

Children's Services **Youth Justice Plan** **2024-25**

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Youth Justice Plan 2024/25

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction, vision, and strategy | 3 |
| Chair’s Foreword | 3 |
| Strategic Vision..... | 5 |
| Principles..... | 5 |
| Local Context..... | 6 |
| Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements | 8 |
| Update on the previous year: | 10 |
| Progress on priorities in previous plan..... | 10 |
| Performance over the previous year | 12 |
| Risks and issues..... | 16 |
| Plan for the forthcoming year: | 17 |
| Child First..... | 17 |
| Resources and services and Service Development..... | 19 |
| Priorities for the coming year..... | 20 |
| Board development | 21 |
| Workforce Development..... | 23 |
| Evidence-based practice and innovation..... | 24 |
| Evaluation..... | 25 |
| National priority areas | 28 |
| Children from groups which are over-represented | 28 |
| Policing..... | 33 |
| Prevention | 35 |
| Diversion | 38 |
| Education | 40 |
| Restorative approaches and victims | 43 |
| Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding | 45 |
| Detention in police custody..... | 49 |
| Remands..... | 50 |
| Use of custody and constructive resettlement..... | 51 |
| Working with families | 52 |
| Sign off, submission and approval | 53 |
| Appendix 1: Staffing Structure | 54 |
| Appendix 2: Budget Costs and Contributions | 56 |

Introduction, vision, and strategy

Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to be able to provide the forward for Medway's Youth Justice Plan 24/25, as the acting Chair of the Youth Justice Partnership Board. However, me having to provide the foreword is bittersweet and has only come about due to the sad passing of James Williams, the Chair of Medway's Youth Justice Partnership Board, in May 2024. James as Director of Public Health for Medway and as the Chair of the Youth Justice Board since 2020, showed great passion for the young people of Medway. James cared passionately about improving the lives of the young people who have found themselves coming to the attention of the youth justice system. James was a great champion of the power of partnership working and his legacy will live on and is testimony to the strength of Medway's Youth Justice Partnership Board. Our thanks go to James, and it goes without saying James will be greatly missed in Medway. Our sincere condolences go to his family and friends.



Medway Youth Justice partnership aims to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people in Medway who are either involved in the Youth Justice System or at risk of involvement.

We aim to empower young people to enable them to achieve their full potential and contribute positively to the community. We aim to provide opportunities for young people to find the best in themselves.

This plan will cover the period 2024/25. It is an achievement of this current plan that it is to a significant extent co-authored by agencies that make up the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board. This reflects the engagement of the partnership board and its commitment to delivering this plan. The approach taken by this plan delivers the third principle of Child First youth justice practice, that being collaboration. Not

only collaboration between agencies working to achieve the best outcomes for children in the youth justice system but also with those children themselves, their parents, and carers as well as those affected directly by children's offending in the community. Throughout this plan the voices of children directly affected by the youth justice system are given expression. This plan presents a commitment to a dialogue with those voices.

During 2023 / 24 we have seen the youth justice system recover from the impact of the pandemic. Referrals from the youth court have increased to pre pandemic levels. Despite the data in this plan reflecting positive data in respect to re-offending and the numbers of children in custody we are aware that the increase in the numbers of children being referred to the courts is at some point in the near future likely to impact on the numbers of children both re-offending and being sentenced to custody. To address these challenges this plan has a strong focus on diversion. Where we can the Medway Youth Justice Partnership wants to prevent children from entering into the youth justice system and being seen by others and themselves as being offenders.

In September 2023, Ofsted published the findings of their inspection of Medway's Children's Services, carried out in July 2023. They graded the service as 'good' overall. Following a final Ofsted inspection in July 2023, inspectors concluded that the services provided for children and families in Medway had 'substantially improved' since the inspection in 2019 and that 'children matter in Medway'. In March 2024 the youth offending teams line management was passed directly within Medway's children's social care. This was to ensure the integration of the service with Children's Services so all Medway's children receive a good service. At this stage the benefits of this integration are at an early stage. The youth offending team is a key agency in terms of working with children at risk of criminal exploitation. Embedding work of the youth offending team within the wider safeguarding work carried out by Medway's children's services is an ambition of this plan.

My thanks to the Board for their continued support.



Dr Lee-Anne Farach

Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive Medway Council

Strategic Vision

Medway's Children and Young People Strategic vision aims to:

- Keep children and families at the heart of what we do.
- Work together with children, young people, and families to help them feel safe, secure, valued, and supported.
- Value strengths, celebrate differences and listen to children and young people to empower them to achieve their full potential and contribute positively to the community.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, requires Local Authorities to have a Youth Justice Plan which is annually updated to set out how youth justice will be delivered locally within available resources. In preparing this plan, the partnership has adhered to guidance by the Youth Justice Board, which sets out a clear framework for Youth Justice Plans. The YJB strategic priorities have also been considered.

Principles

The Medway Youth Justice service along with our partners will work collaboratively to improve outcomes for the children and young people.

The plan reflects the principles which underpin the work of Medway YJ Partnership. The principles of:

- Child First – Our work with Children/Young People involved in youth justice will see them as children first. During the consultation period, children for whom the plan is written referred to themselves as young people and wanted the Youth Justice Team to refer to them in this way.
- Rights and Responsibilities – The Youth Justice Partnership will respect the rights of children, young people, and victims.
- Equality and Inclusivity – The partnership will recognise the uniqueness and protected characteristics children, young people, victims, and the community.
- Partnerships - Through engagement and collaboration with partners we will strive to ensure the safety of Medway community.

The 2024/25 plan has been produced in in collaboration with partner agencies, as such it is to a significant extent co-authored by the Medway Youth Justice Partnership. The aspiration of this approach seeks to enable a focus on delivery and actualising change for children and the community of Medway.

The Youth Justice Team as a public service, has a responsibility to adhere to the duties of the 2010 Equality act. We work in a way that respects children/young people, staff, victims, and partners, and promotes equity and fairness, challenging where necessary disparity and inequality.

Local Context

Medway is an urban area in the Southeast of England.

The last 2021 census data indicated an overall population increase of 6% to 279,800.

As the table below shows the population of children in Medway has shown both increases and decreases depending upon age group.

| Age: | 2011 census | 2021 census | JSNA data | Census Change | Census % Change |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Age 10 – 14 years | 16765 8149 Girls 8616 Boys | 18000 8800 Girls 9200 Boys | 18853 9192 Girls 9661 Boys | +1235 | +7% |
| Age 15 – 19 years | 19031 9254 Girls 9777 Boys | 16200 7900 Girls 8300 Boys | 16506 8082 Girls 8424 Boys | -2831 | -15% |

The most recent Office for National Statistics data (21/05/2021) exploring local income deprivation detailed that In Medway, **13.4%** of the population was income-deprived in 2019. Of the 316 local authorities in England (excluding the Isles of Scilly), Medway is ranked 103rd most income-deprived.

There is a significant contrast in terms of the number of neighbourhoods identified as being income deprived and those not. Of 163 neighbourhoods in Medway, 30 were among the 20% most income deprived in England. In contrast 25 were in the 20% least income deprived in England.

The 2021 census identified that Medway saw the South East's joint second-largest percentage-point fall in the proportion of people aged 16 years and over (excluding full-time students) who were unemployed (from 4.5% in 2011 to 3.0% in 2021).

Despite the decrease, Medway was in the highest 25% of English local authority areas for the share of people aged 16 years and over (excluding full-time students) who were unemployed in 2021. This data is significant when considering the challenges presented in assisting children into the transition to adult employment.

In relation to ethnicity in 2021, 5.6% of Medway residents identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category, up from 2.5% in 2011. The 3.1 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area.

Across the Southeast, the percentage of people from the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" ethnic group increased from 1.6% to 2.4%, while across England the percentage increased from 3.5% to 4.2%.

In 2021, 84.3% of people in Medway identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with 89.6% in 2011), while 5.9% identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category (compared with 5.2% the previous decade).

The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the "Mixed or Multiple" category increased from 2.0% in 2011 to 2.8% in 2021.

Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements

The diagram below provides an overview of the membership of the Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJPB). Appendix 1 details Full board membership; linked to Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements.



The YJPB retains a clear focus on the principal aim of reducing offending and re-offending and maintains strategic oversight of the delivery and performance of the local youth justice system. The membership of the board provides senior representation from key partners to ensure that young people involved in the youth justice system have access to universal and specialist services delivered by partners and other key agencies.

For the last four years the Board has been chaired by the Director of Public Health for Medway. This has provided strategic oversight over health, social care, and criminal justice arenas. Having the board chaired by the director of Public Health has ensured that Youth Justice services in Medway have become more closely integrated in strategic partnerships more broadly. At the point of preparing this plan the board is currently in the process of establishing a new chair for the board.

The partnership board has the responsibility of ensuring that the YOT has access to the minimum partnership resources, of Police, health, education, social work, and probation. The board aims to be fully engaged in the practice of the YOT and to strive for excellence and proactively work as a partnership to address and anticipate the needs of children in Medway involved in the Youth Justice System.

The Youth Justice Plan will be strategically linked to the following plans -

- **Medway local plan**

Medway Council aims to have a plan in place by Autumn 2025 which will address how the land use is developed in Medway up until 2041 and how the needs of the growing population will be supported.

- **Council Plan 2024**

Priority 1 of this plan 'Delivering quality Social Care and Community services' – Sub Priority 'Support our children and young people to ensure they are safe, secure and stable'.

- **Childrens service plan**

Now that the Youth Offending Team is managed within Childrens Social Care the local Youth Justice Plan and the Childrens Service Plan will be developed and aligned with each other.

The YJPB membership provides alignment with other key partnership boards addressing the Youth Justice agenda, Kent Criminal Justice Board, Kent and Medway Reoffending Board, Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP), MAPPA Strategic Management Board. With the Youth Offending Team joining Childrens Services in March 2021 it is represented at Children's services management and senior management meetings.

Since April 2024 the Head of Service for the Youth Offending Team is the head of Corporate Parenting.

Update on the previous year:

Progress on priorities in previous plan

The table below identifies some of the areas of progress from the 2023 / 24 plan.

| Areas of significant Progress on Priorities in Previous Plan: | | |
|--|---|---|
| Board Development: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 5:2 | <i>For the Youth Justice Partnership board to align its activity to national priorities and key performance indicators.</i> | The board's quarterly meetings are aligned to the National Key Performance Indicators and the National Priorities. This has meant that the board has had oversight of all of these areas within the year covered by the 2023 / 24 plan. |
| Resources and Services: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 7:3 | <i>To significantly increase the use of accreditation.</i> | This has been a real success. Within the period covered by the 2023 / 24 plan – 138 children have gained AQA accreditation linked to work that they have undertaken with the Youth Offending Team. This represents the majority of the children who have worked with the team. |
| 7:4 | <i>To have developed accredited interventions that address offending related needs.</i> | This target is linked to the above – over the last year accredited interventions have been delivered that address significant offending related issues such as knife crime, and criminal exploitation. |
| Performance: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 8:1 | <i>For the partnership board to understand and be able to respond to the local increase in the numbers of first-time entrants.</i> | The January 2024 board was presented with a paper analysing the local data in respect to children who are first time entrants. This paper identified who these children are and what type of offences are resulting in tier becoming first time entrants. This has helped the partnership to respond to this issue as the priorities and actions in this year's plan will reflect. |
| Priorities: | | |
| Children from Groups which are over-represented: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 10:1:1 | <i>For the Youth Justice partnership Board to be aware of local disproportionality data-taken from the YJB disproportionality tool kit.</i> | This was presented to the October 2023 youth Justice Partnership Board meeting. This was the first of the local youth Justice Partnership Boards to be aligned to the National Priorities. It was in fact the first time that disproportionality data had been discussed at the local board. This represented an important move forward in terms of the board exerting its responsibility to respond to this issue. |
| 10:1:2 | <i>For the Youth Justice partnership Board to be aware of partnership agency data regarding disproportionality</i> | Partnership agency data was presented to the board. Particularly pertinent to the discussion at t board was the data presented by the Police. There is now an agreement with the Police that disproportionality data will be presented on a yearly basis to the partnership board. |
| Prevention: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 10:2:1 | <i>The prevention activity of Medway Youth Service to be represented at the Medway youth Justice Partnership Board.</i> | Prevention as defined nationally by the YJB is in Medway primarily delivered by the youth Service. Medway is fortunate to have high quality Youth Services that deliver these types of activities within the community. In the alignment of the local partnership boards activities to the national priorities – Prevention was discussed at the January 2024 partnership board meeting. |
| Restorative Approaches and Victims: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 10:5:1 | <i>Oversight by the partnership board of the delivery of</i> | This was important to achieve in that Restorative Services to victims of children subject to Out of Court disposals are delivered by |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | <i>restorative approaches to the victims of offences committed by children subject to out of court disposals.</i> | Community Interest Company commissioned by the Police crime Commissioners Office. The efficacy of his service needed to be established by the local partnership board. Oversight of this delivery took place during the January 2024 Board meeting when the Police Crime Commissioner's Office presented the local data. |
| Serious Violence and Exploitation: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 10:6:1 | <i>A dataset is developed across Kent and Medway to identify risks related to Serious Youth Violence.</i> | This work has been commissioned by the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit and is in the final stages of development. Software is being developed for use across both Kent and Medway to identify the risks related to serious Youth Violence. |
| Remands: | | |
| ID | Achieve: | Progress / Comments: |
| 10:8:1 | <i>Plans for alternatives to Youth Detention Accommodation to be agreed with Childrens Social Care – when these are appropriate to present to the court.</i> | There has been close collaboration between the Youth Offending Team and CSC in respect to children to whom the court is considering Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA). There has been a notable decrease in the numbers of children subject to YDA and an increase in the numbers of children subject to remands to Local Authority Accommodation. |

Notable achievements in the delivery of the 2023 / 24 Youth Justice Plan include actions being undertaken to align the Youth Justice Boards activities more closely with the national priorities given by the National Youth Justice Board. The Medway Board has aligned its quarterly meetings to address each of the national priorities. Datasets have been provided by partners to address these priorities at the board. This has resulted in the board becoming more engaged with these priorities. An example of this is how the actions in respect to the priority: Children from Groups which are over-represented- resulted in disproportionality data being presented at the board for the first time, and that this critical issue was explored and understood in a local context. The board's knowledge and awareness of this particular issue is progressed upon in this plan.

