support feedback | Crosden, Redbrooke, Glyndale, and Stonewood YJSs gather qualitative feedback from children and families on their experiences, focusing on changes in attitudes and behaviours, what worked well, and areas for improvement (e.g. Stonewood share hypothetical scenarios of support to understand what they could change/add moving forward). This feedback is shared with caseworkers and at management board meetings to refine support plans and ensure interventions remain meaningful and relevant to children’s needs. |
| Group sessions | Stonewood facilitate group sessions with caseworkers to support knowledge sharing about good practice within the team. |
| Interactive feedback | In Stonewood, children are invited to visit custody settings and provide feedback on how to make them more child-friendly. |
| Independent children’s panel | The Stonewood YJSs ‘Through Our Eyes’ panel, consisting of children with lived experience of YJS support and facilitated independently, provides feedback on practice. |

Monitoring children's engagement with support was less frequently discussed. Most YJS reported in the national survey that instances of non-engagement from children were rare or extremely low. This was attributed to YJS teams making persistent efforts to 'roll with resistance' and use child first strategies to encourage compliance before escalating cases. Re-engagement efforts included contacting the child and family through multiple channels including home visits, multi-agency involvement (i.e., working with school staff, social workers), using creative engagement methods such as outdoor activities and embedding youth workers in schools, and using the Turnaround programme where appropriate. Many YJSs reported in the national survey that they track outcomes of non-engagement on case management systems. This data may be used to follow up with the child after a set period (e.g., six weeks) to re-offer support as well as inform pre-decision assessments about future OOCR outcomes, if the same child re-offends.

3.5.5 Implementing Turnaround

Deep dive sites agreed that most children in the YJS are already known to children's services, with their involvement in the YJS often seen as an escalation of existing circumstances, rather than as an isolated event. These children also frequently present with complex needs, including learning difficulties or mental health conditions. Early intervention to prevent further entrenchment in offending behaviour is crucial, with the Turnaround programme seen as a valuable initiative for providing preventative support for children receiving certain OOCRs. Glyndale highlighted a large number of children with RUIs and/or subject to NFAs – have engaged voluntarily with Turnaround support, which helped influence police decision-making on next steps.

"Turnaround is amazing. It catches the reachable, teachable moment a lot earlier. For a child after an offence – that's so important because 7 months is a whole lifetime in a child's life. We have such good outcomes with Turnaround and can be flexible." – YJS, Foxleigh

Turnaround expanded YJSs' ability to engage children who might otherwise fall through gaps in support. Examples included tailored support such as family-focused interventions in Stonewood and gym sessions in Redbrooke to improve engagement. Staff in Foxleigh highlighted the programme's role in increasing their capacity to work with a larger number of children, with positive outcomes for many who were not previously known to the YJS.

Despite these successes, YJS staff reported challenges in implementation. Key concerns included Turnaround's original eligibility criteria⁸, which excludes Looked After Children and those subject to Child Protection Orders, despite their heightened vulnerabilities. Crosden

⁸ Turnaround funding was extended for an additional year (until March 2026). This includes some changes to the eligibility criteria.

and Glyndale highlighted the three-month referral window was also seen as a barrier, with administrative delays often preventing timely intervention.

Uncertainty around Turnaround's funding period has caused challenges around long-term planning and staffing stability. Some areas, such as Foxleigh, began preparing for potential funding reductions by redirecting resources to prevention roles or integrating Turnaround into broader Early Help offers. These efforts demonstrate the value of funding in helping YJSs experiment with different approaches to offer diversionary support for children.



Areas for improvement

Given the benefits of early interventions, such as Turnaround, sustained funding could ensure continued support for children RUI and provide YJSs with reassurance this early-intervention support is here to remain.

To support YJSs, the Government should consider:

- Announcing ongoing funding well in advance of temporary funding periods ending to mitigate services losing staff – typically on non-permanent contracts – to then have to recruit again. This instability might impact children who find their relationship with a trusted adult is cut short.

3.5.6 More demand than resource for supporting children with SEND or neurodiversity

Recent evidence suggests 70-90% of children in contact with the criminal justice system have some form of SEND or neurodiversity (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2024). UK-based evidence indicates a significant rise in the prevalence of children with SEND and neurodiversity over recent years (Department for Education, 2023B; NHS England, 2023). These findings were echoed by the deep dive sites, which reported a surge in the number of children on YJS caseloads presenting with SEND or neurodiversity – often without formal diagnoses. Furthermore, many police officers cited they are often unaware of learning disabilities and/or neurodiversity when a child is arrested or in custody (as highlighted in section 3.2.4) and often struggle to access healthcare data during this period (refer back to section 3.4.2). This issue is compounded by long national waiting times for CAMHS assessments, which can range from a month to over two years for some children (Children's Commissioner, 2024). For children in the criminal justice system, these delays can have lasting consequences, with opportunities for early intervention lost as their behaviours escalate during the waiting period.

“He’s on the waiting list for an autism/ADHD diagnosis. He’ll be at his GCSE option age by the time he gets his appointment.” – YJS, Crosden

Deep dive research and expert interviews stressed that mental health referrals for children are at unprecedented levels across England and Wales, further adding to already long CAMHS

waiting times. As a result, stakeholders in Crosden highlighted that health services providing CAMHS interventions are understaffed and stretched. In Redbrooke, stakeholders stressed that this lack of access to in-house forensic and psychological support make it harder to understand children's emotional health, wellbeing and underlying needs. As a result, Redbrooke YJS felt forced to purchase services externally. Staff in Foxleigh view this as a "Catch 22 situation", with no options to fast-track referrals and ongoing staff shortages in mental health services further limiting children's access to support. In contrast, Stonewood staff noted that having a mental health support worker in-house with strong links into CAMHS helped speed up referrals, even though this practitioner was not part of CAMHS themselves.

Some areas offered examples of good practice in this area, such as multi-agency case formulations to create a comprehensive picture of a child's needs and coordinate support across services. In Millgate, the YJS team takes a proactive approach to identifying undiagnosed children with SEND, working closely with specialised staff with expertise in SEND and education re-engagement. These staff help identify structural barriers that children with neurodiversity face, offering targeted support for school exclusions, attendance challenges, and access to health services. When needed, they escalate concerns internally to caseworkers, managers, or strategic leads to ensure children receive the right support. The team also works alongside an outreach worker in the local council who helps children with SEND reintegrate into education, sometimes accompanying them to school to ease the transition. However, these approaches exist only in isolated YJSs rather than as standard practice across England and Wales. Despite the fact many YJSs have access to a mental health worker, stretched resources mean these professionals are often limited to working with children on statutory orders, leaving children receiving OOCRs with minimal mental health support.

"Many children remain undiagnosed, labelled as aggressive and disruptive, and progress through the system without any support." – YJS, Redbrooke

YJS staff also frequently face barriers due to the capacity limitations of external services. Findings from deep dive sites and the national survey consistently pointed to resource gaps, inconsistent access to specialist support, and the lack of culturally responsive services for Black and global majority heritage children with SEND or neurodiversity. Beyond service limitations, wider social determinants such as poverty, housing instability, and family adversity further compound these challenges, disproportionately affecting children in the youth justice system. These factors often create additional barriers to accessing timely and appropriate support, increasing their risk of disengagement from services and entrenching inequalities (Adjei et al., 2025). Needs within this cohort are not uniform, with some children requiring immediate therapeutic support, while others need educational specialists who can work with children before therapy becomes available. Many referrals stall because children do not meet rigid eligibility criteria, or the service lacks specific expertise. Furthermore,

Redbrooke staff noted that local clinical services lacked forensic training, making it harder to deliver appropriate support to children.

While many areas struggle with resource gaps, others have adapted their local workforce to meet the growing needs of children by embedding SALT professionals within YJSs. SALT specialists have expanded their roles beyond traditional speech and language support to address broader neurodiverse needs, fast-track referrals, and offer clinical guidance to YJS teams. Survey findings suggest that YJSs with embedded SALT services are better positioned to support neurodivergent children. In Redbrooke, trauma-informed SALT teams help children develop emotion regulation strategies, improving their engagement and reducing frustration with YJS interventions. Staff reported the positive impact of these services on children and families, including parents praising speech and language therapists and children highlighting improvements on their emotions:

“Met with speech and language therapist to try and help with emotions at school. This is sound; good to have.” – Yasmine, Crosden

Despite the clear demand for this expertise, not all YJSs have the resources to provide it. Crosden and Stonewood have such provision in-house, and report more responsive support that identifies undiagnosed SEND or neurodiversity and as a result, better engagement from children. Having a SALT specialist has also strengthened working relationships and improved working practices around SEND and neurodiversity across agencies, such as education and police. In contrast, Millgate and Redbrooke rely on external commissioning arrangements. This means that access is limited to certain days or dependent on time-consuming processes. Other areas like Crosden and Glyndale have lost in-house provision partially (e.g., no longer having a CAMHS officer) or altogether due to staff turnover, sickness or funding cuts, leaving families to navigate already overstretched health systems for assessments. Such variation in provision raises questions about inequities in access to specialist support across YJS areas, and the long-term sustainability of these services, especially given increasing unmet need in recent years.

A detailed breakdown of SALT and mental health provision across deep dive sites can be found in Table 16, highlighting the pathways and resources, benefits and challenges of these teams.

Table 16. SALT or mental health coverage across deep dive areas, highlighting the pathways/resources, benefits and challenges

| Deep dive | Support in YJS? | Pathway/resource | Reported benefits of SALT support | Ongoing gaps/challenges identified by YJS staff |
|------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|
| Crosden | ✓ | Dedicated in-house speech and language worker. Previously had a forensic CAMHS worker. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies and supports children's undiagnosed SEND or neurodiversity needs. Speeds up access to diagnoses and reduces wait times. Provides quick, responsive, and highly skilled support. Reviews YJS information about interventions to improve accessibility. Shares reports with police and advises on engaging with children. Helps children develop emotional regulation strategies. Guides case managers in adapting communication to meet children's needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for a bigger team of SALT staff to meet increasing demand instead of relying on a single professional. |
| Millgate | ✓ | Externally commissioned speech and language therapist. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SALT professional attending the health panel twice a week has improved identification of children's SEND or neurodiversity needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SALT worker is only available on set days, limiting access. Lengthy referral forms are time-consuming for YJS. |
| Redbrooke | ✓ | Externally commissioned speech and language therapists. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trains YJS staff to better assess and manage SEND needs (based on longstanding partnership between YJS and SALT) such as speaking to court/Magistrates about child with SEND in advance. Strengthens school relationships to improve communication support for children. Supports parents, especially those with English as an Additional Language, in navigating assessment systems and processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of in-house clinical psychologist and speech and language reduces scope to do case formulation work to understand child's behaviours and needs |
| Glyndale | ✗ | Previously had an in-house | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current provision. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High unmet demand, as many children have |

| Deep dive | Support in YJS? | Pathway/ resource | Reported benefits of SALT support | Ongoing gaps/challenges identified by YJS staff |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| | | SALT worker, but no longer do | | <p>speech and language needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents now must go to local hospitals for children's assessments, increasing wait times. |
| Stonewood | ✓ | SALT team plus seconded SALT officer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses and identifies undiagnosed SEND or neurodiverse needs. Supports parents and teachers with new communication methods. Improves referral pathways for children with communication needs. Trains police and social care professionals on engaging with children. Translates legal language into child-friendly formats. Supports children with basic learning skills (e.g., learning left from right). Adds context at JDMP, improving decisions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No challenges reported. |
| Foxleigh | ✓ | CAMHS mental health nurse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children open to YJS have a wellbeing screening with the CAMHS mental health nurse. If the CAMHS mental health nurse, caseworkers/practitioners and/or parents/carers identifies SALT needs, a SALT screening can be arranged. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No challenges reported. |



