



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP25/21

SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
9 MAY 2025

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

SUMMARY:

1. This paper supports the related commitment in the Police and Crime Plan, that the Constabulary will ensure the way it works with young people supports effective engagement, safeguards young people, prevents unnecessary criminalisation and reduces reoffending (including its triage work with Suffolk Youth Justice Service).

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is asked to consider the progress made by the Constabulary and raise issues with the Chief Constable as appropriate to the PCC's role in holding the Chief Constable to account.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report covers the period November 2024 to May 2025 and provides an update to the areas reported on in a previous paper to the Panel.
- 1.2 Strategic oversight of Children and Young Persons (CYP) is shared across the County Policing Command, Crime, Safeguarding and Incident Management and Joint Justice Services. The portfolio holders are as follows: Superintendent County Partnership and Prevention Hub (CPPH) responsible for Children and Young People delivery against the National Strategy and Child Centred Policing Framework including Youth Justice Services (YJS) and Schools, Detective Superintendent responsible for the Safeguarding Partnership, Detective Superintendent for Child Abuse Investigations, and a Chief Inspector responsible for Children in Custody.
- 1.3 The Strategic Governance is held by the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing who chairs the force Children and Young People's Delivery Board, providing leadership and oversight. There are delivery boards for CYP, Child Safeguarding (incorporating custody) and missing.
- 1.4 A new NPCC Children and Young People Strategy was published in October 2025, introducing 3 new strategic pillars – YourTrust, YourVoice and YourFuture. The NPCC are now working with the Youth Endowment Fund to develop a Policing Charter that will accompany the new strategy and support embedding good practice within forces. It is anticipated that this will be published in 2025 and at this point Suffolk will review and amend their internal CYP strategy.
- 1.5 This paper supports the related commitment in the Police and Crime Plan, that the Constabulary will ensure the way it works with young people supports effective engagement, safeguards young people, prevents unnecessary criminalisation, and reduces reoffending (including its triage work with Suffolk Youth Justice Service).

2. KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 2.1 Suffolk Constabulary is a key partner working in the MASH, alongside members of Suffolk County Council from Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), Adult Social Care (ASC), plus health colleagues. The Constabulary remains the largest referrer of child safeguarding concerns into the MASH, consistently contributing around 35% of all the referrals in MASH.
- 2.2 Fig 1, below, shows a steady increase in the volume of "Contacts" into the Children's MASH of which the highest contributor is the Constabulary. Whilst these contacts are finalised several different ways, many will require police research may result in police and partner intervention. This demonstrates the significant increase in demand upon all MASH partners over time, including an increase in Police referrals.

Contacts, and of which from Police Source

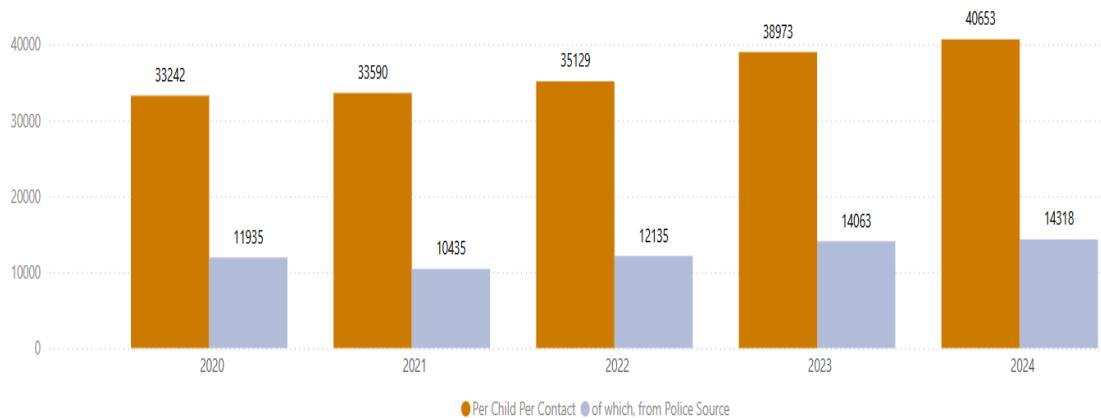


Fig 1 – Number of Children Contacts into MASH (All Agencies).