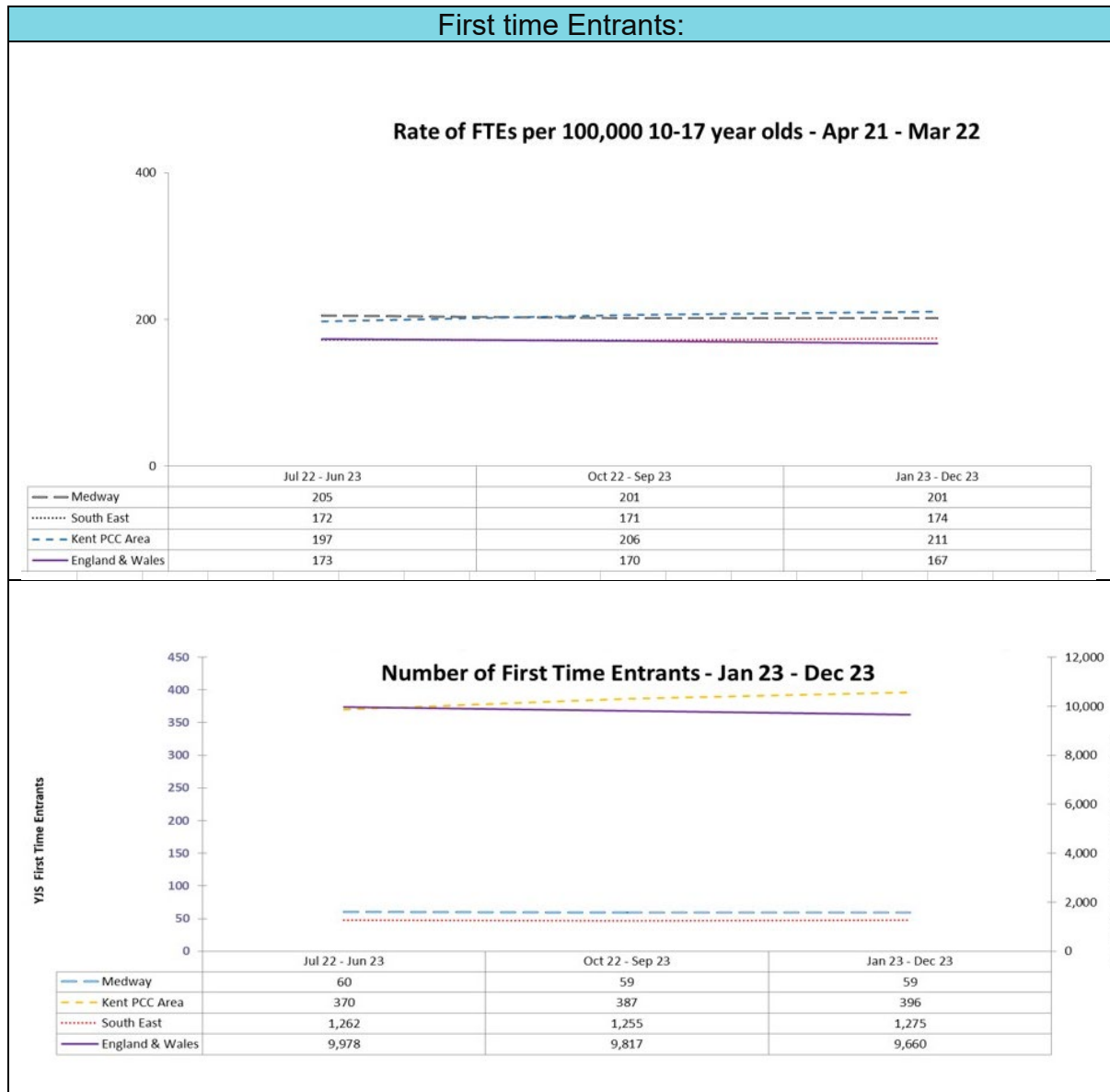
The Youth Justice Partnership Board has continued to broaden its focus from being what was effectively a Youth Offending Team management board to a board that has in its scope the oversight of range of youth justice services delivered in partnership. This is evidenced in the inclusion of the delivery of Medway Youth services prevention activities within the scope of the board. In this year's plan this is also evidence through the co-authorship of the plan with partner agencies.

Prominent outstanding actions are centred around the area of Diversion. The use of Outcome 22 as an effective diversionary measure that reduces the number of children formally entering the youth justice system is in its infancy in Medway. Work has been taking place by both the Police and the youth Offending Team to prepare for the use of Outcome 22, and it has very recently been used purposely with the intention of diversion in mind. However, we have not seen its use as yet, reduce the number of first-time entrants. This is an area where we are hoping that the actions in this year's plan will have a more significant beneficial impact upon the lives of children.

Further commentary on the progress of the 2023 / 24 plan will be provided in the discussion of the National Priorities in the following sections of this plan.

Performance over the previous year

First time entrants (FTE's):



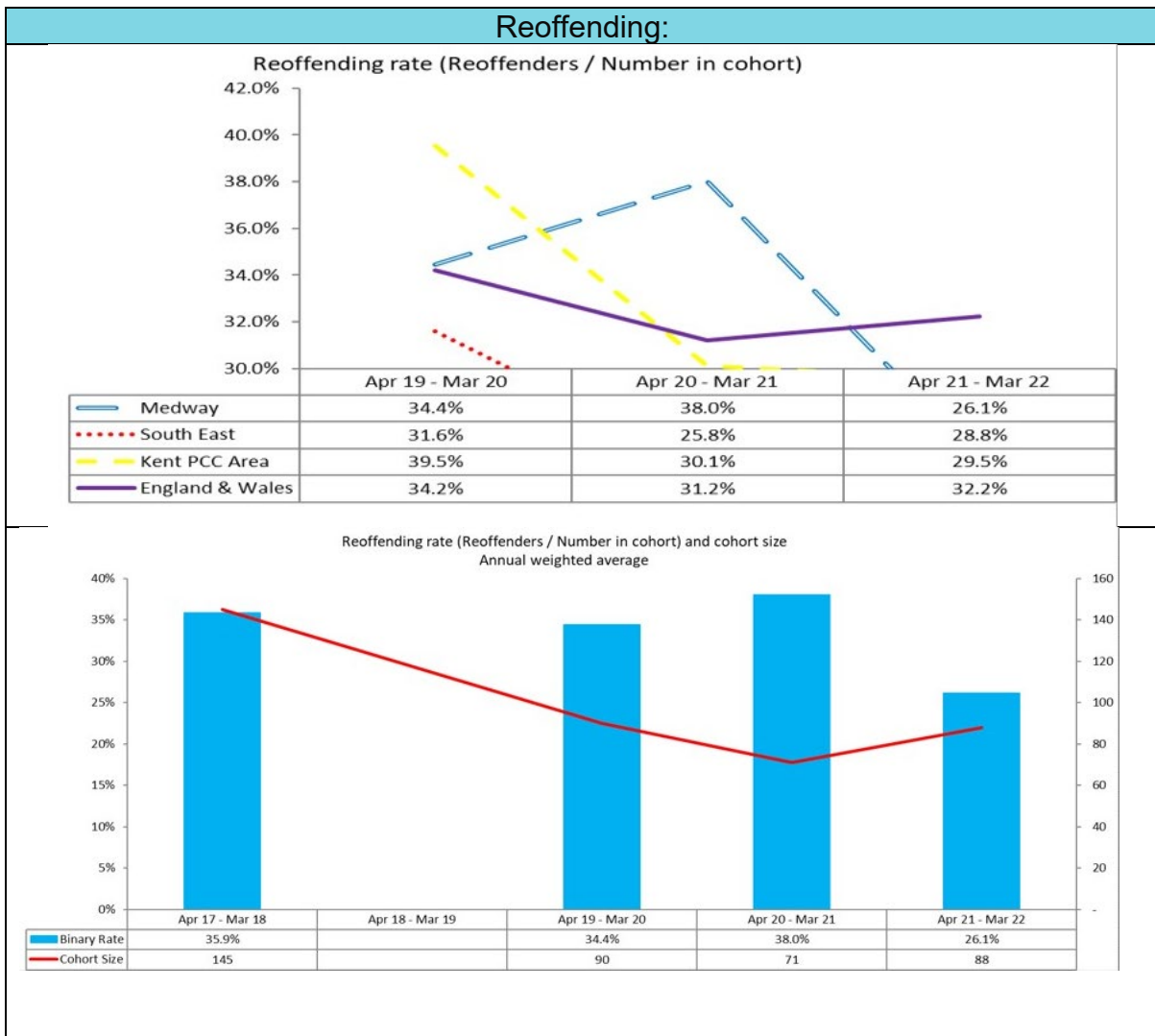
(Published 18/03/2024).

The latest Youth Justice Board data set for Medway shows an increase in first time entrants. The most recent data records this as being a rate of just above 200 in every 100,000 of the local 10–17-year-old population. The highest rate of first-time entrants per 100,000 of the population since 2018 and prior to the above rates has been 176. This was recorded between Oct 2021 and Sept 2022 and was presented in the 2023 / 24 Medway Youth Justice Plan data. When translated into actual numbers of children this was equal to 50 children. The most recent rate per 100,000 of the population presented above is 201 (recorded between Jan 2023 and Dec 2023), this represented 59 actual children.

Local analysis of the 2022 / 23 first time entrant data enabled the partnership to have a better understanding of this cohort. The numerically most significant offences for which children became first time entrants were offences classed as weapon possession. Prior to their becoming a first-time entrant 9 children had previously been open to children's social care (27%), and 15 were open at the point of becoming a first-time entrant (46%). These figures demonstrate the important role Children's Social Care play in terms of preventing children from becoming FTEs. 24 (73%) of these children had not been previously known to the Youth Offending Team, the other 9 (27%) had been open on an Out of Court disposal. This shows the important diversionary role that the Out of Court disposals can have.

That Medway's rate of first-time entrants is higher than both the regional and national rates is a cause for concern. There has been a reflective and open discussion between the Youth Offending Team and the Police as to the reasons behind these higher-than-average rates. There is a recognition that as a partnership we are not confident that we are successfully diverting all the children that could potentially be diverted from becoming first time entrants. It is aim of this plan that the case of each child is reviewed in partnership based on their context and that we are confident in the audit trail of our current decision-making and can justify decisions made as a partnership. This plan can be seen to seek more boldly to reduce the number of children who become first time entrants in the Youth Justice System. This focus is reflected in the actions developed in response to the national priorities of Prevention and Diversion.

Reoffending:

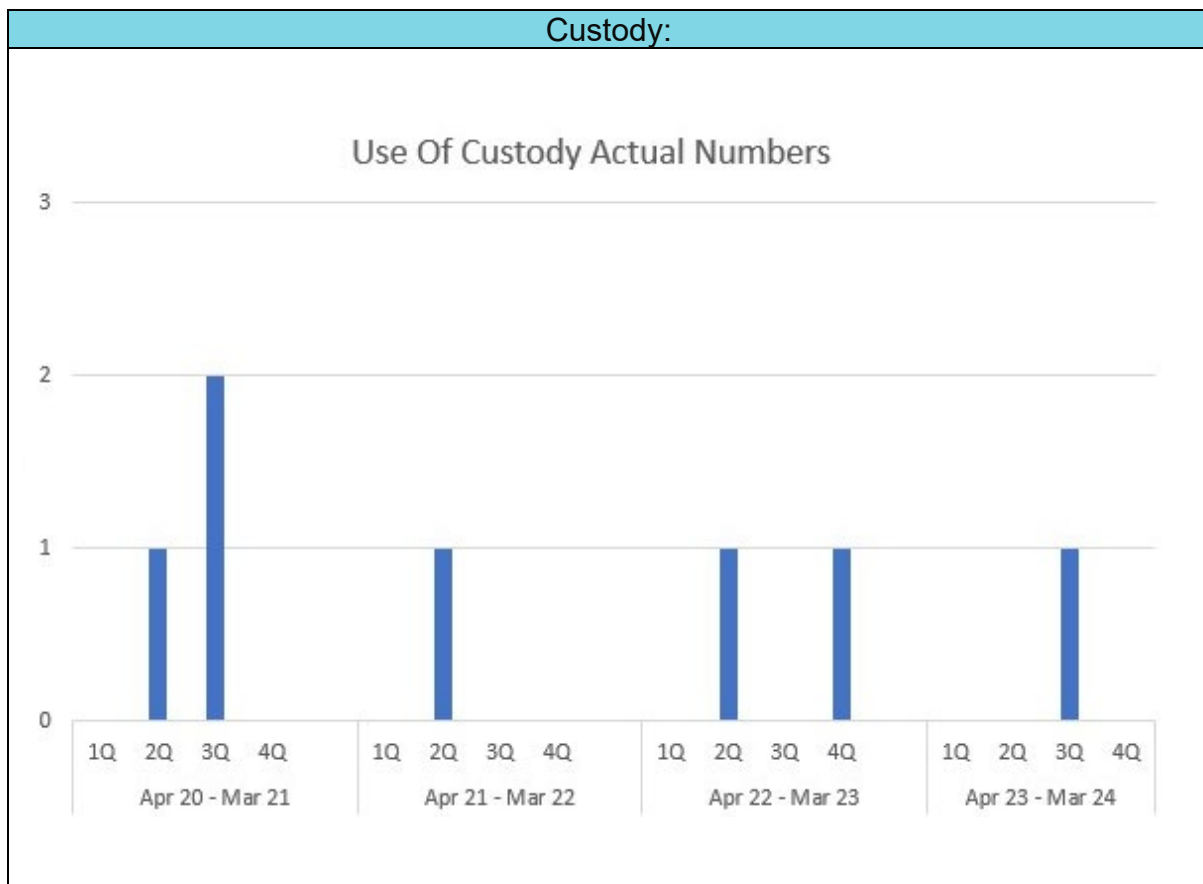


(Published 18/03/2024).