Recommendations

To improve access to psychological support for children:

- Ensure all YJSs have embedded speech and language professionals to address broader disparities, including racial disparities, and ensure children receive appropriate support.
- Promote diversity and culturally competent support through expanded recruitment of clinicians from diverse backgrounds and targeted training for practitioners on culturally competent approaches, recognising how cultural perceptions shape service design and engagement.
- Develop local pathways to fast-track mental health support for undiagnosed children, prioritising those identified by YJS assessments and coordinating with education and health services to reduce duplication and improve access while awaiting formal diagnosis.
- National investment to meet rising demand in psychological support, including psychological therapies, to alleviate short-term, ad-hoc solutions and ensure consistent support can be provided to all children. To ensure equitable access to psychological support for children, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds, all YJSs should have clearly defined referral processes and established working relationships with CAMHS (YEF, 2023) to enable this support system to function efficiently and effectively.
- Locally, mapping out both an Integrated Care Board and YJS footprint to consider how to utilise regional support more affectively which may alleviate postcode differences in access to psychological support.

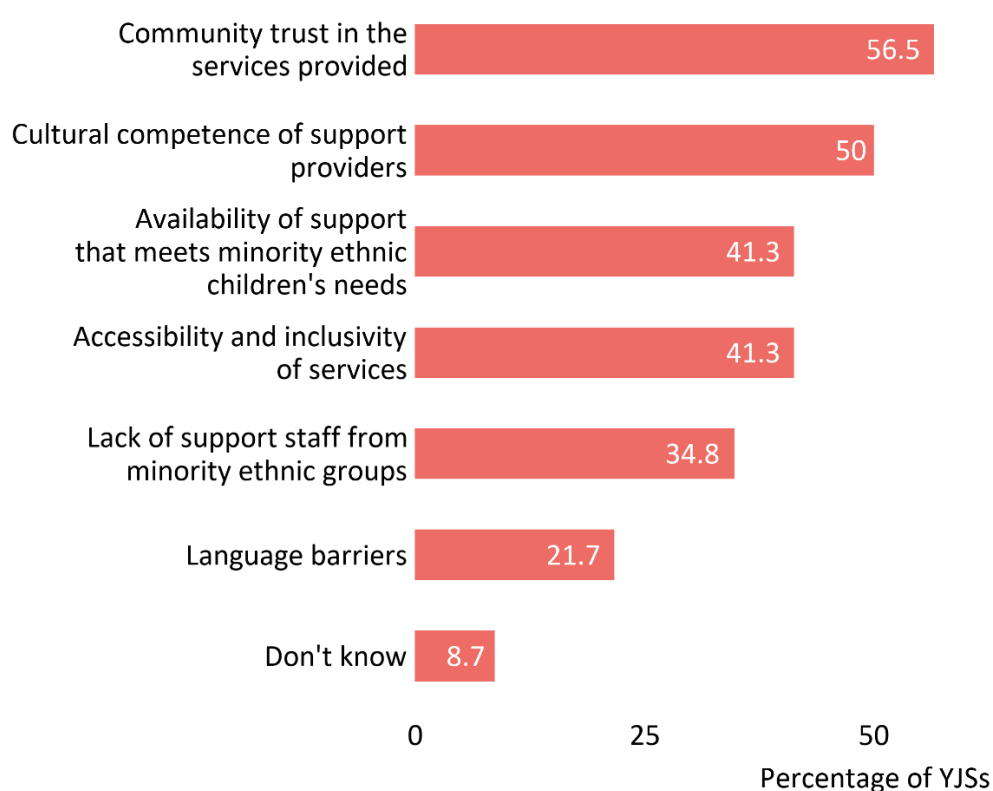
3.5.7 Unequal access to support across different areas

Disparities in youth justice outcomes do not start at the contact with the police. Research indicates that children who come into contact with the law are among the most vulnerable and marginalised in society, often having been in the care system, experienced poverty, neglect or abuse, and may have been excluded from school (UNICEF UK, 2020). The Lammy Review (2017) highlighted that disparity and disproportionality continue to characterise the youth justice system in England and Wales, stressing that Black and global majority children enter the criminal justice system at a younger age than their white peers, were more likely to be remanded, and were more likely to receive custodial sentences for comparable lower-level offences. Furthermore, studies show that these disparities are often exacerbated once a child enters the criminal justice system, including diversionary practice, with children from ethnic minority backgrounds being less likely to receive OOCs than their white peers (Bateman et al, 2020). These findings – alongside insights from expert interviews and deep dive sites,

underscore the systemic inequalities that contribute to disproportionality within the criminal justice system.

Findings from our survey and deep dive sites reveal that disparities in youth justice outcomes are shaped by both racial bias and geographic barriers to service access. For example, some areas with higher levels of ethnic diversity report greater numbers of FTEs into the youth justice system, while rural or semi-rural areas face logistical challenges in delivering support to children. That said, some YJSs are actively working to ensure equitable access to support, but approaches vary, and awareness levels of disproportionality remain inconsistent across services. Furthermore, experts had few concrete suggestions on how to reduce these inequalities and ensure all children can access the support they need.

Figure 16. Factors contributing to perceived racial disparity in accessing OOCR support



Of the YJSs that responded to our survey, 60.3% (n=70) reported not perceiving racial disparities within their service. However, those that did identified concerns relating to systemic and institutional racism within the justice system. This includes disparities in police decision-making and CPS practices, as well as gaps in cultural competency among police officers, leading to differences in how the seriousness of offences is assessed across different ethnic and racial groups. As highlighted in Figure 16, the survey revealed the most commonly identified factor contributing to perceived racial disparity for children accessing support was a lack of community trust in the services provided (56.5%, n=65), followed by limited cultural competence of service providers (50%, n=58). This finding suggests gaps in understanding different cultural contexts may hinder engagement from Black and global majority ethnic

children and families. The Centre for Justice Innovation (2022) emphasise the importance of understanding the unique cultural contexts of children can enhance engagement and effectiveness in diversionary interventions.

Many YJS staff cited unconscious bias in police and court processes as a barrier to children accessing support, with specific concerns relating to the ‘adultification’ of children from Black and global majority backgrounds who may be viewed more as perpetrators of violence than as victims (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022). In the national survey, some areas noted that Black children are charged more quickly or disproportionately sentenced to Referral Orders instead of receiving diversion opportunities, compared to white children or children from other ethnic minority backgrounds. This bias may limit opportunities for Black children to receive OOCRs at the police station stage. These findings correlate with existing evidence that Black and global majority heritage children are often conceptualised as being ‘higher risk’ than their white peers (Robin-D’Cruz and Whitehead, 2021).

Deep dive findings showed that in areas such as Crosden and Glyndale, where the majority of children in the YJS caseload are white (reflecting local population demographics), racial disparities may not always be a focal point of conversations while shaping local practice. As a result, resources such as the YJB’s Case Level Ethnic Disproportionality Toolkit may not be regularly consulted by staff in these areas.

Some services also flagged concerns about general distrust towards the police and the wider justice system among children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds. Survey responses included barriers such as bias in office-in-charge decision making and CPS decision making, disparities in how different communities are policed, a lack of trust from children and families in policing and systems, and the adultification of children at all points of contact with the criminal justice system. Consistent with earlier research, many YJS staff who offered additional open-text responses in the survey and practitioners in some deep dive areas (Foxleigh and Stonewood) noted how advising children to give ‘no comment’ interviews coupled with poor legal advice from solicitors exacerbates such distrust and can limit their eligibility for OOCRs (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022; YJB, 2024a). Some YJS staff recommended a need for legal representatives to be made aware about the negative ramifications of advising children to remain silent during interviews, while others suggested that children, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds should have an opportunity for a second interview if they were initially advised to give ‘no comment’ responses. Police officers also highlighted challenges with gaining circumstantial information about children in custody when ‘no comment’ approaches are taken, which may limit the quality of information shared with YJSs (as highlighted in section 3.2.2).

In addition to racial disparities, survey findings highlighted geographical challenges also impact the availability of youth justice support. Disparities in accessing OOCR support exists both between and within regions and is particularly evident in rural versus urban areas. While

support in some areas is widely available and well-integrated, others face practical barriers to engagement. For example, as highlighted in the national survey, large, rural YJS areas often face logistical difficulties of supporting children across vast regions. Limited service availability, long distances between key agencies, and poor transport options create a fractured support landscape where staff struggle to spend adequate time with each child. In Glyndale, access to support varies across the region, with services becoming increasingly sparse in rural areas, where rurality and deprivation intersect. Many children in semi-rural communities have no access to nearby activities or structured support, meaning YJS staff and police officers often travel long distances to provide interventions.

Police officers and YJS staff described the real-world impact of these challenges on children:

"The young person I work with is 15 and not in school. He wants to go to school but that's not happening. He feels like there's nothing in life to strive for - sadly, it's the reality for many others here. They're bored and don't have access to activities." – Seconded police officer

"We might try to get children into part time employment, but there's nothing available. There's nothing we can put in place to break the cycle longer term. We will see children fall back into an offending pattern, especially when they finish school." – YJS caseworker

Structural barriers within service design can also impact access to support. Staff across deep dive sights highlighted several key obstacles:

- **City centre-based services** – Stonewood highlighted some support services, including post-16 education support and some specific diversion programmes, are concentrated in the city centre. While this makes practical sense given higher rates of youth violence in urban areas, this creates access barriers for children living in outlying areas.
- **Safety concerns** – Stonewood highlighted some children do not feel comfortable accessing support in certain locations due to safety risks (e.g., risk of gang violence, county lines or due to bail restrictions).
- **Public transport limitations** – in semi-rural areas, such as Glyndale, poor transport links make it difficult for children to attend sessions, particularly after school hours when bus services stop early.
- **Budget cuts** – Glyndale highlighted funding reductions (e.g., loss of EU grants) have halted mobile youth club initiatives, which previously provided services to rural areas.

YJS staff in these areas have found ways to work around these barriers to ensure children receive support for OOCRs. In Stonewood, branches of support services have been set up outside the city centre to provide children access to interventions without needing to travel.

For example, Family Hubs are strategically distributed across the area and provide additional locations for support. YJS caseworkers in Stonewood also ensure to check whether young people feel safe attending sessions. If safety concerns arise, staff can walk with children, arrange transport, or explore alternative locations. In Glyndale, where geographical barriers are more pronounced, YJS staff and seconded police officers travel directly to children or signpost them to closer services where possible.