2.3 Fig 2, below, shows the definitive change in how the referrals described above are resolved. Significantly fewer are being resolved within MASH and more resulting in “Other” which includes cases resolved as information, advice and guidance only or redirected another local authority. This also supports a wider partnership ambition to have fewer family social worker interventions (For example Social Work Assessments or S47 investigations) with the percentage of cases being transferred to area social work teams dropping from 15.3% in 2020 to 7.8% in 2024.

2.4 This statistic is also repeated when reviewing how police referrals to MASH are finalised with an increase in episodes closed as “Info, Advice and Guidance” rising from 52% in 2020 to 63% in 2024 and cases being transferred to Children’s Social Care dropping from 36% in 2020 to 32% in 2024.

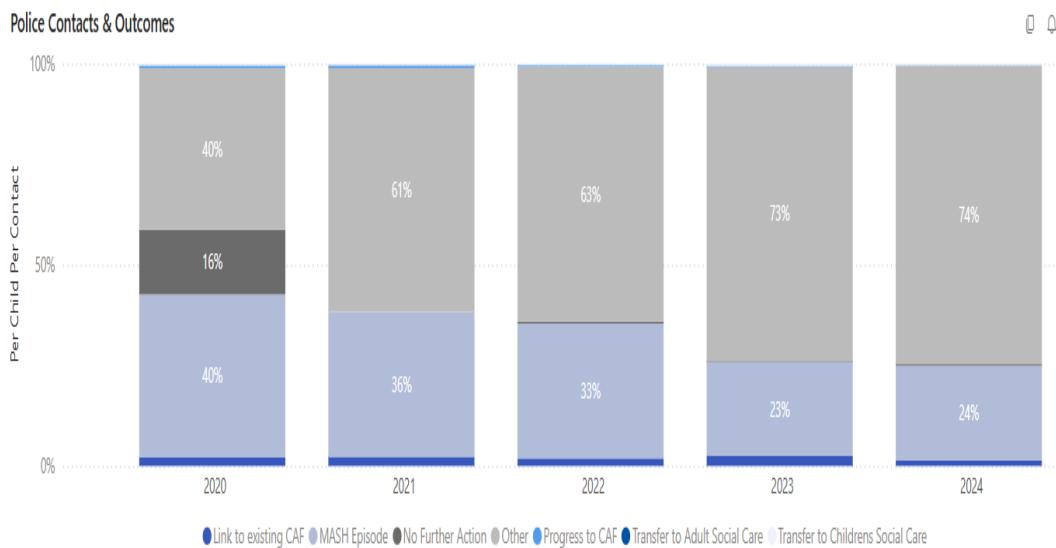


Fig 2 – Police Contact & Outcomes

2.4 Local Authority MASH are implementing an “Integrated Front Door”. This will effectively restructure how members of the public and professionals contact the local authority to report concerns or progress cases. Whereas currently contact goes directly to a specific team, for example adults, children, MASH and area Social Work Teams, the overall aim is to create a single “Front Door” through which all contact is received and assessed before being allocated to the appropriate area of business. We understand that this is likely to result in reduced demand as more contact will be resolved at the initial contact stage, but we are yet to fully understand exactly how this is to be realised.

2.5 In summary, overall demand continues to increase steadily and ability to meet those demands is becoming increasingly challenging. There are several additional contributory factors, and ongoing partnership will seek to review and improve the partnership capacity and efficiency over coming months.

Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS)

2.6 The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS), also known as Clare’s Law, allows police information about a potential source of risk to be shared with a person potentially at risk. This empowers people to protect and safeguard themselves and their children by making an informed choice about their relationships. It is a key strategy to prevent domestic abuse.