The latest Youth Justice Board reoffending data set for Medway shows a positive picture when compared to the data presented in the 2023 / 24 Youth Justice Plan. This data is necessarily historical given that reoffending is established over a period of 12 months. The latest data presented in the 2023 / 24 plan was from April 2020 to March 2021 and presented a 38% reoffending rate in an overall cohort of 71 children. The latest data presented in this current plan is from April 2021 to March 2022 and presents a 26.1% reoffending rate in a cohort of 88 children. The reoffending rate has decreased whilst the cohort size has increased (the cohort size increase is due in part to the increase in FTE described above). This data shows the re-offending rate to have dipped below regional and national rates.

Despite this most recent data presenting a positive trend the youth justice partnership is not complacent in respect to the work that needs to be done to continue this trajectory. Local trends in youth offending can change quickly and services need to be responsive to these trends to continue to address reoffending effectively. The youth offending Team is continuing its work in identifying its re-offenders and understanding their needs and understanding what interventions are most effective in terms of preventing their further offending.

Custody:



(Published 18/03/2024).

The custody rates for children in Medway continue to be low, with only one child receiving custodial sentence in the last year. The child who did receive custody received a custodial sentence received it for an offence that was very serious and where it could have been predicted that custody was inevitable. The length of sentence was such that the child will be resettled as an adult.

Risks and issues

Workforce

A significant issue impacting upon the delivery of positive outcomes for children is the issue of staff retention. With the recruitment of staff by Oasis Restore for the Secure School being opened within the local authority boundary, and with the Medway's proximity to local authorities in London where higher rates of pay are offered for youth justice workers – there has been local concern with regards to the pressures on staff retention. This was a risk identified and highlighted in the 2023 / 24 plan. During the last year work has taken place within the council to re-evaluate the Youth Offending Team Officer role in the Youth Offending Team. This work has looked at the responsibilities and expectations within this role and how these should be appropriately responded to in terms of pay. Work has also taken place to ensure that there is a clear pathway for career progression in all the roles in the Youth Offending Team. The result of this work is that the YOT Officer role has been competitively re-evaluated and the overall potential staff retention pressures described above have been effectively mitigated against.

Children with Additional Needs

Children who have undiagnosed neurodivergence or speech and language need are likely to face additional barriers accessing appropriate services. This may hinder their diversion from criminal activity. Currently the pathways for addressing the needs of these children in Medway remains underdeveloped. This was a risk issue identified in the 2023 / 24 plan. Over the last year significant work has been undertaken by the health commissioners within Medway with providers to improve pathways for diagnosis and support. It is well reported that there is a national shortage of Speech and Language therapists, and this has clearly impacted upon the success of commissioning work over the last year. An innovative service was about to be commissioned in 2023 / 24 when the provider withdrew on account of their inability to staff their proposal. Despite these setbacks local public health commissioning is committed to finding a solution that works for the children open to the Youth Offending Team. Commissioning work in this area is positively developing and this plan is hopeful that within 2024/25 a service that meets these children's needs will be in place.

Education

Education – achieving successful outcomes in relation to the education national priority and the KPI is likely to be challenging locally. The reason for this is a well-documented reduction in post 16 provision in Medway. This plan proposes that every child who is not in education training or employment has an individualised plan in place to enable them to progress. In short, the challenges to services to support these children is going to be harder. The education national priority section below outlines the work that the councils Information Advice and Guidance team is going to undertake to support these children.

Plan for the forthcoming year:

Child First

The delivery of the Child first Principles is central to the ethos of the Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board and this Youth Justice Plan. Below is presented a summary of how the four Child First principles are being delivered locally and are represented in this current plan.

1. Prioritise the best interests of children and recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets responsibilities towards children.

Medway youth offending teams work with children has had a strong focus on theme of identity. We have sought to develop a model of practice that explores the identity journey that a child is undertaking in their life – exploring with them a prosocial future identity. This identity focus seeks to explore the child’s world as they see it themselves. Alongside this plan the youth offending team is seeking to develop its practice in respect to acknowledging and addressing the structural factors that impact upon a child’s life. Team development work is focusing on the identification of structural factors and developing an appropriate response to these.

2. Promote children’s individual strengths and capacities to develop their prosocial identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.

Medway has demonstrated a commitment to working with children through strengths-based approaches. Medway is using accreditation alongside the work that the youth offending team undertakes with children. The work that children undertake with the team is aligned to the accreditation of AQA modules- enabling children to develop a portfolio of accreditations through their work with the youth offending team. Through this work with the youth offending team children will experience a sense of achievement and a realisation of their potential. The development of community projects in the delivery of reparation to empower children and to enable them to feel that they are a part of their community.

3. Encourage children’s active participation, engagement, and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.

This current plan aspires to a stronger commitment to collaboration with children. This will be explored below in the discussion on ‘writing to the child’. This plan also aspires to a commitment to collaboration with parents / carers this is explored in the discussion on the national priority ‘Working with Families’.

4. Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion, and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

There is a strong commitment in this plan to develop the diversionary work of the youth justice partnership. As has already been discussed in this plan – Medway is an outlier in terms of the relatively high number of first-time entrants. How the partnership is going to strengthen its commitment to diversion is explored in the discussion on the national priority ‘Diversion’, this work centres around strengthening the use of diversionary pathways such as Outcome 22.

The child’s voice-

The identity-based approach to practice referred to above represents a strong commitment to listening to child’s voice and to understanding their world as they see it. In 2024 / 25 the youth offending team is taking further the development of collaborative approaches of working with children – through the practice of writing case notes and planning documents to the child. This commitment will entail routinely addressing case notes to children and sharing these with them. This is a new approach to practice and at the point of writing this plan it is not known where it will take the team in terms of deepening the sense of collaborative working. It is a development being undertaken to develop and nurture a professional respect for the child’s voice.

15 children were consulted within writing this plan. In the consultation process the children were made aware their views were being sought to inform the planning process. Their views were sought with regards to the national priorities. For each of the national priorities this plan presents the views of these children. In this way this plan maintains a dialogue with children throughout. Any quotes from children have been carefully edited to ensure their anonymity.

Resources and services and Service Development

We use our grant, partner contributions and available resources (detailed in appendix b at the end of this plan) to deliver youth justice services and we believe they produce the following benefits and outcomes. Our performance will be improved next year in the following ways described below.

These priorities have been agreed by the local Youth Justice Partnership Board members. Priorities 1, 2, and 6 are derived from an analysis of local data regarding local rates of first-time entrants and very recent data regarding disproportionality. This data is presented through the body of this plan. All of the 6 priorities below are grounded in the data and analysis that presented throughout this Plan.

The Medway Youth Justice Plan is aligned to the National ‘Youth Justice Board strategy for delivering positive outcomes for children by reducing offending and creating safer communities 2024–2027’. The priorities of the national strategy are -

1. Supporting improvement of youth justice services in local communities
 - Provision of diversion across the country.
 - Working with partners to prevent and reduce serious violence.
 - Improving youth justice services’ support to victims of crime.
 - Providing for children during the time that they are in custody and when they leave.
 - Supporting workforce development.
2. Focussing on addressing persistent racial disparities across the youth justice system.
3. Influencing development of policy and practice to advance adoption of Child First throughout the youth justice system

The following elements of national priority 1 – the focus on Diversion, addressing serious violence and improving services for victims are addressed in the local priorities included in this plan - 1, 2, 4, and 5.

The national priority 2 is addressed in the local priority – 6 that commits the partnership to understanding and a responding to recent data identifying local trends in disproportionality.

Priorities for the coming year

| Our Priorities |
|---|
| 1: Developing effective diversion and prevention services. |
| 2: Reducing the numbers of first-time entrants. |
| 3: Reducing re-offending through strengthening collaborative working with children and their families. |
| 4: Delivering high quality services to all victims of children's offending. |
| 5: An effective response to Serious Violence and criminal exploitation. |
| 6: Disproportionality, to identify and respond to local trends. |

Board development

The 2023 / 24 Medway Youth Justice Plan set out a work plan for the board that aligned the partnership board meetings with both the national priorities and the key performance indicators (KPIs). The work plan also indicated the responsible agencies required to present to each of the priorities and KPIs. This approach has been beneficial. There has been an improvement in the strength of partnership involvement in the board. There has also been an improvement in the quality of the data presented to the board.

Prior to this approach being implemented the Medway Board had not had oversight of data in respect to children from groups which are over-represented. This is an area of critical importance that the Medway Board is now beginning to engage with. In this way the board can be said to have matured, developed and become more engaged over the last year.

For 2024 / 25 the board now has its first years' worth of KPI data. This data can now inform much more robust discussions at a board level concerning the performance of services in relation to accommodation / education / substance misuse support / emotional and mental health support and the delivery of restorative approaches. It is the aspiration of this plan that board will use this evidence to take a strong approach to supporting improvements in delivering these KPIs where required. It is the aspiration of this plan that in 2024 / 25 the board will drive forward the delivery of the targets in the Youth Justice Plan.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1:1 | For the Youth Justice Partnership Board to have direct and regular quarterly oversight of the delivery of the Youth Justice Plan. | The actions of the Youth Justice Plan to be tracked in the youth justice partnership board meetings. | The partnership board minutes evidencing oversight of the delivery of the Youth Justice plan. |
| 1:2 | For the partnership board to have oversight of the Youth Justice KPI data using this to support performance improvement. | KPI data to be presented to the relevant meetings assigned in the yearly work plan. Actions to be agreed by the board to support performance improvement. | Where KPIs are not being met – actions in place to support performance improvement. |

Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board work-plan. 2024 / 25.

| | Priority / KPI report required. | Responsible agency: |
|--|---|--|
| Theme: Disproportionality and Prevention and Diversion: | | |
| October 2024 | Priority: 1. Children from groups which are over-represented | All agencies |
| | Priority: 2. Prevention. | Youth service Early Help / Family Solutions |
| | Priority: 3. Diversion. | Police Youth Justice Team Youth Offending Team |
| | KPI: 6 – Out-of-court disposals. The percentage of out-of-court disposal interventions that are completed/not completed. | |
| Theme: Serious violence, exploitation, and Victims. | | |
| January 2025 | Priority: 6. Serious violence and exploitation. | VRU Medway Childrens Services |
| | KPI 9 - Serious violence. The rates of children convicted for a serious violent offence on the YJS caseload. | |
| | Priority: 5. Restorative approaches and victims. | Youth Offending Team Restorative service. PCC office / Out of court victim contact. |
| | KPI 10 – Victims. The percentage of victims who consent to be contacted by the YJS, and of those, the percentage of victims who are engaged with about restorative justice opportunities, asked their view prior to out-of-court disposal decision-making and planning for statutory court orders, provided information about the progress of the child's case (when requested) and provided with information on appropriate services that support victims (when requested). | |
| Theme: Custody / remands and resettlement. | | |
| April 2025 | Priority: 9. Use of Custody. | Youth Offending Team |
| | Priority: 10. Constructive resettlement. | Youth Offending Team |
| | Priority: 8. Remands. | Youth Offending Team Childrens commissioning |
| | Priority: 7. Detention in Police Custody. | Police Medway council commissioning / appropriate adult service |
| Theme: Partnerships and resources. | | |
| July 2025 | Priority: 4. Education. | IAG service Medway Council CAMHS Open Road Medway CSC |
| | KPI: 2 - Education, training, and employment (ETE). The percentage of children in the community and being released from custody attending a suitable ETE arrangement | |
| | KPI 3 - Special educational needs or disability (SEND)/Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The percentage of children who have an identified SEND need (or ALN in Wales), are in suitable ETE and have a formal learning plan in place for the current academic year. | |
| | KPI 4 - Mental healthcare and emotional wellbeing. The percentage of children in the community and being released from custody with a screened, or, identified need for an intervention to improve mental health or emotional wellbeing; and of that the percentage of planned/offered interventions; of that percentage of children attending interventions. | |
| | KPI 5 - Substance misuse. The percentage of children with a screened or identified need for specialist treatment intervention to address substance misuse; and of that the percentage of children with planned or offered intervention/treatment; and of that the percentage number of children attending intervention/treatment. | |
| | KPI 8 - Wider services. The percentage children who are currently on either an Early Help (EH) plan; on a child protection (CP) plan or classified as Child in need (CiN) or have looked-after status. For Wales only, children who are classified as Children in Need of Care and Support. | |

Workforce Development

Medway council has undertaken a major review of the terms and conditions of employment for council employees. This review has been entitled 'Medpay'. The council has stated that the latest review of the Medpay scheme seeks to ensure that as a local authority -

- We retain a talented workforce.
- We attract and recruit a skilled workforce.
- We support career progression.
- We tackle the challenge of staff leaving and skills shortages.
- We continue to pay people above the National Living Wage.
- There is a transparent and consistent approach to applying policy for market enhancements and retention payments based on regular market condition assessments.