Access to education was identified as a major inequality driver linked to regional disparities in service provision. Across the deep dive sites, YJS staff described how placement availability, school transitions, and SEND or neurodiverse support gaps disproportionately impact justice-involved children. Five of the six deep dive areas – Crosden, Millgate, Redbrooke, Foxleigh, and Stonewood – reported that securing alternative education placements for children in YJS caseloads remains a significant challenge.

YJS staff noted that many children struggle with school transitions, particularly from primary to secondary school, when behavioural difficulties and underlying needs become more apparent. Without the right support, children who managed in primary school can begin to disengage. Some schools lack the resources to provide additional help, while others fail to push for educational assessments, assuming that behavioural issues stem from trauma rather than undiagnosed SEND conditions or neurodiversity.

YJS staff also reflected on gaps in service provision for children outside mainstream schools, which can reinforce existing regional disparities. In Crosden, children with SEND are particularly affected. Once a child is excluded from school, they are often unable to access special educational provision (SEP), even when their needs are clearly identified by parents and YJS staff. This is due to limited and inconsistent availability of suitable provision compared to neighbouring areas. In Millgate, placement options are so limited that children are routinely sent outside the area, delaying transitions and leaving them without education for months, and in turn, increasing the risk of future criminalisation and contextual harm.

However, securing placements alone is not a solution, with Foxleigh YJS noting that even when placements are arranged, children – particularly those with SEND, neurodiversity, children who have experienced trauma, or have unstable home environments – can struggle to engage in education without wraparound support. For example, one child diagnosed with autism was placed in a motor vehicle apprenticeship but did not attend due to severe anxiety and lack of additional support. Without trust-building, tailored strategies, and flexible approaches to engagement, educational placements alone are unlikely to succeed.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Summary of findings

The findings of this report highlight several interconnected themes that impact children's interactions with the police, the referral process to local YJSs, inter-agency collaboration, and the support provided to children. These themes underscore systemic challenges and opportunities for improving outcomes for children within the criminal justice system across England and Wales. Key themes include:

- Inconsistent use of child first and child-centred approaches across the youth justice journey
 - **Police interactions** – survey findings and expert interviews highlighted variability in how police apply child first principles, particularly frontline officers. While some officers receive child first training, this is not consistent across teams, likely due to staff moving into new roles and inconsistent training opportunities across different teams.
 - **Children in custody** – multiple deep dive sites raised concerns about the inconsistent quality of custody experiences for children, with some children receiving minimal safeguarding support. Some areas were keen to minimise the use of custody suites to reduce trauma on children.
 - **Referral processes** – delays in police referrals to YJSs, combined with poor information-sharing practices, limit opportunities for professionals to intervene with children at in a timely manner (Glyndale, Crosden).
 - **YJS support** – YJS staff in Redbrooke and Millgate highlighted challenges in fully embedding child first approaches, with competing priorities and stretched resources impacting the quality of child-centred interventions. Some areas excel in co-production with children, while others do not currently use such approaches.
- Multi-agency collaboration: the key to effective youth justice support
 - **Referral processes and data sharing** – barriers in referral processes were highlighted across the deep dive sites, with inconsistent data sharing practices and poor-quality information limiting timely intervention. Effective collaboration between YJSs, police, and health services is critical to improving this process. Seconded officers and YJSs often report difficulties accessing education and health data, which may impact children's custody experiences, referral timeframes and information gathering ahead of JDMPs.

- **Co-location and stronger partnerships** – areas with co-located services and joint working practices reported better outcomes for children. Stonewood and Glyndale benefitted from having integrated teams, which enable quicker access to information and improve communication across agencies - including children's services, YJSs and police.
- **Inconsistent application of multi-agency mechanisms** – while multi-agency case reviews and panels exist in many areas, including the deep dive sites, they are inconsistently used. Survey findings indicate that some services engage partners regularly, while others operate in silos, reducing opportunities for coordinated support planning. Additional clarity is sought over the best agency to support a child and understanding how these referral pathways work in practice.
- Unequal access and resource disparities
 - **Variation in access to support across regions and population groups** – this creates a postcode lottery for children. Children's experiences and outcomes are shaped by intersecting factors such as race, disability, neurodiversity, care experience, and geography — with those who fall into more than one of these groups often facing compounded disadvantage. Survey findings and deep dive areas such as Glyndale highlight how children living in rural areas face practical barriers to support such as poor transport links and limited local services, while urban centres experience higher demand but greater availability of resources. Children from ethnic minority backgrounds face additional challenges due to systemic bias within the criminal justice system and a lack of culturally responsive support services.
 - **Growing demand for SEND and neurodiverse support exacerbates disparities** – across deep dive areas, long CAMHS waiting lists, limited access to specialist provision, and inconsistent referral pathways means children with SEND or neurodivergence often remain undiagnosed and unsupported. Millgate and Redbrooke noted that resource gaps make it difficult to provide adequate support without timely access to external health and education services.

4.2 Recommendations

A number of recommendations were identified on both a local and national level for each stakeholder group. At the local level, we have identified key tangible recommendations for YJSs, police, wider practitioners and strategic funders and coordinators.

4.2.1 National recommendations

Children's interactions with the police

Systemic top-down changes to improve frontline officers using child first and child-centred approaches. This could include embedding child-centred safeguarding in HMICFRS inspections, and the Home Office introducing child-centred policing KPIs for Chief Constables to drive accountability.

Embed professional curiosity to support child-centred decision-making. The NPCC and College of Policing should align safeguarding messaging to emphasise professional curiosity as a key tool for officers. Clear guidance and training should showcase best practice, discretion, and the use of contextual information to prevent unnecessary criminalisation while maximising support and maintaining public safety.

Children referred from the police into local YJS

Establish a national protocol to fast-track investigations by creating dedicated teams to process cases. This would prevent delays due to competing police demands and enable timely intervention, particularly for children at risk of exploitation.

Review and adapt referral mechanisms to accelerate decision making. While many areas use multiple referral mechanisms – such as automated alerts and co-located staff – referral processes for OOCR still take weeks. Exploring data management systems, potentially supported by Artificial Intelligence, could enhance efficiency for police, YJS, and children services. For instance, improving the way data is visualised (e.g. through dashboards) so that officers have access to key information (e.g. previous outcomes) to inform referrals and decision-making.

Inter-agency working to support children

Establish a national data sharing framework to standardise practice across agencies (police, YJS, health, education). Provide clear policies and example data sharing agreements for each partner agency.

Strengthen inter-agency collaboration through co-location and structured communication. Build on national guidance – such as 'The role of the Youth Justice Service Police Officer' guidance document (YJB and NPCC, 2023) – to promote co-located teams, standardised

communication channels, and regular multi-agency meetings to enhance coordination and timely interventions.

Children offered support from local YJS and other agencies

Strengthen YJB oversight, support and consistency in practice through local Oversight Teams to ensure alignment to evidence-based approaches. Building on the data YJS are now collecting from YJSs, publishing data – such as the number and demographics of children diverted, the support children receive, length of time from arrest to support, and re-offending rates – on diversion outcomes as part of youth justice statistics, would improve sector-wide understanding and inform future practice. The YJB could enhance its Resources Hub with up-to-date research, guidance and practical tools, including aligning with HMIP’s views on effective diversion and staying up to date on pending OOCR thematic inspection findings. Guidance could outline effective multi-agency diversionary responses, drawing on good practice examples and incorporating feedback loops between agencies. To support consistency, national-level training – delivered by the YJB or relevant agencies (e.g. Unitas) – would equip YJSs in embedding child first principles in case management, support plans and relationship-based practice.

Prioritise psychological support for children to meet rising demand. Ensure all YJSs have the funding and capacity to establish clear referral processes and strong partnerships with CAMHS. This will enable an efficient, effective, and equitable support system.

4.2.2 Local recommendations

The actors responsible for implementing each recommendation are shown below each recommendations using the below symbols.



Children’s interactions with the police

Prioritise alternatives to custody to prevent traumatisation, and enhance support when custody is unavoidable. Provide dedicated support to help children share their experiences safely, including child-friendly, co-produced resources to improve understanding of police processes – particularly for children with SEND or neurodiversity. Ensure health professionals (CAMHS, SALT) are present in all custody settings to support children through this experience.



Enhance police training to strengthen professional curiosity and child-centred policing across forces. A systemic shift is needed to equip officers with training, leadership support, and practical guidance to proactively safeguard children. Training approaches should include real-life case studies, reflective practice sessions, and scenario-based learning. Content should include effective communications techniques with children, understanding behavioural changes in adolescence, contextual risks, the risk of adultification for children and trauma-informed approaches aligned with procedural justice. Prioritise training for officers working with children, ensuring regular refreshers to address staff turnover. Appoint champions within teams to mentor officers and promote best practice.



Children referred from the police into local YJS

Enhance cross-agency communication on referral outcomes to improve referral form quality. Establish a structured feedback loop between YJSs and police, enabling YJSs to update arresting officers on referral outcomes and highlight gaps affecting assessments. Seconded youth justice officers should help embed these processes.



Have dedicated officers who work collaboratively with seconded YJ officers to advocate for child centred policing across the force and are responsible for improving experiences for children through checking referrals to YJSs (and other services), reviewing custody practices, and streamlining process to expedite investigations. This team would have greater insights into OOCRs, youth justice legislation and child first approaches within the youth justice system, as well as training around identifying neurodiverse and SEND behaviours. This would not replace the role of the seconded officer, but would help improve the quality of referrals, safeguarding information and processes to ensure child centred policing is being used in practice.



Inter-agency working to support children

Streamline referral processes across agencies by establishing clear points of contacts with regular touchpoints and standardised data sharing agreements. Ensure all partners (including police, YJS and health services) are engaged in implementation to improve efficiency and effectiveness.



Children offered support from local YJS and other agencies

Ensure a diverse workforce and train staff on culturally responsive practice. This would include clinicians from diverse backgrounds and providing targeted training on culturally responsive practice. Recognise how cultural perceptions influence service design and engagement and tailor services to meet the needs of children from ethnic minority backgrounds and children with SEND or neurodiversity. To improve community trust in services, invest in community-based interventions to better support at-risk children and families, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds.



Develop local pathways to fast-track mental health support for (undiagnosed) children. To improve psychological support for children within limited resource constraints, healthcare providers should prioritise children identified through YJS assessments and improve access for those awaiting diagnosis. Embedding speech and language or mental health professionals within all YJS teams will help address rising SEND and neurodiversity needs, tackle racial disparities, and ensure children receive appropriate support.



4.2.3 Conclusion

By addressing these recommendations at both the local and national level, stakeholders can build a more equitable and effective youth justice system that prioritises the needs and rights of children.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Expert Interview Topic Guide

Background

1. Can you tell me about your role and how it relates to arrested children (10-17 years old)?

Identification of vulnerable children

What should happen (policy)

2. When a child is arrested, what policy or guidance informs the police's responses?

Context setting: Specific policies are in place, with some more recently being implemented. We'd like to understand how fit-for-purpose these policies are and if they are supporting police in their response and if not, what changes might be needed.