During the course of 2023 / 24 the youth offending team underwent the 'Medpay' review. Specifically, the terms and conditions of the Youth Offending Team Officer post were reviewed to ensure they meet current market conditions. Also, all job roles in the team were reviewed and placed within a clear career progression framework which details what qualifications / knowledge / experience, and skills are required for career progression. All new starters in the team are placed at a specific level within the Medpay structure and are provided with detailed criteria as to how to progress to the next level. The Medpay structure incentivizes the attainment of qualifications and skills for career progression and pay progression. Inherent in the Medpay career progression structure is the responsibility of the local authority to provide staff with the opportunities to progress. Particularly for the youth offending team in Medway progression has been aligned to the completion of the Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate and the completion of the Degree in Youth Justice. The Medpay review has had the effect of enhancing the creation of a culture of learning and development within the youth justice team.

From April 2024 the Youth Offending Team has had a practice development lead linked to it from the Childrens Social Care Practice Development Service. Alongside the youth offending Teams Practice Manager, a series of practice development workshops are being developed for 2024 / 25. The themes of these workshops have been derived from extensive audit activity referred to in the 'Evaluation' section of this plan. Already two practice days have been delivered in May 2024 – exploring themes of the identity and diversity, structural factors and writing the child.

A significant development in the area of workforce development has been the development of locally agreed Youth Justice practice standards. These have been co-developed between the youth offending team management team and the Childrens Social Care Practice Development Service. These practice standards represent an attempt to actualise themes of collaboration and responding to diversity and structural factors. They have been written to support the delivery of the Youth Justice National Standards and have been written to support the delivery of the Youth Justice Boards case management guidance. They have been written to develop how practice is delivered in Medway and to support staff with guidance as to

how to respond to key issues such as criminal exploitation and working with families. These practice standards were launched during the recent practice days in May 2024.

Evidence-based practice and innovation.

In 2023 / 24 Medway youth offending team completed the development of a web-based application (App) to engage children in planning positively for their future. This was a three-year project funded by the Youth Justice Board Pathfinder program. The end 'product' of this project was the Connect App which the Medway youth offending team have been using with children since April 2023.

The project started out from a recognition that the digital space is one that children routinely inhabit but is avoided by youth justice professionals. The development of the App was assisted by the support of the criminology department of the University of Loughborough. This support was centred on ensuring that the project adhered to the principles of child first practice. The University of Loughborough provided an interim report in the autumn of 2023 to assist with the project's development.

This was an ambitious project and the whole area of digital development is one not traditionally undertaken by social care professionals. The expectations of children in respect to the digital space are high – children are familiar with Apps that have been developed by major technological corporations with budgets that vastly exceed the budget available to this project. On reflection presenting it to children using the term 'App' was a mistake in that this term naturally led to comparisons with other Apps with which they are familiar and use on a daily basis. As iterations of the App were tested with children their expectation was that it would be able to contain features such as audio and video recording – features that exceeded the budget of the project.

The Connect App is an interface between a child and their worker in which both can upload images, photographs, free text, emojis, and weblinks to explore the questions 'Who am I?', 'Who do I want to be?' and 'How am I going to get there?'. It is a digital tool for exploring the identity journeys of a child.

Over the last year many children have benefited from using the App. For some children using a digital platform in this way has opened up and facilitated a deepening conversation about their identity journey and about their interests and the lives that they live. One of the significant achievements of the app is that it enables a child to have access to a record of the work that they have undertaken with the youth offending team on their own phone or digital device, rather than work being stored away in an office or in a case management system that is routinely inaccessible to the child.

Medway youth offending team remain committed to the development of the use Connect App. The technical development of the App has come to an end but the utility, potential and possibilities of the App in practice with children is still being explored.

Evaluation

Between January and April 2024, the Practice Development Service alongside the youth offending team Managers commenced a review of young people's files open to the Youth Justice Service. The electronic files of 40 young people were reviewed alongside the allocated worker. The focus of the audit was on exploring the impact and application of the "child first" principles and what lessons could be learned moving forward. The subsequent findings of the audit centred around the following themes for improvement.

Cultural Competence

Consistently identifying the cultural needs of children identified and ensuring that these are fully explored.

Developing the understanding of:

- children with neurodiverse needs and how they could be supported.
- children excluded from education, or with EHCP's.

Voice of the Child

The audit found that staff had forged good working relationships with young people. Further exploration as to how the child's 'voice' could be further reflected upon and developed in terms of how this is recorded on the child's electronic record. In evidencing co production with the young person their voice needs to be consistently, explicitly, and meaningfully recorded in their own words. As has already been discussed in this plan the team is moving towards a 'writing to the child' approach in recording contacts.

Exploitation

Developing the response to contextual safeguarding . An alignment with Children's Social Care Practice, in the use of Kent and Medway criminal exploitation toolkit.

Plans

Developing planning so that it reflected a more child first approach. Using the voice of the child in planning and ensuring that planning responds to changes in the child's situation.

Supervision & Management Oversight

The development of management oversight. The audit reflected on the potential use of the Power BI tool to enable managers within the team to have readily available data as to the completion of work streams.

The findings of this audit have been responded to through the development of a set of Practice standards that were launched in May 2024.

The themes identified in the audit are being explored with the staff of the youth offending Team through a series of practice workshops throughout the year, including contextual safeguarding.

Standards for children

The 2023 National Standards Audit covered standard 2 'At court'. Of the 22 questions included in the Youth Justice Board's Audit tool, Medway rated itself in audit as being Good in 17 areas and as Requiring Improvement in 5 areas.

Detailed below are the 5 areas in which we rated ourselves as requiring improvement, with a description of the specific point requiring improvement and how these are being addressed-

3. Do your court processes take all possible steps to promote fair treatment of particular groups of children?

The audit found that there was not a clear specific set of processes to 'promote fair treatment of particular groups of children' in respect to children from ethnic minority groups. Since the audit was completed processes have been developed to address this issue and included in local practice standards.

7. Do you have a means to get regular feedback from magistrates and judges about your reports and court services, and engage with strategic partners to ensure court confidence in your work and interventions?*

The audit found that whilst the youth Offending team ensured that it was represented at the court users group and the youth bench meetings – there was not a formal standardised process for the youth bench to provide feedback about the quality of reports and recommendations from the youth offending team. This is an area addressed in the current youth justice plan.

8. Do you have a means to ensure children can participate effectively in court proceedings, and to secure consistent feedback from children about their experience in court?

For the most part this specific standard was considered to have been met in that the voice of children was found to be consistently presented to the courts, and that children were consistently seen by the Youth Offending Team prior to their hearings so that the court proceedings could be explained to them. The one area outstanding was that there was not a local process in place to collate data regarding children's experiences of court. This is addressed in the actions presented below.

9. Do you have consistent access to custodial warrants for children remanded and sentenced to youth detention accommodation?

This was not found to be consistent in all cases.

15. Does your service have an effective Quality Assurance process for reports?

The audit found that all reports presented to the youth court had the oversight of a manager in the youth offending team and were subject to a quality assurance process. The area that required improvement was the consistent recording of this on the case management system.

Locally the National Standard audit process can be seen to generate actions that improve practice. The actions from the audit that remain outstanding are included in the present plan.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|------------|--|---|--|
| 2:1 | For the Youth Offending Team to receive feedback from the Youth bench regarding the quality of reports and proposals presented to the court. | To implement a process whereby the views of the Youth bench are routinely sought. | Evidence of the establishment of a clear process of feedback between the Youth Bench and the Youth Offending Team. |
| 2:2 | For the Youth Justice partnership board to have understanding of the experiences of children of the Youth Court | To implement a process whereby the experiences of children of the Youth Court are routinely sought. | For a paper to be presented to the partnership board detailing local children's experiences of the youth court. |

National priority areas

Children from groups which are over-represented

| Childrens voices / Voices from Black children |
|--|
| Do you think that you are treated fairly as a black child in the criminal justice system? <i>No, I think differently sometimes.</i> |
| Do you think that you are treated fairly as a black child in the criminal justice system? <i>Yes, I am it's not my colour it's me as a person.</i> |
| Do you think that you are treated fairly as a black child in the criminal justice system. <i>My skin colour shouldn't be a reason to be treated fairly or not I was treated as a result of my crime.</i> |
| How could workers in the criminal justice system in Medway better support black children? <i>Treat them the same as white people we are all the same.</i> |
| How could workers in the criminal justice system in Medway better support black children? <i>They do at the moment same as everyone else.</i> |

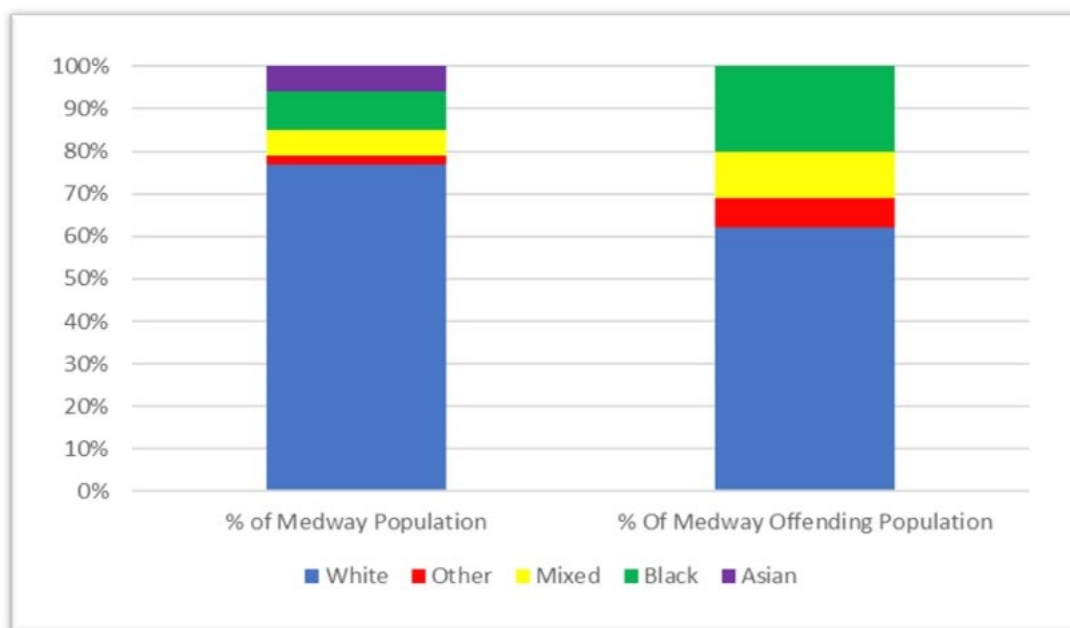
(A selection from responses from 5 Black children compiled for this plan)

The Black children that we talked to in compiling this plan expressed a number of different views – some felt that that they were not treated fairly, and some did not. All of them expressed a desire to be treated fairly and the 'same' as white children.

The Local data in respect to children who are over-represented in the Youth Justice system presented in the 2023 / 24 plan (data collated by the national Youth Justice Board) did not indicate that there were any local issues in respect to disproportionality. This data compares the representation by ethnicity by percentage of the local population compared to the percentage of those children with offences recorded against them (offending population). The data in the 2023 / 24 plan covered the time period 2021 – 2022. The most recent data supplied by the national youth justice board does indicate that there is a local issue in respect to disproportionality. This data covers the time period between 2021 – and 2023.

It is important for the local youth justice partnership board plan to be informed by the most recent data in respect to this issue. Below are included tables from the most recent Youth Justice Board Ethnic Disparity toolkit.

2021 – 2023 representation of % of the population compared to % of offending population. This table represents the percentage of children from different ethnic groups compared to the percentage in the offending population.