The NPCC's Child Centred Policing Strategy aims to improve the quality of policing for CYP, emphasising their unique needs and vulnerabilities and create a safer environment by prioritising early intervention, prevention, and safeguarding.

The National Vulnerability Action Plan is a comprehensive framework to enhance the policing response to various forms of vulnerability. It aims to unify efforts across police forces, reduce duplication, and highlight gaps in addressing vulnerability.

3. To what extent do you think the NPCC's Child Centred Policing Strategy might impact how arrested children are referred to support?

Prompt: How aware are police of this strategy? How well is it working?

4. To what extent do you think the National Vulnerability Action Plan impact how arrested children are referred to support?

Prompt: How aware are police of this plan? How well is it working?

What are the enablers and barriers for police?

5. What are the benefits and challenges for police treating every arrest of a child as a safeguarding opportunity in practice?

How can this be improved?

6. What changes are needed to enable police to treat the arrest of a child as a safeguarding opportunity?

Prompt: System-level change? Other?

Making referrals

What should happen (policy)

Context setting: The Child Gravity Matrix is a decision-making tool designed to assist police officers in determining the most appropriate outcome or disposal for children under 18 who offend. This matrix helps in evaluating the severity of the offense by considering both aggravating and mitigating factors, ultimately providing a score that guides the decision on the suitable course of action. It aims to support consistent, fair, and proportionate responses across police forces. The matrix is used to ensure that decisions about out-of-court resolutions are well-informed and consider the individual circumstances of each child. It emphasizes a child-centred approach, focusing on early intervention and diversion from formal prosecution whenever appropriate.

7. How well do you think the new Child Gravity Matrix (September 2023) is or isn't working?
Prompt: How have you applied the matrix? Any examples of good or bad practice? Changes to partnership working? Is it reaching all children who need support?

What are the enablers and barriers for police?

Context setting: The Crime Outcomes Reporting Framework in England and Wales is a systematic approach designed to categorize and report the results of police investigations. This framework was implemented to enhance transparency and provide a clear understanding of how different crimes are resolved by police forces.

8. To what extent, do you think the Crimes Outcome Reporting Framework is transparent and clear? Do you think it has any impact on police's attitudes and actions towards diverting children and why or why not?
Prompt: What impact, if any, do you think recording Outcome 22 as a successful outcome for arrested children?

How can this be improved?

Context setting: The Case Management Guidance on out-of-court resolutions provides a framework for police officers and YJS' to decide on appropriate outcomes for children who have committed offenses.

9. Are some children disproportionately impacted (positively or negatively) by the use of the Case Management Guidance?. If so what characteristics (prompt gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic group, neurodiversity)?

Inter-agency working to support children

What should happen (policy)

10. To what extent does the Case Management Guidance impact communication between the police and YJS'? Any impact on decision making?

What are the enablers and barriers for police and Youth Justice Services?

11. What is working well in the referral process for arrested children?
12. What common barriers do police face in making quick and effective referrals for arrested children?
Prompt: Who are the challenges related to? Is it the police (e.g., limited awareness of referral pathways), arrested children (e.g., fear of being judged) or other agencies (e.g., waiting times for local authority support)?
13. How do delayed support referrals impact arrested children?
14. Who do you think the police make the most referrals to for arrested children? Are there any policies which govern this (e.g., working together statutory guidance)?
15. How do the police, social services, schools and community organisations collaborate and share information to best support arrested children?
16. What are the enablers and challenges to collaborating and sharing information with these agencies? What are the benefits of working this way?
Prompt: Any best practice examples?

How can this be improved?

17. What cross-organisational actions do you think would improve the speed and effectiveness of referrals for arrested children? How do you know?
18. What else could be done to improve the speed of referrals and cross-organisational communication to support arrested children?

Support for children

What should happen (policy)

19. What kinds of support are available for arrested children in England and Wales?
E.g., sports/arts programmes, therapy, MST, family, social skills training/emotion management, restorative justice etc.
20. Where can YJS access resources and training, such as implementation tools or session plans for these interventions?

What are the enablers and barriers for Youth Justice Services?

21. Do you think support for arrested children varies across YJS and if so, why?
22. What challenges are YJS facing when looking to support a child?
23. How well are children's mental health needs met?
24. What barriers are the police and YJS facing when trying to support children's unmet mental health needs?

25. What would help to ensure equity in access to diversion schemes for all children (in particular children from minority ethnic backgrounds and neurodivergent children)?

How can this be improved?

26. What changes do you think would encourage consistency in support for arrested children?

Prompt: System-level change? Other?

Systemic issues affective the process: data, inspections, funding , policy/legislative changes needed.

27. Where would you target funding to support diversion to have the biggest impact for arrested children and why?

28. *[Tailor to the interviewee's role]*

- *Are you aware of what data the police collect on diversion and referrals?*
- *Are you aware of what data YJS' collect on diversion and the nature or extent of support?*
- *Are you aware of what data police and crime commissioners (PCCs) collect on diversion and the nature or extent of support?*

Prompt: If not, what data should police/YJS/PCC collect on diversion and the nature or extent of support?

Anything else?

29. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for taking part in this interview

Appendix B: National Survey Questions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey, and for sharing your valuable input.

Background

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) have commissioned Cordis Bright to conduct research which aims to address a significant gap in national-level information about the support provided by Youth Justice Services to children who come into contact with the police for an offence. Insights from this survey may also be used to inform a related study on referral pathways for this cohort of children, which the YEF and Department for Education for England are working together on as part of a joint research programme.

While youth diversion is widely practiced across England and Wales, access to these schemes varies due to several factors such as eligibility criteria, referral processes, and length of interventions. Currently, there is a lack of data on the types of support available, the impact of different OOCR interventions, and how these interventions are tailored to each child's needs. Additionally, practitioners often face challenges in delivering support and accessing reliable research on the effectiveness of these interventions.

Your participation in this survey will help us improve our understanding of current support provision across Youth Justice Services. Together, we can enhance the effectiveness of OOCR support and ensure that every child receives the support they need.

About the survey

It includes five main sections as well as introductory and conclusion questions to help contextualise your responses. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Please could you complete this survey by the *insert deadline 3 weeks after launch date*

Confidentiality

All survey data will be kept confidential, securely stored, and deleted after project completion in line with our data protection policies.

Further information

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Jade Farrell at Cordis Bright via jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk

Introduction

1. What is your role in the Youth Justice Service (YJS)?
 - Head of Service
 - Service Manager
 - Team Manager
 - Other (please specify):
2. Name of Local Authority Area:
3. What out of court disposals (OOCR) do children receive in your scheme? Please select all that apply.
 - Youth Caution
 - Youth Conditional Caution
 - Community Resolution
 - No Further Action
 - No Further Action – Outcome 21
 - No Further Action – Outcome 22
 - Other (please specify):
4. For those children who receive the different OOCRs below, do you have a dedicated offer of support? Please indicate answers for all options that apply [As a matrix with the options below for each]

| | Yes | No | I'm not sure |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----|--------------|
| a. Youth Caution | | | |
| b. Youth Conditional Caution | | | |
| c. Community Resolution | | | |
| d. No Further Action | | | |
| e. No Further Action – Outcome 21 | | | |
| f. No Further Action – Outcome 22 | | | |
| g. Other (please specify): | | | |

Any comments: [Open- text box]
5. Does your service have a dedicated police officer/s assigned to the diversion scheme?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I'm not sure
6. [If answered Yes] Please specify the rank of the police officer/s assigned to the diversion scheme: [Open-text box]
7. Please rate the effectiveness of your partnership work with the police in your local area at **both strategic and operational levels, specifically in relation to diversion efforts**. Select one option for **each level**.

- a. Strategic level
 - Highly effective
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not at all effective
 - b. Operational level
 - Highly effective
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not at all effective
8. Please rate the effectiveness of the Joint Decision Making Panel (OOCR) in your local area.
 - Highly effective
 - Very effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not at all effective
 - We do not have a Joint Decision Making Panel
 9. [If selected any of the rating options, implying there is a panel] Do you have any additional comments or feedback about the effectiveness and functioning of the Joint Decision Making Panel in your area? Please also include details on the number and type of professionals who sit on the panel. [Open-text box, optional question]
 10. [If selected 'We do not have a Joint Decision Making Panel' for Q. 28] Please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place and who is involved in the decision-making process. [Open-text box]

Support options available

11. Approximately, what percentage of your service's caseload consists of informal OOCRs (as opposed to formal)?
 - 0-9%
 - 10-19%
 - 20-29%
 - 30-39%
 - 40-49%
 - 50-59%
 - 60-69%
 - 70-79%
 - 80-89%

- 90-100%
 - Unknown
12. Does the nature and level of your support for children differ between formal and informal OOCR options, and if so, how? [Open-text box]
 13. If an assessment by the YJS is conducted to inform the OOCR decision, approximately how long does it take for this to be completed?
 - 1-2 weeks
 - 3-4 weeks
 - 5-6 weeks
 - 7 or more weeks
 14. Once an OOCR has been agreed for the child, approximately how long would it be before a child starts accessing support?
 - 1-2 weeks
 - 3-4 weeks
 - 5-6 weeks
 - 7 or more weeks
 15. What processes are in place when a child accessing support does not engage or fails to comply with the conditions of their OOCR? For example, are alternative support schemes offered, and is this information communicated back to the police or Joint Decision Making Panel in some or all cases? [Open-text box]

Accessing OOCR support through targeted interventions

16. What factors/characteristics are considered to ensure that the OOCR support is targeted and tailored to the child? Please select all that apply.
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Mental health
 - Religion
 - Sexual orientation
 - Nature of offending behaviour
 - Ethnicity
 - In contact with children's social care
 - Child with English as a Second Language (ESL)
 - Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
 - Personal needs, strengths, and aspirations of the child
 - Risk assessment
 - Contextual safeguarding
 - Other (please specify):

17. Data suggest that children from minority ethnic groups have been less likely to benefit from OOCRs than their white peers (see [Bateman et al., 2022](#))
18. Based on your experience, do you perceive a difference in the benefit that minority ethnic children receive from OOCRs when compared to their white peers? In other words, are children from minority ethnic backgrounds more likely to be charged than to receive an OOCR option?
 - Yes
 - No
19. [If they select Yes] Please indicate which of the following factors you feel contribute to this difference:
 - Availability of support that meets the specific needs of minority ethnic children
 - Cultural competence of support providers
 - Language barriers
 - Accessibility and inclusivity of services
 - Community trust in the services provided
 - Representation of minority ethnic groups among support staff
 - I don't know
 - Other (please specify):
20. Where support is required, what types of approaches/interventions are available to children in your area?
For each option, please indicate whether it is used as part of formal or informal OOCRs or both.