Statistical tool ⁽¹⁾ to determine over-represented ethnic groups in local YJS offending population, year ending March 2023

| Ethnic group | 2022/23 Offending Population | Share of total ⁽¹⁾ | 2021 Census 10-17 population by ethnic group | Share of total % ⁽²⁾ | % Point Difference | Over represented, offending pop >10 and statistically Significant |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Asian | 0 | 0% | 1,791 | 6% | -6% | No |
| Black | 14 | 20% | 2,455 | 9% | 11% | Yes |
| Mixed | 8 | 11% | 1,655 | 6% | 5% | No |
| Other | 5 | 7% | 440 | 2% | 5% | No |
| Ethnic minority groups ⁽³⁾ | 27 | 38% | 6,341 | 23% | 15% | Yes |
| White | 44 | 62% | 21,777 | 77% | -15% | No |

Description:

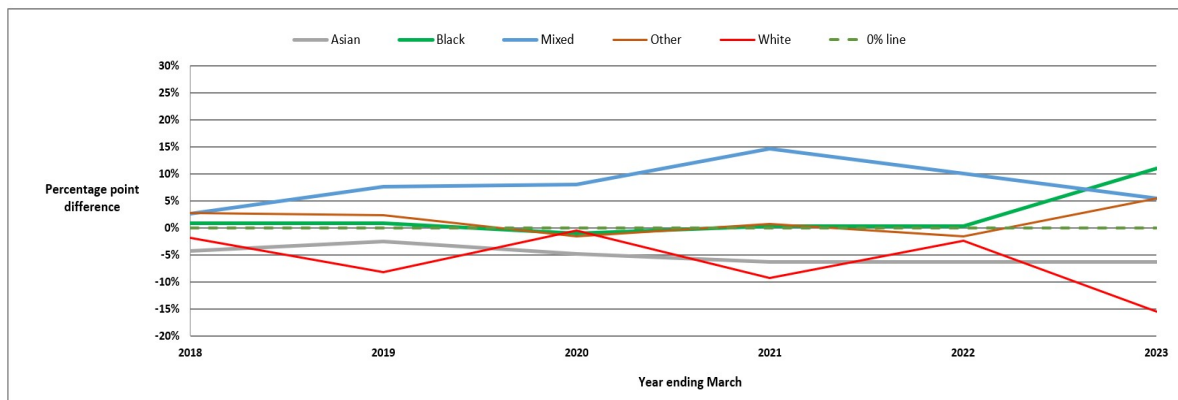
The tool identifies where a particular ethnic group is over-represented in the youth offending cohort and the level of over-representation is statistically significant.

Where a particular ethnic group is over represented in the offending population and the offending population is greater than or equal to 10 children it is identified by being highlighted in yellow. The significance level of this test is set to 5%.

1: Excludes children where the ethnic group is not known.

2: The share by ethnic group is based on where ethnic group is known.

3: Due to small numbers it has been decided to aggregate data for children from the Asian, Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups into the ethnic minority group.

Trends in percentage point differences between local 10 to 17 population and YJS offending population, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2023⁽¹⁾

Description:

The charts above shows trends in the percentage point difference between offending and local population for each ethnic group at the YJS.

If a particular ethnic group has a higher percentage represented in the offending population than in the 10-17 population then that group is over-represented and it will present as positive percentage in the graph above.

For example if at a particular YJS children from a White ethnic background accounted for 60% of the offending population, but only 50% of the local 10-17 population the percentage point difference would equal 10% (60% - 50%), whereas if children from a Black ethnic background accounted for 15% of the offending population and 20% of the local 10-17 population, the percentage point difference would equal -5% (15% - 20%).

What this data shows is that disproportionality in respect to Black children and children from other ethnic minority groups can be identified since 2022 (the period covered by the data presented in the last plan). The Youth Justice Board disproportionality tool-kit shows that there are issues of over representation from first tier interventions (Out of Court disposals / Youth Cautions) onwards. The above data was made available by the national Youth Justice Board during the completion of this plan (on 15/05/2024). As a consequence at the point of writing this plan it has not been possible to identify from this data what is underpinning this change of direction in terms of disproportionality.

In the October 2023 Medway Youth Justice Partnership Board meeting, data was shared by Kent Police in respect ethnicity and Stop and Search rates and Stop and Searches that led to an arrest. Neither of these data sets revealed any statistically significant findings indicating local disproportionality.

In this plan the board will extend this oversight of Police data to look at ethnicity in respect to Police Strip search data.

The significant move forward for the Medway Partnership board was that this data was being presented and discussed. This represented a first for the board.

| Childrens voices / Voices from Girls |
|--|
| <p>Do you think your treated differently by the criminal justice system because you're a girl?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Yes.</i> ○ <i>No different to anyone else.</i> ○ <i>No, I don't think it's the same.</i> ○ <i>No.</i> ○ <i>No different at all, same as a boy.</i> |
| <p>Do you think that the interventions offered to you are responsive to your experience of being a girl?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Yes, they are.</i> ○ <i>Yes, it was really good, I have enjoyed them, and they have helped me.</i> ○ <i>Yeah, It should be all the same to boys and girls.</i> ○ <i>Yes, enjoyed them I find my YOT worker is very caring and suits me.</i> ○ <i>My interventions are good think it would work on both girls and boys.</i> |

(A selection from responses from 5 Girls compiled for this plan)

Similarly to Black children, most of the girls who contributed to this plan thought that they were not treated differently by the criminal justice system on account of their being a girl. They also indicated that they felt that the interventions offered to them were responsive to their experiences of being a girl.

Medway Youth Offending Team has taken an approach to working with children that puts the theme of identity as being central place. Our practice is to understand the identity journey that a child is taking and interact with them. This focus on identity as has been previously explored in this plan is evidence based. Whilst this is an approach that we seek to take with every child – it does not mean that we treat every child the same. Rather it means that treat every child differently and respond to the unique features of their identity. In practice this firm focus on the theme of identity has meant that the children's experience of racism and sexism should be recognised acknowledged and addressed.

The efficacy of this approach needs to be continually evaluated. This plan proposes to put in place a process by which the experiences of youth justice services of children from groups who are over-represented and girls are regularly sought and responded to both individually and in team practice discussions.

It is important to note that the make-up of the staffing team is much more diverse than it has been previously. The gender balance of the team and diversity of ethnic backgrounds enables the team to be more responsive to the needs of the diverse range of children with whom it works.

The most recent data in respect to disproportionality and Children from groups which are over-represented published on 15/05/2024 - requires a response by the partnership board. At the point of compiling this plan these trends indicating disproportionality are new and have not been investigated. Current trends need to be understood and responded to. Efforts need to be made to understand the experiences and trajectories of Black children and children from other ethnic minority groups who are over-represented.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|--|--|--|---|
| 3:1 Youth Offending Team | That the youth justice partnership board is aware of and able to respond to the current trends evidencing ethnic disproportionality within the youth justice system locally. | A deep dive into the latest data from the YJB Ethnic Disparity Toolkit. The presentation of case studies citing individual children's trajectories and experiences. | A paper is presented to the board presenting an analysis of the latest disproportionality data and case studies. |
| 3:2 Youth Justice partnership board | That the Youth Justice partnership board develop a response to the latest disproportionality data. | A plan is agreed by the board to address the disproportionality data presented in this plan. | Evidence of a plan being in place to respond to the latest disproportionality data. |
| 3:3 Police | To increase the boards exploration of disproportionality to explore data in respect to children being strip searched. | For Kent Police to present data to the board that identifies whether or not there is a disproportionate response to Black, Asian and Mixed ethnicity children being strip searched compared to white children. | Data and accompanying analysis is presented to the board in respect to ethnic disproportionality and the use of strip search. |
| 3:4 Police | To increase the boards exploration of disproportionality to explore data in respect to the diversionary use of Out of Court Disposals (OCD). | Identification by comparative offences by offence gravity – to see whether there is any disproportionality in respect to what OCD Black, Asian, and Mixed ethnicity children receive compared to white children in respect to the same offence gravity offences. | Data and accompanying analysis is presented to the board in respect to ethnic disproportionality and the use of Out of court disposals. |
| 3:5 Youth Offending Team | That the experiences of children from groups who are over-represented and girls are regularly sought and responded to in the delivery of youth justice services. | To put in place a process by which the experiences of youth justice services of children from groups who are over-represented and girls are regularly sought and responded to both individually and in team practice discussions. | Evidence that these children's experiences are being listened to and responded to. |

Policing

| Childrens voices |
|---|
| <p>What do you think of the police in Medway?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Ok not got much to say really, it's a job they do.</i> ○ <i>I like them they are good at their jobs.</i> ○ <i>They don't look into things properly they too excess they jump the gun and don't think first.</i> ○ <i>Alright I suppose, a policeman said he wanted to recruit me as a mentor to speak to young people and help them stop offending and support them.</i> ○ <i>I had a cry for help, and they really helped me didn't walk away.</i> ○ <i>Ok with me and communicate good when I went missing in Medway.</i> ○ <i>They were nice to me when I was arrested.</i> ○ <i>All nice in Medway that I have met.</i> |
| <p>How can the Police better support children not to get in trouble?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Don't think they can it's a job and here are doing it. Maybe talk to kids first see what's going on.</i> ○ <i>Yes, they could speak to children better, be more understanding and actually talk to you.</i> ○ <i>No there isn't anything they can do it is down to the parents.</i> ○ <i>Yes, they can, I previously a worker from police for prevention and thought he was really good so maybe that could work if they had more about in Medway.</i> ○ <i>Speak to them better have respect and listen to young people and stop thinking they are god and better than you.</i> ○ <i>I don't think they can do anymore than they do as they arrest us and lock us up and we still get into trouble.</i> |
| <p>How do you think that the Police could better engage and communicate with you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Listen more.</i> ○ <i>Good experience for me so I can't say much more.</i> ○ <i>Majority have been nice and communicated well with me, I wasn't very happy/angry, but he spoke to me and helped me understand that my anger wasn't helping.</i> ○ <i>Yes, they can let you talk more and not sound so patronising.</i> ○ <i>Communicated very well with me spoke to me like I was human, not an idiot and was ok so I think they do a good job. Some of them could be better at their job.</i> |

(A selection from responses from 15 children compiled for this plan)

For the most part the 15 children that contributed to the compilation of this plan commented positively about their experiences of the Police in Medway. This should be recognised as an achievement given the interaction that the Police had with these children in arresting them and sometimes detaining them in Police custody. The children spoke of their desire to be respected and listened to by the Police.

Medway has its own Child Centred Policing Team. At an operational level partnership working with this team has began to develop since the beginning of 2024. Prior to this operationally the main interface between the Police and the Youth Offending Team was focused on the delivery of Out of Court Disposals and Diversionary activity. The sergeant of the Child Centred Policing Team has started to attend the monthly Youth Justice Risk meeting and has provided support for team in managing the risk presented those children assessed as presenting high and very high risk of harm to others and those children who are themselves considered to be at risk in the community.

During the course of the last year there have been strategic discussions between the Police and Medway Youth Offending Team. These discussions have focused on actualising locally the YJB NPCC The Role of the Youth Justice Service Police Officer (Dec 2023) document ([here](#)).

There have also been discussions regarding the implementation of the NPCC Child Gravity Matrix and the delivery of Outcome 22 as a deferred prosecution locally ([here](#)).

These discussions over the last year have now come to the point of implementation. As has been previously explored in this plan Medway is currently an outlier in terms of both regional and national rates of first-time entrants in the Youth Justice system. Affecting the numbers of first-time entrants is an activity that requires partnership with both the Police and the courts. It is the aspiration of this plan that the actions contained within it are based on a strong partnership with the Police and will over the course of this plan positively and significantly impact upon the numbers of children who are first time entrants.

Indicative of the strength of the partnership with the Police is that the Police have authored 7 of the actions contained within this plan. These actions are spread across a number the different National Priorities. Where an action has been authored by the Police this will be identified in the first column (see below).

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| 4:1 Police | Swifter delivery of outcomes for cases returned from court for youth out of court resolutions. | The Kent Police Youth Justice Team will attend youth court each week to be available to deliver OOCR's where appropriate within the court environment improving timeliness and incorporating the victim voice. | Reduction in the length of time cases returned from court for an OOCR take to administer. |
| 4:2 Police | Implementation of a youth justice service joint protocol setting out the role of the police within the youth justice service across the delivery of intensive supervision and joint working | Kent Police and Medway Youth Offending Team should deliver against the YJS joint protocol to make best use of resources and adopt associated taskings that Kent Police have responsibility to deliver | Review of YJS joint protocol for effectiveness and compliance |

Prevention

Childrens voices / Prevention and Diversion

What do you think would stop children from getting into trouble with the law in the first place?

- *No there isn't anything apart from maybe look in background first to see what has happened in their life. Also, every crime should be looked at individual cases for sentencing like background, family, peer pressure etc.*
- *Consequences of law, they think they know but they don't, need to learn the effects on family not just myself and friends.*
- *The way society is you see people with more like clothes and you want it, so giving paid work experience to help financially and show them they can get jobs.*
- *School help children more, look at their friendship group, Parents to make sure they are with good people too not ones that get into trouble.*
- *No there isn't anything you can do they just will get into trouble.*

(A selection from responses from 15 children compiled for this plan)

In Medway a range of Prevention services are delivered by Medway Youth Services. The range of services provided is extensive and can be seen to address the comments made by children above. A wide range of activities, opportunities and support for young people aged 8-18 and up to 25 for those with additional needs and disabilities are provided. They support prevention of youth offending in several ways:

Diversionary activity – The activities offered are available to all young people in Medway, ensuring there is a low threshold to engagement. These activities are promoted across Children's Services and partners and particularly at teams working with vulnerable young people. While any young person is welcome to engage, efforts are made to target opportunities for those who need them the most.

Early identification of risk – Centre-based and street-based (detached) youth workers often become aware of risk-taking behaviour and young people's early involvement in anti-social and criminal behaviours. When this is the case, youth workers communicate concerns through referrals and in the professional network, engaging in strategy meetings to share information and support the coordination of support.

Focussed deterrence – Where groups of young people have been identified as at risk of escalating criminal or anti-social behaviour, youth workers support focussed deterrent approaches to supporting young people, where there is high engagement, opportunity, surveillance, and management of risk. Youth workers roles are usually about supporting access to targeted diversionary and growth opportunities, combined with sharing information.

Skills based education – Medway Youth Service uses the Skills Builder Framework to inform its work in schools, offering 6 free sessions to each secondary school in Medway. These sessions support the development and growth of personal and social skills including: listening, speaking, problem solving, creativity, aiming high, staying positive, team work and leadership. This program is supported by research

that suggests social skills training programmes have reduced the number of children involved in crime by 32% and particularly youth violence, as well as other benefits such those who develop strong social skills having a 25% greater likelihood of employment, with greater promotion and career prospects than their peers.

Growth approach - Skill Builder sessions formalise approaches used across the Youth Service that support personal and social growth and development. The Skills Builder Framework provides a useful language for communicating the benefits of youth work and capturing evidence of its impact. These positive associations have been long suspected, but difficult to prove. Recent research commissioned by the DCMS has highlighted:

'There is a clear association between participation in youth provision and positive short-term outcomes relating to physical health and wellbeing, pro-social behaviours, and education. There is also strong evidence that these short-term outcomes are sustained over decades and, compared with non-participants, people who attended youth clubs continue to score more highly for several of these indicators of wellbeing.' ([SQW 2024](#))

Others research [UK Untapped](#) (2022) indicates that every £1 invested in youth work benefits the taxpayer by between £3.20 and £6.40, citing particular relationships with improved education and employment outcomes, benefits for mental and physical health and decreased crime and anti-social behaviours.

Specialist prevention projects

Medway Youth Service also engages in targeted approaches to support risks to young people. These include:

Medway Hospital Project – Three full time youth workers are based at Medway Hospital, funded by the Violence Reduction Unit. They engage with young people admitted to hospital or visiting the emergency ward. There is a focus on young people with risks associated with youth violence, either as victims or active involvement. Their role is to support young people while in the hospital, but also to signpost to community support services and share information to support risk identification and management. Their work is particularly important where young people are admitted and there is not an immediately apparent risk of offending or exploitation, but where one becomes apparent through their interactions.

School and Locations Assessments – Medway Youth Service supports contextual safeguarding efforts by engaging young people in contextual safeguarding assessments in relation to schools and areas where risks are highlighted. This work involves young people in identifying elements of risk and safety in the spaces where they spend their time. Issues could relate to the physical condition of an area such as lighting or unsafe spaces, concerning youth or adult behaviour, exploitation risks, their ability to access support or get help and more. The assessments inform planning and changes to environments and targeted work to support young people. Importantly the young people are active participants in these assessments and are encouraged to take lead roles in solving problems that impact them. This work has

received funding from the Police Crime Commissioner and the Violence Reduction Unit.

Brief Intervention Counselling – Medway Youth Service offers 6 sessions of counselling support to young people who do not meet the CAMHS thresholds and do not have access to other counselling opportunities. This service aims to offer early help to young people who are starting to be vulnerable or are starting to experience a trouble or problem. Examples of previous support include: Domestic violence & abuse, Bereavement, Anxiety and Depression, Trauma, PTSD, Behavioural, Anger management, Low self-esteem, Self-harm, Abuse, Bullying, Family issues, Relationship problems, Young carers, Transgender, Suicide, School work and school pressures, School refusers. Although these may not indicate offending behaviour they can be precursors to wider issues and early support has a preventative role deescalating concerns that could lead to risky behaviours. The Police Crime Commissioner has funded this offer consistently for around five years.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| 5:1 Youth Service | Support young people to have a better understanding of the impact of anti-social behaviour. Improved safety of young people. | To co-develop three projects that respond to young people's experiences of anti-social behaviour and crime in the Chatham High Street area as part of the Safer Streets 5 PCC funded project. | Number of young people involved in projects. Recorded outcomes and case studies demonstrating young people's achievements. Feedback from town centre forum and partners related to young people's engagement and reductions in anti-social behaviour. |
| 5:2 Youth Service | Young people are involved in efforts to evaluate and improve contextual safeguarding responses in schools and the community. | Deliver three school assessments and three locations assessments in response to needs identified. (This target assumes this number of assessments are requests.) | Number of young people involved in projects. Recorded outcomes and case studies. demonstrating young people's achievements. Changes made and responses offered in these locations to address contextual safeguarding issues. Feedback from schools, community forums and partners related to young people's safeguarding. |
| 5:3 Youth Service | Reduction in risks associated with groups of young people identified for focussed deterrent support. | Engage in up to three focussed deterrent projects (if identified) in responses to identified needs. This work involves identifying additional activities and support as part of a partnership response to young people's risks related to ASB. Offending behaviour and or exploitation. Focussed deterrent responses should be | Number of young people involved in projects. Recorded outcomes and case studies demonstrating young people's achievements. Reductions in recorded ASB, offending behaviour or risk of exploitation. Observations from partners involved in the focussed deterrent approach including police, social care, education, families, and community partners. |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | determined by the contextual safeguarding panel based on Police intelligence and Violence Reduction Unit analysis. | |
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Diversion

There is a strong focus in this present plan on the theme of diversion. As has been previously explored a number of times in this plan Medway is currently an outlier in terms of both regional and national rates of first-time entrants in the Youth Justice system. Currently the partnership is not able to assert with confidence that all those children who should be diverted from the criminal justice system are being diverted. This statement is made in recognition of the fact that potential diversionary measures that exist in legislation have not been extensively used locally. The level and rate at which children can be diverted from becoming First Time Entrants remains relatively untested.

Currently there is a process in place with the Police in which the outcomes for children who are being considered for an Out of Court disposal (OOC) are agreed. This weekly multi-agency panel process is convened by the Police but the panel itself is comprised of both the Police and the Youth Justice Services of both Medway and Kent as well as other advocates. The panel has since September 2023 encouraged partners to consider Outcome 22 as a deferred caution route as an alternative to YC or YCC in line with the refreshed Child Gravity Matrix. Further exploration will review how the panel could be involved in deferred charge decisions but that is not currently an element of the Youth Justice multi-agency panels.

As described in the Police national priority section of this plan - It is the aspiration of this plan that the actions contained within it are based on a strong partnership with the Police and will over the course of this plan positively and significantly impact upon the numbers of children who are first time entrants. Much work has taken place between the Police and the Youth Offending Team over the last year to bring the partnership to a place where bringing down the numbers of first time entrants is possible.

Success in this work will be evaluated by Medway no longer being an outlier in terms of the national and regional rates and numbers of children becoming first time entrants.

It is important to note that effective diversionary work will enable the partnership to address issues more confidently in respect to ethnic over representation in the delivery of statutory disposal and orders made by the youth court.

Medway is currently delivering the Ministry of Justice's Turnaround program. This program is designed to deliver diversionary activity to those children considered as being on the cusp of offending. The criteria for children's suitability for the program are...

- Release under investigation or pre-charge bail:
- Anti-social behaviour - acceptable behaviour contacts (ABCs)
- Anti-social behaviour - ancillary orders
- Interviewed under caution following arrest/voluntary interview
- No Further Action (including Outcome 22)
- Community Resolution (Outcome 8)
- First-time youth caution (not including conditional caution)
- Release under investigation or pre-charge bail
- Discharged by a court.

We are in the process of evaluating the first year of delivery of this program to establish its efficacy locally in terms of effectively diverting children from the Youth Justice system.

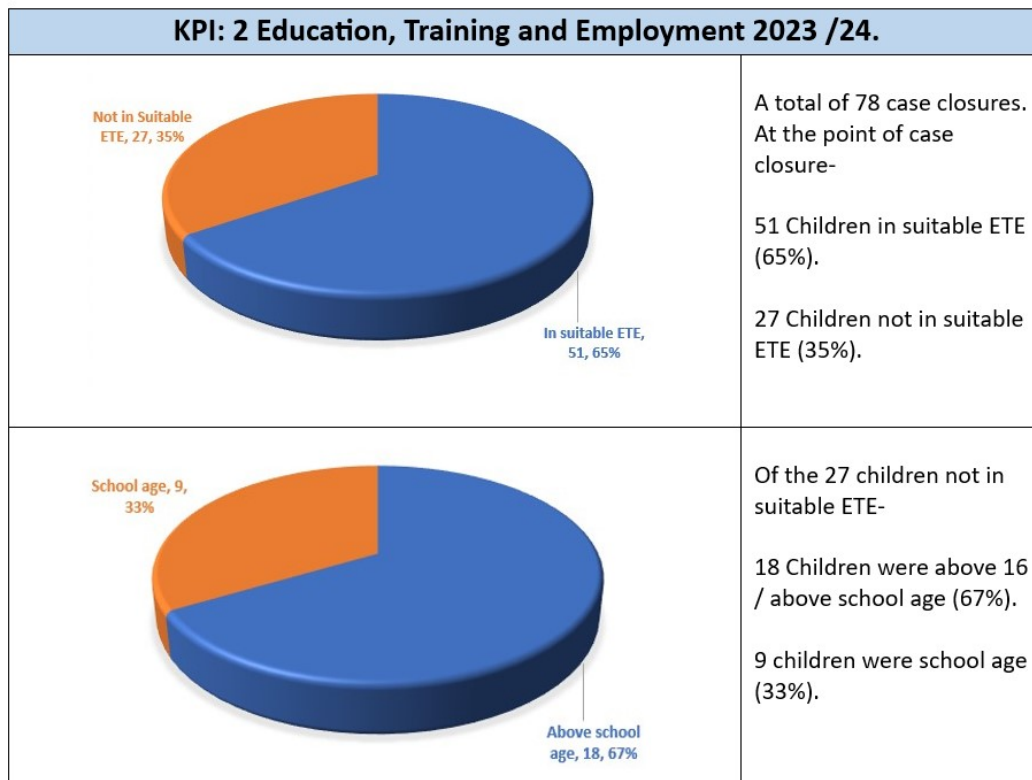
| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| 6:1 Police | The extension of diversionary work with children through the use of outcome 22 being used as a deferred caution and deferred charge. | Kent Police and Medway Youth Offending Team should establish a clear process for the use of outcome 22 as a deferred caution and explore the use of O22 for deferred charge criteria. | Police Measure: |
| | | | Evidence of the increased use of outcome 22 as a deferred caution through the Youth Justice panel. |
| | | | YOT Measure: |
| | | | A decrease in the number of First Time Entrants. A reduction in the use of Youth Cautions and Youth Conditional Caution. |
| 6:2 Police | The extension of education based diversion work with children through the use of outcome 22 being offered where cases would have resulted in No Further Action | Kent Police to establish a reporting mechanism to share with Medway Youth Offending Team when O22 has been delivered for NFA cases | Evidence of increased use of outcome 22 as an alternative to no further action |
| 6:3 Police | The increase of early intervention approaches to reduce escalation of offending and repeat offending through police-led targeted interventions | Kent Police will deliver intervention workbooks as a means of early intervention aimed at addressing offending behaviour, impact on self, family and community providing an opportunity to be professionally curious to identify any safeguarding or support requirements | Evidence of the use of intervention workbooks and reduction in repeat offending in those undertaking them |

Education

| Childrens voices |
|---|
| <p>What has your experience of school been like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Didn't like school. ○ Not too good, it was ok didn't really get on with school it was too much I wanted to earn money in year 10, it was pointless year it was too long going to school to 16yrs. ○ Hate it that's all I am going to say. ○ Primary was ok, secondary was ok but got kicked out for fights then got sent to a PRU and was better and helped more as it was small school and classes. ○ Got kicked out from mainstream, went there till year 9, was kicked out as I assault a teacher. But he put his foot on my head restraining me, I know I kicked off, but he went to the extreme and made me lose my temper. I was then sent to a PRU and was much better. ○ I used to focus at school and get good grades, but it changed in secondary school. I could make decisions, but I decided to bunk school. But I also didn't have friends there they were at another school, so I wanted to meet them, so I used to go to their school. Then it started friends argue as we were different areas and there was a lot of arguing so I stayed away from school more. |
| <p>What role do you think schools have in helping children not get into trouble?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They could teach stuff in little school about law and stuff at a young age maybe might help them to choose better. ○ I don't think they could do much to change or help in any way. ○ Don't think there is anything they still down to the parents. ○ No there is nothing they can do to help. |

(A selection of responses from 15 children compiled for this plan)

A common message from children involved in the Youth Justice System is that they have struggled with or depending on their age, continue to struggle with school. Some cited positive experiences whilst in Pupil Referral Units which they felt began to meet their needs. It is well established that being in education training or employment (ETE) is a protective factor against offending. The challenge is enabling children who are disaffected with education to engage with education, training, and employment. This challenge is evident in the Key Performance Indicator data for 2023 /24 detailing the numbers of children in ETE at the end of their youth justice intervention.



A 35% rate of children not in ETE at the end of their YOT interventions is a cause for concern. 2023 /24 has been the first year that the National Youth Justice board has required Youth Justice Services to complete this KPI in respect to education. The current plan reflects a more robust response to the implementation of the KPI and the identification of children who are not in education training and employment. Early indications from the national data set are that the % of children not in ETE in Medway is similar to the regional rate.

Work is being undertaken in Medway to address school inclusion. A system to support Inclusion is designed to ensure access to the right support at the right time in the right place, with the majority of children and young people having their education needs met in their local mainstream schools. By creating a system that further supports appropriate intervention as early as possible and prevents escalation of needs, developing more capacity in the system in terms of provision and expert knowledge will reduce the need for children to be placed in off-site provision. Off-site provision then being able to focus on the most complex of needs.