| Formal OOCRs only Informal OOCRs only Both |
|---|
| ◦ Education and skill development interventions |
| ◦ Education and tutorial services |
| ◦ Mentoring programmes |
| ◦ Service-learning programmes including voluntary work, working on community projects, completing educational courses and degrees. civic engagement |
| ◦ After-school programmes |
| ◦ Summer schools |
| ◦ Job and vocational skills training |
| ◦ Sports programmes |
| ◦ Positive activities including art, creative writing, dance |
| ◦ Social skills training |
| ◦ Speech and language support |
| ◦ Relationship and violence prevention lessons and activities |
| ◦ Substance use education and counselling |
| ◦ Mental health support |
| ◦ Crisis intervention |
| ◦ Family support programmes such as Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Multi-Systematic Therapy (MST) |
| ◦ Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) |

- Trauma-focussed interventions or trauma-specific therapies
- Challenge-based activities in outdoor settings such as adventure and wilderness therapy
- Victim awareness classes and activities
- Weapon use prevention/education programmes
- Restorative justice
- Other (please specify) (1)
- Other (please specify) (2)
- Other (please specify) (3)

Any comments on the duration or approach to tailoring the above interventions to meet the specific needs of the children:

Alignment of support with evidence base

21. How well does the OOCR support currently available to children in your area align with the evidence-base of what works best?
 - Very well aligned with the evidence base
 - Somewhat aligned with the evidence base
 - Not aligned with the evidence base
 - I don't know what the evidence base says
 - Practical experience in our area shows that different approaches (than the evidence base) are more effective
 - The available evidence is not applicable to our local context
 - I'd like to access the evidence base but have been unable to do so
 - Other (please specify)

22. [If answered 'Very well aligned' or 'Somewhat aligned'] What resources do you use to ensure alignment of your OOCR support with the evidence base? Please select all that apply.
 - Statutory or national guidance
 - Inspection reports
 - Youth Justice Resource Hub materials
 - Academic research and evaluations
 - Policy research from VCSE or other independent organisations
 - In-house evaluations or local area assessment of support
 - Practitioner experience and knowledge including discussions with other YJS's/organisations
 - YEF's toolkit
 - Other third sector toolkits
 - Feedback from children
 - Other (please specify)

23. How do you stay informed about the latest evidence-based practice and/or policy/legislative development on effective OOCR support for children? Please select all that apply.

- Attending sector conferences, events, webinars, and/or workshops
- Subscribing to relevant newsletters or publications
- Participating in network meetings or resource hubs for youth justice professionals
- Collaborating with academic institutions or researchers
- In-house training and development
- External training
- Following relevant social media channels or online forums
- Reading government or official reports and publications
- I don't stay informed about the latest research and/or developments
- Other (please specify) _____

24. [If they select 'I don't stay informed about the latest research..'] What factors are preventing you from staying informed about the latest research/developments?
[Open-text]

Enablers and challenges

25. What are the main enablers to delivering support for children who come into contact with the police for an offence? Please select all that apply.
- Additional funding e.g., Turnaround programme
 - Good relationship with local police
 - Joint Decision Making Panels in place
 - Effective collaboration and information sharing between professionals involved
 - Quick referral periods and clear referral processes
 - Specific enablers in my Local Authority area (i.e., diversion on agenda/priority area)
 - Working with relevant/supporting partners/organisations (e.g., schools, VCSE sector, healthcare sector, ASB teams)
 - Availability of tailored support interventions
 - Other (please specify) 1:
 - Other (please specify) 2:
 - Other (please specify) 3:
26. What are the main barriers/challenges to delivering support for children who come into contact with the police for an offence? Please select all that apply.
- Funding-related challenges e.g., funding cuts
 - Relationship with local police e.g., issues with joint working, receiving data on use of OOCR options
 - Barriers to accessing research or information on the impact of OOCR support interventions
 - Staff recruitment/retention challenges e.g., staff shortages, poor retention, vacancies
 - Lengthy referral periods
 - Increased demand for OOCRs
 - Specific challenges linked to the child

- Specific challenges in my Local Authority area
- Working with relevant/supporting partners/organisations (e.g., schools, VCSE sector, healthcare sector, ASB teams)
- Other (please specify) 1:
- Other (please specify) 2:
- Other (please specify) 3:

Recommendations (optional question)

27. What are your top three suggestions/recommendations for improving access to OOCR support and overcoming barriers in your local area? [Open-text box]

Conclusion

To understand the support offered to children following OOCRs, we will be speaking to staff at Youth Justice Services, police, other practitioners and policy makers as well as some children that have lived experience. Please contact Jade Farrell at jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk if you have any questions or comments about this project.

28. Would you be interested in being contacted about future research **and / or** receiving a video recorded presentation of our report findings when published early next year? If yes, please opt-in by sharing your name and email address below. Select all that apply.
- Yes, I would like to be contacted about future research
 - Yes, I would like to receive the presentation of findings
- First name:
- Last name:
- Email address:
29. If you have any relevant documents or links to further information about your area's OOCR support that you believe are important for us to know at this stage, please upload them or provide us the details below: [Upload option for links/docs AND Open-text box for any additional comments]

Appendix C: Police Topic Guide

Background

1. Can you please confirm your role, and which police force you work for?

Safeguarding arrested children

We'd like to start by asking you about safeguarding children you come into contact with for committing an offence, considering policies in place, how fit-for-purpose these policies are and what is and isn't working so well.

What's going on

2. When you arrest, voluntary interview or otherwise deal with a child suspected of committing an offence, what legislation, policy or guidance informs your response?

Context setting for interviewer: The NPCC's Child Centred Policing Strategy aims to improve the quality of policing, emphasising their unique needs and vulnerabilities and prioritising early intervention, prevention, and safeguarding. The National Vulnerability Action Plan aims to unify efforts across police forces, reduce duplication, and highlight gaps in addressing vulnerability.

3. Can you tell me about any strategies or action plans for policing children within your police force, which might impact you and colleagues' ability to safeguard children you come into contact with for an offence?

Prompt: Can you tell me about your understanding of the Child Centred Policing Strategy or National Vulnerability Action Plan and how this is locally impacting how you safeguard children?

4. When you come into contact with a child for an offence they have committed, how do you identify their safeguarding needs?

5. What are the most common safeguarding needs you come across?

6. What does the safeguarding process look like (i.e., who is involved, how long does the process take, any formal/sequential steps that must take place)?

7. Does this process differ depending on the characteristics of the child?

Prompt: If so, by what characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, SEND, neurodiversity status)? Any changes over time? Any differences by type of offence?

8. What type of OOCR are used the most for children in your force area?

Prompt: What work is being done to ensure OOCR are not disadvantages children by characteristics (such as gender, age, ethnicity, SEND, neurodiversity status)?

Enablers and barriers

9. What's working well with identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of children suspected of committing an offence?
10. Are there any barriers you face when treating a child's arrest as a safeguarding opportunity? Anything you think needs to be improved?

Making referrals

I'd now like to ask you about making referrals, what is and isn't working so well and what could be improved.

What's going on

Context setting: The Child Gravity Matrix is a decision-making tool designed to assist police officers in determining the most appropriate outcome or disposal for children, considering the individual circumstances of each child.

11. How well do you think the new Child Gravity Matrix (September 2023) helps you and your colleagues make referral decisions for children?

Prompt: How have you applied the matrix? Any examples of good or bad practice?

12. What does the referral process to support services (such as your local YJS) for arrested children look like in your force?

Prompts: Any governing policies? If not, what steps do you complete? Who do you make the most referrals to? Is there sufficient information provided through the referral process?

13. What types of support/interventions do you most commonly refer children to?

Prompt: Does this differ across offence types? Do you think these interventions work and have been properly assessed?

Context setting: Research states the referral process to support shouldn't take more than 4 weeks to minimise children's exposure to the formal criminal justice system.

14. After arrest, how quickly do you refer child to support?
15. Does the outcome of the arrest (such as NFA, RUI) impact whether the child is referred on to support?
16. After you have made a referral, how quickly does a child receive support? (i.e., are there waiting lists, or other factors influencing this)?

Enablers and barriers

17. What's working well in the way your police force refers children to support services (i.e., YJS, community organisations, Early Help)?
18. Is there anything that is working less well in the way your police force refers children to support services? Anything you think needs to be improved?

Inter-agency working to support children

I'd now like to ask you about inter-agency working, including the way you work with other organisations, what information you need, what the enablers and barriers are to positive partnership working and what could be improved.

What's going on

19. Do you work with other organisations to support children involved in an offence and if so, how?
Prompts: i.e., YJS, police, schools, LA, social services, community organisations?
20. What information, if any, do you share with your local YJS and other organisations to safeguard or support arrested children?
Prompts: What data on an arrested child do you provide (e.g., sex, age, ethnicity)?
21. Do you have a Joint Decision Making Panel with your local YJS to help with decision making? If so, how does this work and who sits on this panel (how many people, in what roles)?

Enablers and barriers

22. What is working well in the way you work with other agencies and share information to support arrested children?
Prompts: Are any multi-partnerships or groups (i.e., Serious Violence Duty partnerships, Violence Reduction Units, Community Safety Partnerships) particularly useful?
23. Are there any barriers working together with other agencies and share information to support arrested children? Anything you think needs to be improved?
Prompts: Any structural challenges (i.e., too many partnership covering similar areas)? Differences across agencies (i.e., different information systems) Lack of clarity on what can be shared? Child involved in an offence in a different force area to their home (county lines, ease of travel, online offences)?

Additional questions

24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D: Practitioners and Policymakers Topic Guide

Background

1. Can you please confirm your role and which organisation you work for?

Making referrals

Our first set of questions is going to focus on: [Option A] who you get referrals from, what is and isn't working so well and what could be improved / [option B] on where referrals come from for services you commission, what is and isn't working so well and what could be improved.

What's going on

2. How are the police and/or YJS' referring children that have come into contact with the police for an offence to your organisation/the services you commission, to access support?

Prompts:

- *Is there a front door which all services must go through in your area?*
 - *Are there specific teams/individuals that someone contacts around a specific area of support?*
 - *Is there sufficient information provided through the referral process?*
3. Do you/the services you commission get referrals from other agencies such as schools or community sports clubs (or others)?

Enablers and barriers

4. What is working well in relation to how the police and/or YJS' [and any other agencies mentioned in Q3] refer children into your service/your commissioned services?
5. Do you think there any barriers for police and/or YJS' [and any other agencies mentioned in Q3] referring children?

How can this be improved?

6. Is there anything that would help improve the referral process, considering the timings, quality and effectiveness of referrals?

Inter-agency working to support children

I'd now like to ask you about inter-agency working, including the way you work with other organisations, what information you need, what the enablers and barriers are to positive partnership working and what could be improved.

Enablers and barriers

7. What is working well in the way you work with other agencies and share information to support children?

Prompts: Any structural positives (i.e. working in same building, regular meetings/shared strategies)? Are any multi-partnerships or groups (i.e., Serious Violence Duty partnerships, Violence Reduction Units, Community Safety Partnerships) particularly useful?

8. Are there any barriers working together with other agencies and share information to support children?

Prompts: Any structural challenges (i.e., too many partnership covering similar areas)? Differences across agencies (i.e., different information systems) Lack of clarity on what can be shared? Child involved in an offence in a different force area to their home (county lines, ease of travel, online offences)?

Any improvements?