Challenges in respect to addressing this KPI relate to the sometimes-short time periods that children on Out of Court Disposals (OOC) are open to the team. Sometimes a OOC intervention is closed within a matter of months presenting a challenging timeframe by which to work with a child and re-integrate them into a ETE provision. In Medway the number of alternative education providers has decreased making it more challenging to find opportunities for children open to the Youth Offending Team. More positively Medway is fortunate to have two very good Pupil Referral Units with good and outstanding OFSTED ratings. The links between these

schools and the Youth Offending Team are very good and joint working takes place to support the children who are educated there.

Over the last year a significant area of success has been the delivery of accredited interventions to children open to the Offending Team. In the year 2023 / 24 a total of 138 AQA accreditations were awarded to children open to the team. For many of these children receiving these AQA awards will represent a significant achievement. This work is potentially valuable in terms of fostering motivation in respect to further ETE attainment and the team is exploring how the AQA delivery can be enhanced to effectively support those children who are not in education training or employment.

The Youth Offending Team in Medway has a designated Information Advice and Guidance worker whose role is to support post 16 children into ETE. The contribution below was authored by the manager of this team.

The Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Team support young people academic age 16/17 years. The IAG will have a named contact dedicated to the Youth Offending Team, whereby all correspondence and will be made. An IAG specialist will attend relevant team meetings and meet with a named member of staff within YOT to ensure data is correct and updates are made. The named IAG Specialist will be situated within the Youth Offending Offices, once a week.

Young people within the cohort, who are known to the Youth Offending Team, will receive a priority service and not placed on waiting lists. Careers and Transition support will be offered to referred young people. Young people will receive careers guidance, transition support, opportunities for education, training and employment awareness, application support, CV writing and Interview skills support where required. Young people will receive follow up support.

The IAG Specialist will ensure that key workers are updated with progress and information.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 7:1 | Improved outcomes for Children not in Education Training or Employment. | Have a process in place to identify children not in ETE at the start of their intervention and to have an individualised plan developed and in place to address their ETE status. | A significant reduction in the % and actual numbers of children not in ETE at the end of their YOT intervention. |
| 7:2 | Enhancing the use of AQA accreditation for those children who are NEET to support them towards gaining a place in education training or employment. | Linking up the delivery of the AQA accreditation with the work of the information advice and guidance team. | A significant reduction in the % and actual numbers of children not in ETE at the end of their YOT intervention. |

Restorative approaches and victims

| Childrens voices |
|---|
| <p>Do you think it is a good idea to meet with victims and say sorry to them?</p> <p>Would you like the opportunity to say sorry to the victim of your crime?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication through the victim and perpetrator would be so helpful, victim can feel a sense of closure. ○ I feel guilty and if he would meet me and accept my apology, I would feel like I could move on with my life and maybe they could too. ○ Yes, I do think it's a good idea, teach you to move on and help them maybe friends. ○ I would say sorry it was street robbery, when I sat in court the victim impact statement was read out from their side, I also saw footage I realised how bad it was and felt guilty. ○ No, it doesn't work and I wouldn't do it I wasn't guilty. ○ For my crime I would probably say sorry but not sure. |

(A selection of responses from 15 children compiled for this plan)

Restorative approaches are central to the work of the Youth Offending Team in Medway and are supported by the wider partnership. As can be seen from the above comments made by children the possibility of engaging in a restorative process with the victim of their offences is seen as very challenging. Restorative approaches are essentially about healing relationships, they are something that both the person who caused harm and the person harmed have to be fully motivated to engage in. In Medway the approach has been and continues to be a victim led service. Restorative approaches will never be deployed unless the victim of the offence wants to take part in them. Local experience shows that it is common for victims to want to engage in restorative justice and therefore it is imperative that a high-quality service is made available to them.

In 2023 / 24 the delivery of Restorative Justice and contact with victims was adversely affected through staffing issues. The Restorative Practice worker in the team retired and there was a period of time before the successful recruitment of a new worker. A new Restorative Practice worker has been in place since January 2024.

Restorative practice in respect to Out of Court Disposals (OOCd) has been delivered by a service commissioned by the Police Crime Commissioners Office. Over the last year the performance of this service in relation to facilitating the delivery of Restorative Justice to the victims of children subject to OOCd has not been as we would have expected. The performance of this service was reviewed at the January 2024 Youth Justice Partnership board meeting. The data provided by the PCCs office showed that no direct or indirect Restorative Justice took place with any of these victims during that period. In response to this the Youth Offending Team has agreed with the Police that the Medway Youth Offending Team Restorative Justice worker is going to take on this work. The level of engagement of victims with the service provided by the Youth Offending Team has historically been high. It is an exciting opportunity to extend this service to the victims of children subject to OOCd and thus provide high quality restorative approaches to all victims of children involved in the Youth Justice System in Medway.

The Restorative Practice worker is currently in the process of trying to revitalise the Restorative approaches provided in the Referral Order Youth Offender Panel Process. A new cohort of panel members are currently being trained and inducted.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|------------|---|---|---|
| 8:1 | Restorative approaches provided to the victims of children subject to Out of Court Disposals. | Develop and deliver restorative approaches for the victims of children subject to Out of Court Disposals. | The numbers of victims of children subject to Out of Court Disposals engaged in restorative approaches. |
| 8:2 | A new cohort of volunteers in place to deliver Restorative approaches. | Train and induct a new cohort of volunteers from the community in Medway. | Evidence of new volunteer panel members being in place to deliver restorative approaches as a part of the Referral Order Panel Process. |

Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding

The themes explored in this section of the plan address multiple areas of children's experiences. In terms of eliciting children's views this plan has focused on talking to children about knife crime – in that knife crime is indicative of concerns in respect to serious violence and contextual safeguarding. The theme of exploitation was also explored.

| Childrens voices |
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| <p>Why do you think children carry knives or weapons in Medway?</p> <p>1: It is what it is, now it's the life in Medway just like London.</p> <p>2: I have been caught carrying a knife, so I had it for protection wasn't going to use it but had to carry, glad I didn't need it.</p> <p>3: Don't support carrying knives, stupid people carry knives but someone people have no choice and are scared and all about reputation.</p> <p>4: Everyone carries knives it's just kids being kids.</p> |
| <p>What can be done about it?</p> <p>1: Nothing, it's too much going on, just like London, its life our lives now.</p> <p>4: It's been here for years and will never go away, it's the young kids you need to change.</p> |
| <p>Do you think children are exploited by criminals?</p> <p>1: Yes and no some choose it some don't.</p> <p>2: No, I made that choice myself and choose to do it and don't think many are exploited it's a choice not forced.</p> <p>3: Yes, they are groomed by criminals and all the rappers' videos have a hold over young people by showing crime as good.</p> <p>4: Yes, they are at a young age they are, it needs to be change with young age not teenagers as it's too late when they are teenagers got too involved by then.</p> |
| <p>What do you think should be done about it?</p> <p>1: Nothing can be done</p> <p>2: Education on knife crime within schools as a lesson that everyone must attend regularly. Also learn that it can harm you, by someone using it or stabbing yourself by accident which is what I did. I was arrested and had it in my pocket, and it stabbed me in leg which really hurt.</p> <p>3: Start getting them when they are really young, they need education about grooming, just your life no one wants to die so why do It, they need to be educated to save their life.</p> <p>4: Not sure to be honest maybe classes on crime and what can happen to them if they break the law.</p> |

(A selection of responses of 4 children from 15 children compiled for this plan)

There is a sense from these responses that children see the prospect of serious violence and exploitation as a reality in their lives, a reality that they cannot avoid and are required to negotiate.

Serious Violence

Medway is a local authority with a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The director of the Violence Reduction Unit is a member of the local Youth Justice Partnership Board. There are close strategic and operational links between the VRU and the partnership.

The Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) of Serious Violence was published in January 2024. The analysis identified various issues that relate to Medway and included a focus on children as part of the work. Regardless of the age of the victim or suspect of public place serious violence, Medway is the district in the County which is most affected.

According to the Office for National Statistics, 11.8% of the population of the County are aged between 10 – 17. Children in Medway are over-represented in the statistics as either the suspect of having committed a serious violence offence (33% are identified as children) or being the victim of serious violence (27% of the victims are children).

The main offence types within the definition of serious violence that have been recorded are:

- Violence with injury (70%)
- Possession of weapons (10%)
- Robbery (7%)
- Assault with intent to cause serious harm (6%)

The Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is a multi-agency collaboration between Medway Council, Kent County Council and Kent Police. The VRU has representatives seconded from these organisations into the unit and a Medway Senior Youth Worker is the VRU coordinator for Medway and Swale.

There is regular sharing of data and analysis between Medway and the VRU which includes Youth Justice and Children's Services data along with that of Kent Police, Probation, KCC and Health. The data is used to inform the local understanding of how Medway is affected by serious violence including the places of most concern and the individuals who require additional agency attention due to the risks that they face or that they pose to others.

The VRU coordinator works closely with the Youth Justice team to ensure that there is a multi-agency response to incidents of violence or when there is data or intelligence which suggests that risks of violence are increasing. The VRU funds a variety of services in Medway including the Reachable Moments project in Medway Maritime Hospital, community sport in Medway schools and recreational spaces and a mentoring service for children at risk of criminal exploitation.

The VRU propose the following for the Medway Youth Justice plan for 2024 – 25:

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|---|--|--|---|
| 9:1 Violence Reduction Unit / Medway CSC | An effective multi agency response to serious youth violence by VRU and Medway Children's service including YOT. | To review and ensure that processes and information sharing are robust and understood across the service areas and that the response is appropriate and timely for adolescents. | The number of strategy discussions that are undertaken because of serious youth violence. will be reported to the Medway Youth Justice Board on a quarterly basis. |
| 9:2 Violence Reduction Unit | Strengthen the response to serious violence in community spaces. Ensure that any young people placed in Medway and about whom there are concerns linked to exploitation or violence are known to agencies who can support them | Medway Youth Justice and the VRU will ensure that both agencies attend all contextual safeguarding meetings. The meetings will be informed of any concerns about places where violence may occur or any children placed in the district about whom there are risks of exploitation or violence | The chair of the Contextual Safeguarding meeting will report back on the impact of the data provided by the VRU to the meeting and the contribution of Medway Youth Justice staff and the VRU.. |
| 9:3 Violence Reduction Unit | The response to risks linked to networks or groups of young people will be responded to through Focused Deterrence | The VRU will analyse data and identify any emerging groups, gangs, or networks of children where there are associated risks of violence. Medway Youth Justice will be an active participant in the planning for and response to how risks, whether to or posed by the individuals in the network, are managed. | The VRU will report on the risk scores linked to the network using pre and post intervention analysis. The VRU will report on how the process of Focused Deterrence was delivered and which agencies had a positive impact on risk levels |

Exploitation:

Criminal exploitation is a complex area that can only be addressed through an effective interface between Youth Justice Services and wider Childrens Social Care services whose primary focus is that of safeguarding the child.

Medway Children's Services teams hold regular Missing and Exploitation Discussions to address themes including criminal exploitation. The Missing & Exploitation Discussions (MED) are operational discussions chaired by Service Managers, to develop service level understanding and management of risk, and a service and team level response to extra familial risk. The MED seeks to ensure that identified risks to vulnerable children are being managed. Each discussion reviews the Kent and Medway exploitation assessment tool and safety plan. Effective planning for these children needs to be multi agency, relevant and have been shared with the child and parents/carers to reduce the risk of exploitation for that child. It is an aspiration of this plan that the Missing and Exploitation discussion are embedded and identify exploitation at an earlier point.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| 9:4 | Early identification of children and young people | Embed consistent use of missing exploitation discussions to enable an early preventative response to the risks identified | Increase in the number of MEDs held. |

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| | where the risk of exploitation is identified. | | Decrease in numbers of repeat missing incidents for children where exploitation is identified. |
|--|---|--|--|

Medway Early Help / Family Solutions deliver an intervention specifically aimed to support parent / carers of children at risk of exploitation. The DICE programme has been devised by Barnardo's following feedback from parents where they stated the felt alone, worried, and powerless in relation to dealing with the modern-day risks faced by families such as grooming exploitation and digital dangers.

The DICE programme aims to help parents develop their skills, build knowledge, and increase confidence to meet the needs of their children as they grow up in the modern world. DICE is a four week programme which can be carried out in either a group or 1:1 setting. The target audience is parents and carers of children and young people aged between 8-15 years who are at risk of exploitation. Sessions are delivered face to face and last for 2.5 hours.

The DICE programme FREE with 4 x 2-hour sessions:

Session 1- Introductions and thinking about the life of a teenager.

Session 2- The exploitation of children and young people.

Session 3- Digital Dangers.

Session 4- Parenting Top Tips

It is the aim of this plan for the youth offending team to either deliver this program directly or to ensure that the parents / carers of children open to the team are encouraged and able to attend the program.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 9:5 | Increased use of the DICE program in respect to children who are criminally exploited. | Utilise the DICE program for the youth offending team cohort. | The number of parents / carers of children who are identified as being criminally exploited – who attend the program. |

Detention in police custody

A number of the children who contributed to this plan had experienced being detained in Police. Their experiences of this were as would be expected overwhelmingly negative – although some did acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism of the Police officers and custody staff dealing with them. Prior to the 2023 / 24 Youth Justice Plan, the detention of children in police custody was not routinely reported on to the local Youth Justice partnership Board. Now this area forms a part of the oversight of the partnership board. At the April 2024 partnership board meeting senior Police representation reported to the board on the work undertaken to avoid unnecessary overnight detentions.