9. Is there anything you think would improve inter-agency working and information sharing with the police, local YJS and any other agencies?

Safeguarding children

I'd now like to ask you about safeguarding children that have come into contact with the police for an offence, considering your organisations policies and practices, what's working well, what challenges you might face, and what could be improved.

What's going on

10. When a child is referred to you, how do you identify their safeguarding needs?
11. Do you have any policies or guidance informing your safeguarding practices?

Enablers and barriers

12. What is working well with identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of arrested children?
13. Are there any barriers you face to safeguarding arrested children?

How can this be improved?

14. What would help your organisation improve safeguarding for children?

Support for children

Finally, I'd like to ask you about what support your organisations offers and for whom, what the enablers and barriers are, and what could be improved.

What's going on

15. How does your organisation support children that come into contact with the police for an offence?

Prompts: Does your organisation directly support children, or do you signpost children to providers? What kinds of support are provided?

16. To provide support, do these children need to meet certain criteria? If so, what are they?

17. What evidence underpins the support offered?

Enablers and barriers

18. What is working well with the support you and your organisation offer?

Prompt: Does the criteria ensure the right support is offered to children? Anything around the quality and speed of support offered?

19. Are there any challenges offering support to children, considering the quality, speed and effectiveness of support?

Prompt: Do these difficulties involve funding, collaboration with other services or thresholds for services (e.g., CAMHS)?

20. What work is being done to ensure your support is accessible to all children and does not disadvantage children by characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnic background, SEND or neurodiversity status)?

How can this be improved?

21. Is there anything that could improve the provision, quality and/or speed of support offered to children?

22. Is there anything else that could improve equal access to diversion schemes and support for all children?

Additional Questions

23. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E: YJS Staff Topic Guide

Background

1. Can you please confirm your role and which YJS you work for?

Making referrals

Our first set of questions is going to focus on referrals, what is and isn't working so well and what could be improved.

What's going on

2. How are the police referring children to your organisation to access support and in what cases?
3. How are you and your YJS referring children to other agencies (i.e., community organisations, LA) and when would you do so?
4. What types of services are you referring children to (e.g., sports or arts clubs, mentoring groups, family therapy providers)?

Context setting: Recent research stresses that the referral process to support for children that come into contact with the police for an offence should not take longer than four weeks to minimise children's exposure to the formal criminal justice system (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2021; YEF, 2023; YJB, 2024)

1. After arrest, how quickly do you receive a referral from the police? Prompt: Any differences depending on the type of (formal/informal) OOCR?
2. How long does it take for your YJS to complete an assessment?
Prompt: If referrals are high, do you have a process in place to ensure children most in need are 'top of the pile'? Do you complete assessments for all children? What assessment are you using (i.e., PDAT or Asset Plus)?

Enablers and barriers

3. What's working well in relation to referring children considering both police referring into your service and your YJS referring to other organisations?
4. Do you think there are any barriers around referring children, considering both police referring into your service and your YJS referring to other organisations?

How can this be improved?

5. Is there anything that would help improve the referral process, considering the timings, quality and effectiveness of (receiving and sending out) referrals?

Support for children

I'd like to ask you about what support your organisations offers and for whom, what the enablers and barriers are, and what could be improved.

What's going on

6. How does your organisation support children?

Prompts: Does your organisation directly support children, or do you signpost children to providers? What kinds of support are provided?

Context setting: The Case Management Guidance on OOCR provides a framework for YJS' (and police officers) to decide on appropriate outcomes for children who have committed offenses

7. Once a child is referred, can you talk me through how the needs of that child are assessed and the types of support/intervention a child is likely to receive?

Prompts:

- a. *How do the child's and families thoughts contribute to decision making?*
- b. *Does the Case Management Guidance impact decision making?*

8. What evidence underpins the support offered?

Enablers and barriers

9. What is working well with the support you and your YJS offer?

Prompt: Does the criteria ensure the right support is offered to children? Anything around the quality and speed of support offered?

10. Are there any challenges offering support to children, considering the quality, speed and effectiveness of support?

Prompt: Do these difficulties involve funding, collaboration with other services or thresholds for services (e.g., CAMHS)?

11. What work is being done to ensure your support is accessible to all children and does not disadvantage children by characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnic background, SEND or neurodiversity status)?

12. Is there anything that could improve the provision, quality and/or speed of support offered to children by your YJS?
13. Is there anything else that could improve equal access to diversion schemes and support for all children?

Inter-agency working to support children

I'd now like to ask you about inter-agency working, including the way you work with other organisations, what information you need, what the enablers and barriers are to positive partnership working and what could be improved.

What's going on

14. Do you work with other organisations to support children and if so, who and how?
Prompts: i.e., police, schools, LA, social services, community organisations, health partners, courts?
15. What information do you share with the police (and other organisations you work with) to support and safeguard children? What does this process look like?
16. Do you have a Joint Decision Making Panel with the police to help with decision making? If so, how does this work and who sits on this panel (how many people, in what roles)?

Enablers and barriers

17. What is working well in the way you work with other agencies and share information to support children?
Prompts: Any structural positives (i.e. working in same building, regular meetings/shared strategies)? Are any multi-partnerships or groups (i.e., Serious Violence Duty partnerships, Violence Reduction Units, Community Safety Partnerships) particularly useful?
18. Are there any barriers working together with other agencies and share information to support children?
Prompts: Any structural challenges (i.e., too many partnership covering similar areas)? Differences across agencies (i.e., different information systems) Lack of clarity on what can be shared? Child involved in an offence in a different force area to their home (county lines, ease of travel, online offences)?

How can this be improved?

19. Is there anything you think would improve inter-agency working and information sharing with the police and any other agencies?

Safeguarding children

I'd now like to ask you about safeguarding children that have come into contact with the police for an offence, considering your organisations policies and practices, what's working well, what challenges you might face what could be improved.

What's going on

20. When a child is referred to you, how do you identify their safeguarding needs?
21. Do you have any policy or guidance informing your safeguarding practices? *Prompt: Can you tell me about your understanding of the Child First approach and how this is locally impacting how your service safeguards children?*

Context setting: YJB's vision is for a Child First youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make constructive contribution to society. This will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims.

22. What does this safeguarding process look like (i.e., who is involved, how long does the process take, any formal and/or sequential steps that must take place)?
23. Does this process differ depending on the characteristics of the child or their offence? *Prompt: If so, by what characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, SEND, neurodiversity status)? Has this changed over time? Any differences depending on the characteristics and severity of the offence?*

Enablers and barriers

24. What is working well with identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of arrested children?
25. Are there any barriers you face when safeguarding children? If so, what kind of challenges?

How can this be improved?

26. Is there anything that would help improve how your YJS safeguards children?

Additional Questions

27. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix F: Children's Consent Form and Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study

You have been asked to take part in a research project, because your caseworker thinks you would be a good person to chat to. Before you decide, it's important you understand why we're doing this research and what you'll be asked to do.

Who are we?

We are researchers working for an organisation called Cordis Bright. We've been asked by the Youth Endowment Fund and the Department for Education to understand how well children are supported after they come into contact with the police.



Angela



Jade



Scarlett



Ashna

What information will I have to share?

We would like to know some information about you, including your age, gender, ethnicity and any special educational needs/neurodivergent. You only need to share what you're comfortable with. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.

What you say to us will be kept private.

The only time we might have to tell someone what you've said is if something you say makes us think you or someone else might be in danger. But we'll try and talk to you first if this happens.

What will happen afterwards?

1. We will take some notes when we talk which are purely for research purposes and will not be shared outside of the research team.
2. After we've finished talking to you and other children, we will write up what we've found in a report. We might include your map in our report. We will never include your name or any other information that could identify you. This means your identity will remain hidden.
3. Once our report is finished, which we expect to be on 7th April 2025, we will delete all the notes from our conversation, so we don't hold any of your personal details.

If you're happy to chat with us, please fill in our short consent form [here!](#)

What is the study about?

We want to hear about your experiences with the police, and the support you received afterwards. We'd like to hear what was and wasn't so good about it.

What does taking part involve?

If you and your parent/carer agree for you to take part, we will ask you to:

- ☒ Have a chat with one of our team.
- ☒ Complete a 15 minute activity to map out your experience.
- ☒ Talk through your experiences, what you think was good and not so good.
- ☒ The chat won't last more than 20 minutes.
- ☒ Your parent/carer can be there if you'd like.

Do I have to take part in this study?

No, you don't have to talk to us if you don't want to, even if your parents/guardians said you could. It's your choice! You can **change your mind before, during, or after the interview, and you don't need to give us a reason.** To do this, please tell your caseworker. If you decide to withdraw and our analysis has not yet been completed, your data will be deleted from our records. If our analysis has already been completed, details from your interview will have been anonymised, meaning all identifiable data will have been removed, which makes it impossible to delete. **This won't affect the support you have been receiving.**

✓ Why should I take part?

By sharing your experiences, you'll help us understand whether support services have made a difference in your life and how we can better support other children in the future. Your feedback will help to create a more positive and supportive experience for everyone.



Are there any risks if I take part?

We do not believe there are any foreseen risks in taking part in this study.

Who can I talk to if I have any questions about taking part?

If you have questions now or later, please ask Jade who is managing this research project. She can be contacted at jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk or 07749 418 891.

CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN

➤ You've been contacted because your caseworker thinks you would be a great person to chat to. If you have any questions about any of the above, please feel free to ask your caseworker.

➤ If you are happy to speak to us after reading the information, please fill in the consent form below.



Remember, you can change your mind about whether you are happy to speak with us at any time. Just tell your caseworker if you do.



Please confirm the following:

| | I agree (✓) | I do not agree (X) |
|---|-------------|--------------------|
| I understand that by taking part in this study I am helping people to understand my experiences of the police, youth justice service and other services that have supported me. | | |
| I agree to take part in this study. | | |
| I understand I can change my mind before, during and after the interview. I understand that if I decide to withdraw and the analysis has not yet been completed, my data will be deleted. If the analysis has already been completed, the details from my interview will have been anonymised, meaning all identifiable data will have been removed, which makes it impossible to delete. | | |
| I understand that you will never include my name or any other information that could identify me. | | |

➤ **Your full name:** _____

➤ **Your age (in years):** _____

➤ **Would you like to have someone with you when you speak to us?**

- ☐ Yes, my parent/carer
- ☐ Yes, my caseworker
- ☐ Yes, another trusted adult
- ☐ No, I don't want anyone else with me

➤ **If you chose 'another trusted adult', please specify your relationship with this person:**

Your signature

Date

Who can I talk to if I have any questions about taking part?

If you have questions now or later, please ask Jade who is managing this research project. She can be contacted at jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk or 07749 418 891.

Appendix G: Children's Topic Guide

Introduction

Welcome and warm up

To get to know the child and set a friendly and conversational tone, ask introductory questions such as:

- What do you like to do in your free time?
- How has your day been so far?

Introduction

Thanks so much for agreeing to chat with me today. My name is [name], and I'd like to chat to you today about your experiences of the police and [X] youth justice service. I thought we could start by asking you to map out some of these experiences from start to finish, and then I'd like to ask a few questions about them. You can stop or end our chat at any time - you do not need to give a reason for this. If I ask you a question on something you don't want to talk about, you do not need to answer.

We are talking to children, police officers, caseworkers, and other people who work with children across the whole country to see if children in different places experience things differently and to see if there are any ideas that we can share about how things could be better.

Reassurance:

- I'm not here to test you in any way. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to hear how about your experiences and understand if and how it's made a difference to you.
- [Caseworker] thinks you would be a great person to chat to.
- This is a safe space where you can say anything you like, including any good and bad experiences you might have had.
- You only need to share what you're comfortable with. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.

Confidentiality:

- What you say to us will be kept private. The only time we might have to tell anyone else what you've said is if something you say makes me think you or someone else might be in danger. But I will try to talk to you first if this happens.

- No one outside of our research team (that's the people working on the project at my company – there are five of us) will know what you've said. That includes your caseworker and the police.
- Nothing you say will be linked to you. We will take some notes when we talk.
- After we've finished talking to you and other children, we'll write up what we've found in a report. We might add your map to our report. We will never include your name or any other information that could identify you. This means your identity will remain hidden and anyone reading the report will not know you have taken part.
- Once our report is finished, which we expect to be on the 7th of April 2025, we'll delete all the notes from our conversation and consent forms, so we don't hold any of your personal details.

Consent:

[Caseworker] has shown you an information sheet and consent form. Thank you for reading and signing them. Do you have any questions at all?

Are you happy to continue chatting to me today?

Creation of journey map

- It would be great if you could show me what your journey with the police and youth justice services by creating a 'map' or timeline of your experiences.
- We have some example maps that you can look at. You can copy how they look if you want to, get some ideas from them, or make your own – it's completely up to you. You can change your mind at any time too.
- We want to know what happened after you met the police and got support from [X] youth justice service.

Show example maps (either on paper or online) and materials to produce them.

After 15 minutes of journey map creation, suggest a short break (5 minutes), before discussing the map.

Discussion of journey map

Notes for interviewer: We don't expect that every single question will be asked, but the questions/prompts column gives a bank of prompts the researcher can draw on to guide the conversation. Please use the following prompts against each touchpoint the child has

included on their map, using the map to guide the discussion. If there's a missing touch point from our list, please still ask them about it.

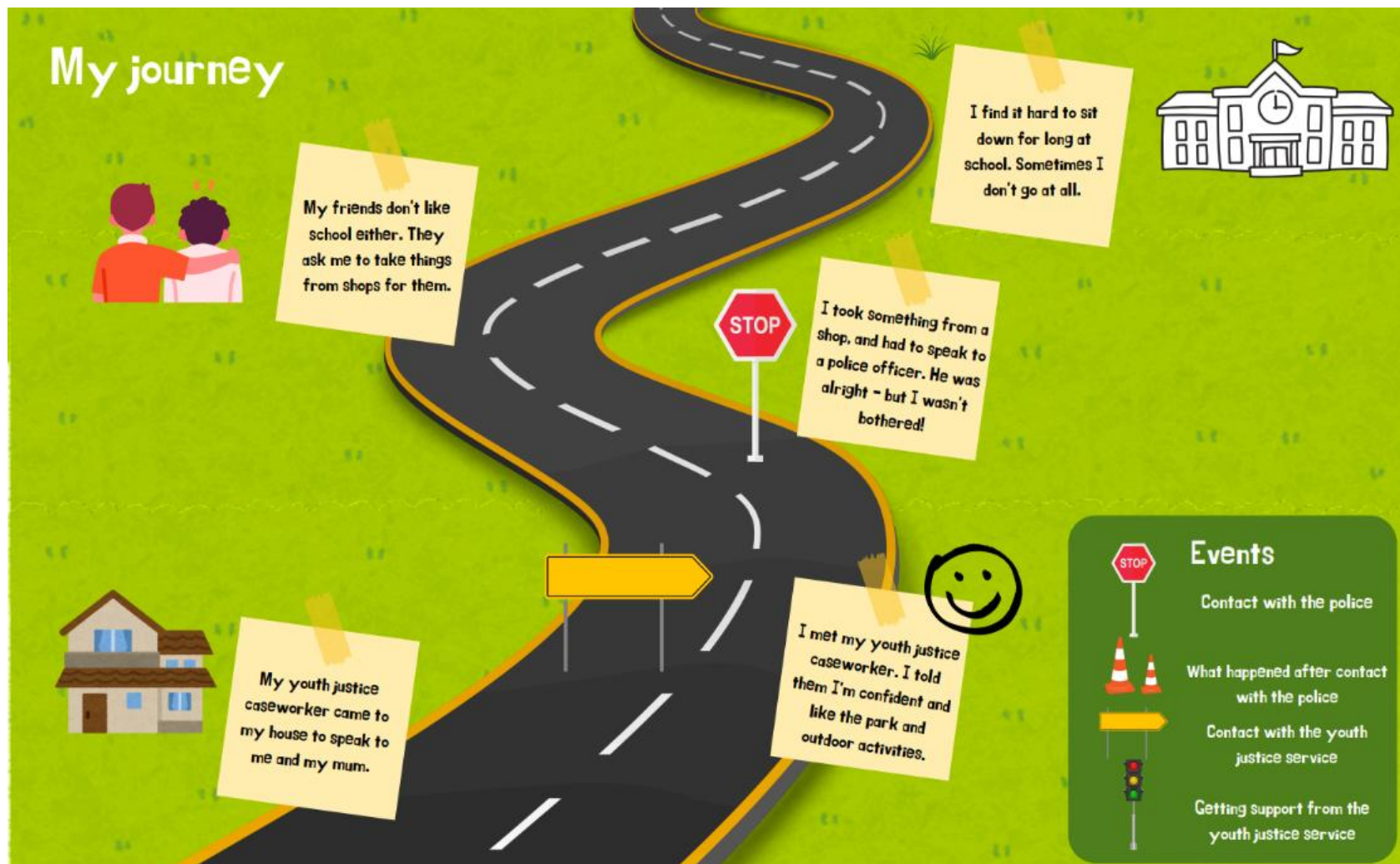
Interviewer to judge if this discussion should happen during the creation of the map or after the child has completed it.

| Touchpoint | Questions/Prompts |
|--|---|
| Coming into contact with the police for an offence | 1. What happened? Did you understand what was happening? |
| What decision the police officer made next | 2. How did this make you feel? |
| Contact with the YJS | 3. Was there anything good about what happened? |
| Support offered | 4. What would have made the experience better for you? |
| Support delivered | 5. Did you meet or speak with anyone else? (E.g., your school, a social worker) |
| | 1. Did you accept the support you were offered? |
| | 2. What does your support look like? (E.g., what activities do you do?) |
| | 3. Is there anything good about the support? |
| | 4. What would make the support better? |

Concluding questions:

- Is there anything else you want to share with me today?
- Is there anything you'd like to ask me?

Appendix H: Example Journey Map



Appendix I: National Survey Findings

This appendix includes national survey findings to provide additional detail for findings highlighted in the report.

6.9.1 Effectiveness of JDMPs

Almost all YJSs (97.5%) in the sample reported having a JDMP for OOCRs, with only three exceptions (2 in South East & South Central and 1 in North West) reporting they did not have a JDMP (as well as reporting not having a dedicated officer for diversionary activities) A majority (90.1%) of YJSs rated JDMPs as “Highly” or “Very effective,” showing strong confidence in their utility and impact (see Table 17)

Table 17. Effectiveness ratings of JDMPs by YJSs in the sample

| Effectiveness rating of JDMP | Number | Percentage of YJSs |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Very effective | 54 | 47.7% |
| Highly effective | 48 | 42.4% |
| Moderately effective | 11 | 9.7% |
| Do not have JDMPs | 3 | 2.5% |
| Total | 113 | 99.3% |

All the 48 YJSs that rated their JDMPs “Highly effective” also rated operational level partnerships with the police as either “Highly effective” (64.5%) or “Very effective” (33.3%) This reinforces the role of robust day-to-day collaboration with the police in ensuring effective decision-making on OOCRs. A majority of services (71.5%, n=73) who rated their JDMPs as “Highly” or “Very effective” (n=102) reported having strong strategic partnerships with the police, while a minority (28.4%, n=29) reported having only “moderately effective” or “slightly effective” relationships with local police (see Table 17) The gap could suggest that while operational collaborations directly support JDMPs’ working, strategic misalignment could hinder long-term consistency/effectiveness when determining OOCR outcomes.

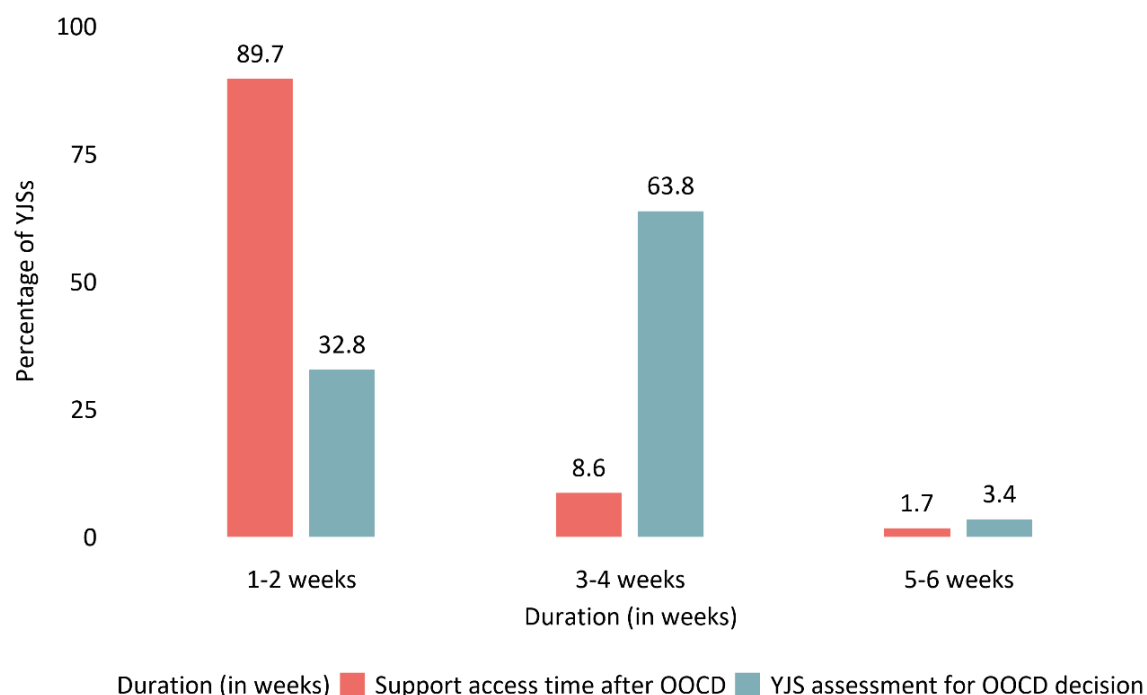
6.9.2 Timeframes for making an OOCR decision and accessing support

As seen in Figure 17, only 32.8% of YJSs complete their assessments for OOCR decisions within the same 1-2 week timeframe, highlighting potential delays in evaluating referrals despite the quicker provision of support. The majority of YJSs (63.8%) conduct their assessments within 3-4 weeks, indicating that while YJSs prioritise minimising waiting times for support, challenges in referral pathways may delay assessments necessary to inform these decisions.