The provision of appropriate adults is provided by volunteers for a non-profit organisation based in Kent, the 'Young Lives Foundation'. The oversight of this service is undertaken by the council's partnership commissioning team. The Youth Offending Team does not have direct involvement in the provision of this service as in some other areas.

The local partnership board has been cited on developments in the provision of PACE beds locally (April 2024). This plan recognises that this is an area of youth justice that the partnership board needs to continue to develop its oversight of. It is an action of this plan for the board to strengthen its oversight of the detention of children in custody. The Youth Offending Team has attended this year as series of meetings convened by Kent Police to address the Home Office Concordat on Children in Custody – seeking to prevent the detention of children in police stations following charge.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|------|--|---|---|
| 10:1 | For the local Youth Justice Partnership board to achieve effective oversight of children detained in police custody. | The establishment of a children in custody concordat to provide an annual overview of child in custody development across accommodation, appropriate adults & PACE compliance | Data regarding children detained in youth custody will have been presented, discussed, and responded to by the partnership board through the Concordat. |

Remands

| Childrens voices |
|---|
| <p>Have you ever been remanded? Yes, What was your experience? Didn't like it felt like an animal, couldn't choose food, was in a box hated it. Prison officers were nice some rude. How could it be improved? Just don't go there, it will change you forever be outside more in cell's too long. How can YOTs best support children remanded? Support was good, and having appointments helped me get out of my cell which was good.</p> |

(The response of 1 child compiled for this plan)

Only 1 child who contributed to this plan had experience of being on remand to Youth Detention Accommodation. The above response although short is telling of a negative experience for the child, an experience that it is clear they found traumatic. This particular child was only remanded for a matter of weeks when they were eventually released on a bail package in the community supported by the Youth Offending Team.

The Youth Offending Team is aware of how children are not necessarily convicted for the offences that they are remanded for, and there where possible convincing alternatives to youth detention accommodation should be provided to the court. As the above child's observations reveal unnecessary remands should be avoided where at all possible. Over the year 2023 – 24 we believe that we have achieved a successful use of bail packages in the community to reduce the use of remands.

Over the last year we have seen a significant reduction in the use of Remand to Youth Detention Accommodation. This reduction has resulted in historically low numbers of Medway children experiencing remands to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA). At the point of writing this plan there is actually only one Medway Child remanded to YDA.

We have seen an increase in the numbers of children being Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation (RLAA). This development presents new challenges and possibilities. Effective partnership work between wider children services and the youth offending team is critical in supporting children Remanded to Local Authority Accommodation.

For children and young people who are on remand to youth detention accommodation or remanded to local authority accommodation, the Corporate Parenting service will work with the youth offending team to ensure there is joined up working that ensures the safety and welfare of those young people on remand. We will share any known information to help courts make informed decision. We will ensure that our statutory responsibilities are responded to for children in care. We will work with families where they are involved to ensure there is coordination of the support and safety plan.

| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|------|---|---|--|
| 11:1 | Plans for alternatives to Youth Detention Accommodation to be agreed with Childrens Social Care – when these are appropriate to present to the court. | Collaborative work with Childrens Social Care – to identify accommodation / placement / alternatives to remands to Youth detention accommodation. | Children should only remain in Youth detention accommodation when this is considered the only option by the court. |
| 11:2 | The effective support of children remanded to either Youth Detention Accommodation or Remanded to the Care of the Local Authority. Children who become looked after as they are on remand will be known across both services and joint working will take place. | Information to be shared in a timely manner and children in care processes to be activated. | That children are appropriately supported on remand and do not engage in further offending. The correct processes and duties are being followed. |

Use of custody and constructive resettlement

In the last year the Youth Offending Team has only had one child sentenced to custody. This very low rate of the use of custody means that it is not possible to present any statistically significant data in respect to the needs of these children and the issues that they face on their resettlement journeys. It is also not possible to provide examples of constructive resettlement being delivered locally on account of any such examples only referring to a single individual rather than being examples of service wide change. However, it should be noted that in respect to this one child who was released from custody – there was good partnership working with Children’s Social Care that enabled him to have a planned release address.

In a similar theme to the above discussion on remands – the success of the Youth Offending Team locally has been in presenting convincing alternatives to the court instead of custody. Whilst only one child has been sentenced to custody in 2023 – 24 the court has considered custody in requesting ‘all options’ Pre-Sentence Reports in many cases.

Over the last year the team has sought to develop its capacity to provide intensive packages of supervision and support in the community – as alternatives to both custody and remands. These packages include the provision of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme.

The Youth Offending Team has also continued to develop its provision of unpaid work and reparation activities in the community. The unpaid work requirement in a Youth Rehabilitation Order of up to 240 hours for children over 16 adds an element of robustness to a community sentence. As previously described in this plan these interventions are accredited through the nationally recognised AQA award scheme, so that children will receive recognised qualifications for their completion of unpaid work and reparation. This all increases the rehabilitative element of supervision in the community improving the viability of YOT supervision in the community as an alternative to custody.

Working with families

| Parent / carers voices |
|---|
| <p>How has YOT supported you with your child? How do you think that YOT could better support you with your child? What support do you think parents need who are getting in trouble with the law?</p> <p>Parents are oblivious to what is going on outside their doors, they don't believe they kids are in gangs / or know anything about internet safety, consequences and the law and help parents see the signs that your children are heading that way. School can be very supportive, but they don't have time they are too busy. I think YOT have done an amazing with our young person and work so hard I know other YOT workers too and think YOT does enough, other services need to step up and do more.</p> <p>YOT has done an amazing job with my daughter, she has completed her hours with support fully from her worker and really turned her life around and has helped her see errors of way with crime. Dementia café- she has loved and really got to grips with her payback for crime she committed, and this has help her massively. Think YOT has offered as much as they could maybe running a group for parents like a coffee morning to chat to other parents who kids are in same situation and have someone there that can answer any questions on crime and what will happen to them if they continue.</p> <p>My daughters YOT worker is amazing and has helped her and myself so much probably more me as I kept ringing all the time as I didn't know what would happen. I think that YOT should have a person that works just for parents take the pressure off the worker with young person and maybe like once a month a meeting like a coffee morning were other parents can meet and chat and maybe someone there that can advise on what's happen etc I think police could do more supporting and advising than they do and, but YOT has been helpful and do as much as they possible can and very supportive. I think there should be a group to meet with and might help people get direct support and advise and someone to chat to whenever they want.</p> |

(The responses of 5 parents / carers compiled for this plan)

Having a child involved in the Youth Justice System presents specific challenges to parents and carers. They often report finding it challenging knowing how the Youth Justice System works and what level of support both they and their child can expect. They are often anxious and deeply worried about their child's behaviour and the potential risks that they are exposed to. Alongside the above there is often a sense of shame and feeling judged by professionals.

It is the established practice of the Youth Offending team in Medway to work works closely alongside the parents / carers of the children who are referred to it. However, it is clear from the parents / carers that were consulted in the preparation of this report that they would value interventions specifically directed at supporting them. This plan is taking forward the aspiration to work more collaboratively with parents / carers and to decisively involve them in the delivery of the plans of intervention delivered to their children.

Specific areas such as serious youth violence present heightened levels of concerns for children in the community. It is the aspiration of this plan to involve parents / carers in the development of work to tackle serious violence in the community.

Medway Youth Offending Team is not resourced to have specific designated 'parenting support' worker. This plan has identified actions to support parents / carers that do not require such a post.

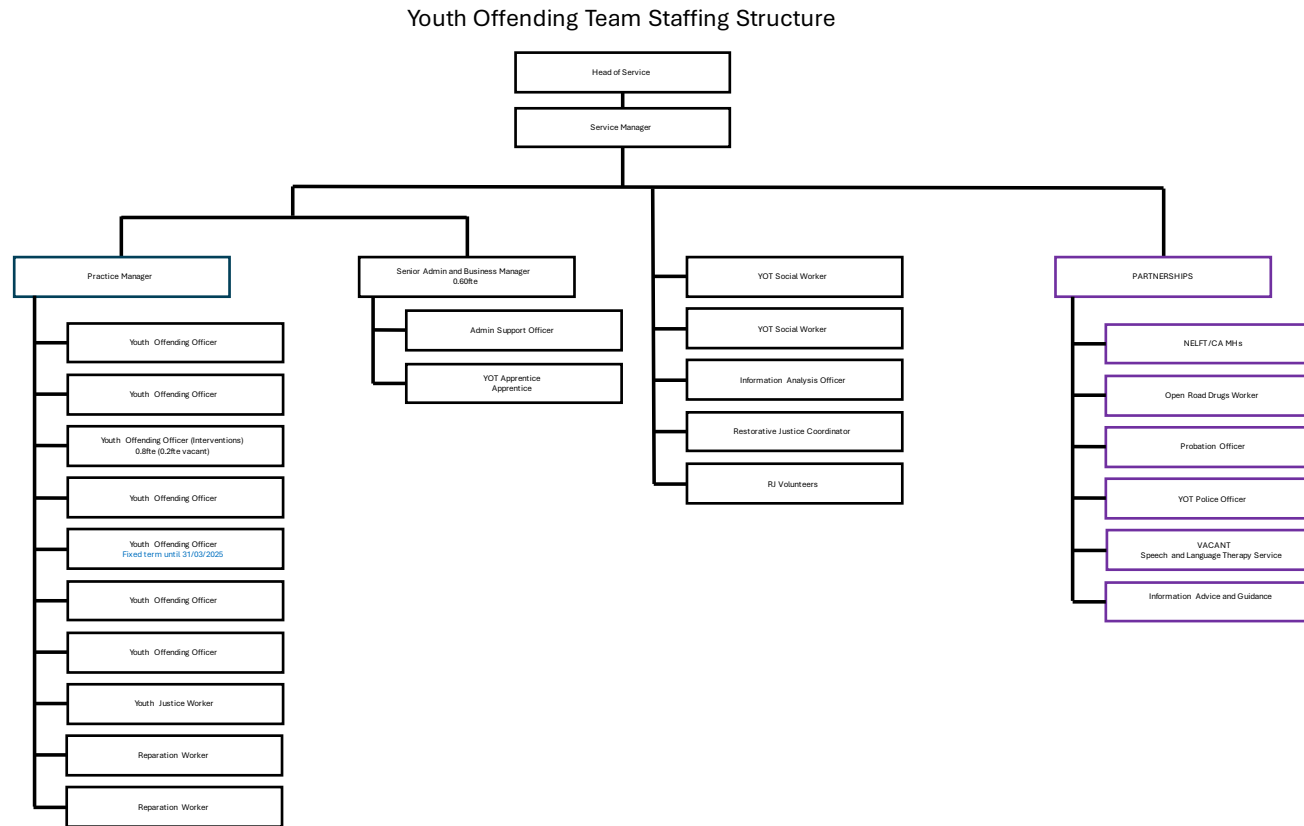
| ID | Achieve: | Do: | Evidence / Measure: |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| 12:1 VRU | Improve the involvement of parents within the work of Youth Justice so that their voices help inform the services available to the families of children in the criminal justice system- specifically in relation to serious youth violence. | Medway Youth Justice will link with the Service Manager for Family Solutions to explore how parents can understand the needs of teenagers and the VRU will explore how the parent voice can inform the work to prevent serious violence or criminal exploitation | The measurement of the proposals will be part of the proposals as they are developed and agreed. |
| 12:2 | Improved provision of information for parents whose children are involved in the Youth Justice System. | Development of a up to date parents' leaflet – detailing the Youth Offending Teams 'offer' to parents. | Evidence of information being provided to parents / carers. |
| 12:3 | Greater levels of collaborative working with parents' carers in the delivery of interventions to their children. | Parents / carers being invited and encouraged to take part in the planning meetings and reviews of their child's work with the Youth Offending Team. | Significant increase in the levels of contact with parent / carers and increased evidence of their involvement in planning and reviews. |
| 12:4 | The development of direct support for parents / carers. | The implementation of quarterly 'parent / carers evenings / mornings' – in which parent carers are invited to the youth offending team office to address their experiences and concerns. The implementation of regular parent / carer appointments being delivered – specifically for parents / carers to address their experiences and concerns. | Significant increase in the levels of contact with parent / carers – evidence of this being delivered to provide support. |

Sign off, submission and approval

This Youth Justice plan was signed off by the Chair of the Youth Justice Partnership Board on 19/06/2024 pending the final approval of the Cabinet of Medway Council.

In line with Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000, the plan is due to be approved by the Cabinet of Medway Council on 27/08/2024.

Appendix 1: Staffing Structure



Ethnicity, sex and known disability of staff.

| Ethnicity | Male | Female | Disability |
|------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| White | 6 | 15 | 1 |
| Indian | | | |
| Asian | | | |
| Black | 1 | 1 | |
| Mixed | | 2 | |
| Other | | 1 | |

Appendix 2: Budget Costs and Contributions

Medway Youth Justice Budget:

Youth Justice Board grant- (awaiting confirmation- figure given based on 2023 / 24 grant) - £392,592

Local Authority contribution - £347,895

Police Crime Commissioners Office contribution - £90,353

Turnaround (Ministry of Justice) - £93,689