Very few YJSs (1.7% for support and 3.4% for assessments) exceed 5-6 weeks, reflecting a general commitment to keeping waiting times for both processes within structured timelines.

No YJS said this process took 7 or more weeks to complete. A majority of YJSs (89.7%) provide support access within 1-2 weeks after an OOCR decision, demonstrating a strong emphasis on reducing waiting times for children receiving OOCRs.

Figure 17. Duration of OOCR assessment and accessing support after OOCR



6.9.3 Racial disparities in accessing OOCR support

60.3% of YJSs reported that they do not perceive racial disparity in their services, while 39.7% of YJSs acknowledged the presence of racial disparities. The division in perception suggests potential differences in how YJSs approach or recognise racial disparity, possibly linked to regional or organisational awareness and practices.

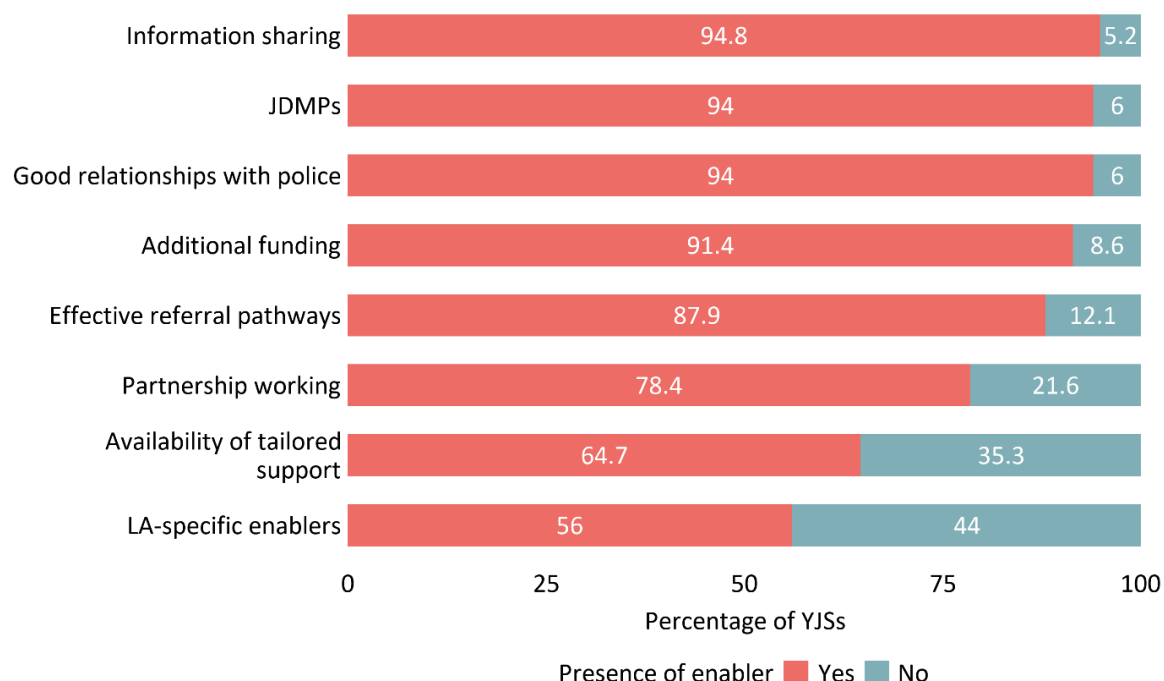
Among YJSs that identified racial disparities in children accessing OOCR support, those in the Midlands had the highest proportion, with 57.1% of sampled YJSs (representing 42% of all YJSs in the region). The next highest proportions were 56.5% of sampled YJSs in London (or 41.9% overall) and 52.9% of sampled YJSs in the South East & South Central region (or 47.4% overall). No YJSs in the North East and Cumbria reported racial disparities, and only one YJS in Wales, acknowledged such disparities.

6.9.4 Enablers and barriers to delivering OOCR support

As seen in Figure 18 information sharing (94.8%), JDMPs (94%), and good relationships with the police (94%) are the most commonly reported enablers across YJSs. This likely shows a strong foundation for multi-agency working within YJSs. While 91.4% of YJSs identified additional funding as an enabler, 77.6% also flagged limited funding as a barrier, making it a double-edged sword (see Figure 18 and Figure 19). Effective referral pathways (87.9%) and partnership working (78.4%) are widely acknowledged as enablers. However, challenges such

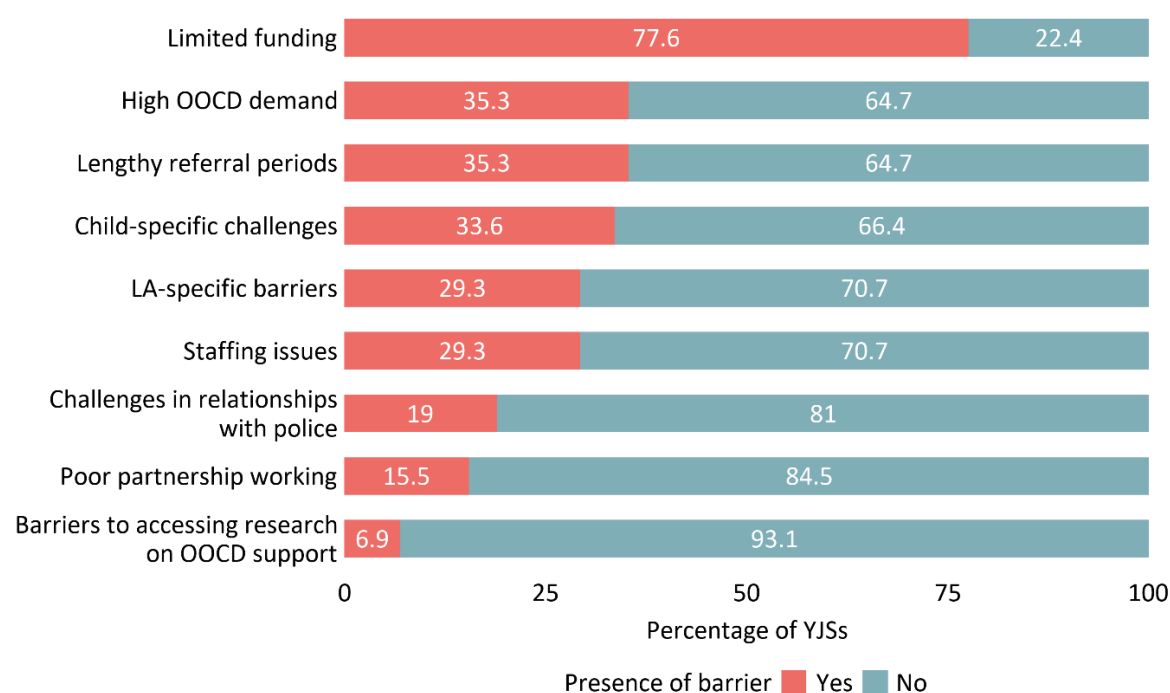
as lengthy referral periods (35.3%) and poor partnership working (15.5%) indicate that while strong systems exist in many areas, these mechanisms are not uniformly robust.

Figure 18. Enablers identified by YJSs for delivering effective OOCR support



An interactive table showing a region-wide distribution of the enablers is available here: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/DBIQE/?v=13

Figure 19. Barriers identified by YJSs for delivering effective OOCR support



An interactive table showing a region-wide distribution of the barriers above is available here: https://www.datawrapper.de/_/g7eiG/?v=7

6.9.5 Types of support/interventions available

The majority of interventions/support programmes across YJSs were on offer for both areas, with smaller numbers specified to only formal/informal OOCRs. Most commonly reported interventions were victim awareness classes and activities (99.1%), restorative justice (99.6%), and substance use education and counselling (95.7%)

Table 18. OOCR support interventions/programmes on offer across YJSs in the sample

| Intervention/approach | Both | Formal only | Informal only | Not available |
|---|-------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| After-school programmes | 31.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 68.1% |
| Challenge-based activities in outdoor settings | 33.6% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 65.5% |
| Summer schools | 38.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 61.2% |
| Family support programmes | 50.0% | 1.7% | 0.0% | 48.3% |
| Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) | 52.6% | 2.6% | 0.0% | 44.8% |
| Mentoring programmes | 64.7% | 1.7% | 0.0% | 33.6% |
| Social skills training | 81.0% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 18.1% |
| Education and tutorial services | 81.9% | 0.0% | 0.9% | 17.2% |
| Sports programmes | 81.9% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 17.2% |
| Service-learning programmes | 80.2% | 3.4% | 0.0% | 16.4% |
| Speech and language support | 81.0% | 1.7% | 0.9% | 16.4% |
| Trauma-focussed interventions | 82.8% | 2.6% | 0.9% | 13.8% |
| Positive activities including art, creative writing, dance | 86.2% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 12.9% |
| Job and vocational skills training | 86.2% | 1.7% | 0.0% | 12.1% |
| Crisis intervention | 89.7% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 10.3% |
| Relationship and violence prevention lessons and activities | 94.8% | 0.9% | 0.9% | 3.4% |
| Weapon use prevention/education programmes | 94.0% | 1.7% | 0.9% | 3.4% |

| Intervention/approach | Both | Formal only | Informal only | Not available |
|---|-------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Mental health support | 93.1% | 3.4% | 0.9% | 2.6% |
| Victim awareness classes and activities | 95.7% | 1.7% | 0.9% | 1.7% |
| Restorative justice | 96.6% | 0.9% | 0.9% | 1.7% |
| Substance use education and counselling | 99.1% | 0.9% | 0.0% | 0.0% |

Note: Some YJSs responded that the classification in our survey questions, i.e., Availability for ‘formal only,’ ‘informal only,’ or ‘both’ is challenging and oversimplifies their approaches and doesn’t apply to how they work.

An interactive version of this table is available here:

https://www.datawrapper.de/_/TXcGT/

As highlighted in Table 18, the majority of interventions/support programmes across YJSs were on offer for both areas, with smaller numbers specified to only formal/informal OOCRs. Most commonly reported interventions were victim awareness classes and activities (99.1%), restorative justice (99.6%), and substance use education and counselling (95.7%)

Less common interventions/approaches included after-school programmes (68.1%), challenge-based activities in outdoor settings (65.5%), and summer schools (61.2%) saying these were not available, respectively.

In total, 34 YJSs in the sample provided free text responses for ‘other’ interventions on offer (beyond the above) Across the board, YJSs emphasised that each intervention is highly tailored to the child's unique learning style, specific offence, identified needs, and personal life experiences. Sessions are designed to be flexible, allowing them to be revisited as needed throughout the intervention. Priority is given to building a relationship and identifying the best way to deliver the sessions and in what order the best suits each child.