2.7 There has been a sharp increase in the use of the DVDS, with the most significant rise coming from members of the public making ‘Right to Ask’ applications. In 2024 the Constabulary saw an increase of 54.6% in all applications from the previous year. This equates to a total of 1,357 applications in comparison to 879 in 2023. 2025 is likely to be higher still 74 more applications received in January and February this year in comparison to the same period last year.

2.8 Following engagement with other police forces it is evident they are experiencing comparable increases and pressure to deliver responses within the designated 28-day time frame. As a result, a review as how this service can be improved is underway.

Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS)

2.9 The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS), also known as Sarah’s Law, allows police information about a potential source of risk to be shared with a person whose children could be in contact with that potential source of risk. This empowers parents and care givers to protect and safeguard children by making an informed choice about contact and relationships.

2.10 There has been a more gradual increase in CSODS applications. 2024 saw the highest number of applications with 138 applications, up from 88 in 2023.

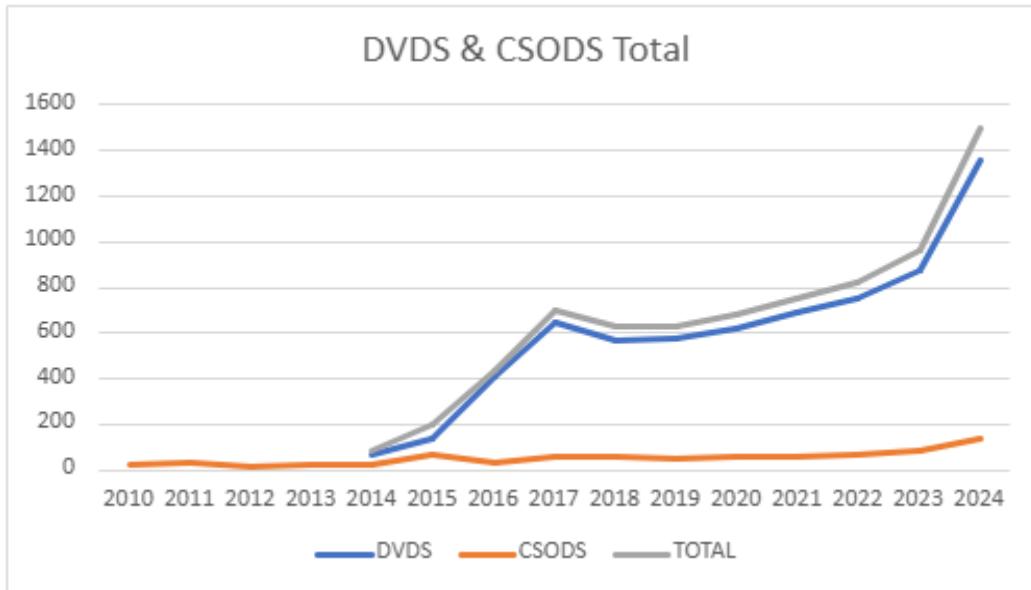


Fig 3 – Suffolk DVDS & CSODS Applications (Annually) 2010 - 2024

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)

- 2.11 The County's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) continue to be attended by CYPS to address child safeguarding concerns within cases discussed. All MARAC referrals are processed through the MASH where the Constabulary has a MARAC Coordinator and Administrator.
- 2.12 MARAC referrals have increased but the number of cases progressing to MARAC has remained largely the same. Recent changes to the MARAC meeting are beginning to realise some improvements in the quality of the meeting however some challenges remain in relation to partnership participation and contribution to the MARAC Steering Group. These are being progressed through respective Senior leaders within the relevant organisations.

Missing Children

- 2.13 As shown in Fig 4 below, missing Children numbers continue to reduce annually, and this is due to a combination of appropriate reporting, greater partnership working and intervention by the missing person advisors with individual care homes. An audit based upon HMICFRS Inspection regime was conducted at the end of 2024 and this has highlighted some deficiencies in quality of operational missing person investigations. As a result, a Task and Finish Group has been established and several areas for improvement identified. This includes Compact and the tasking system and increasing knowledge and training on Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation.

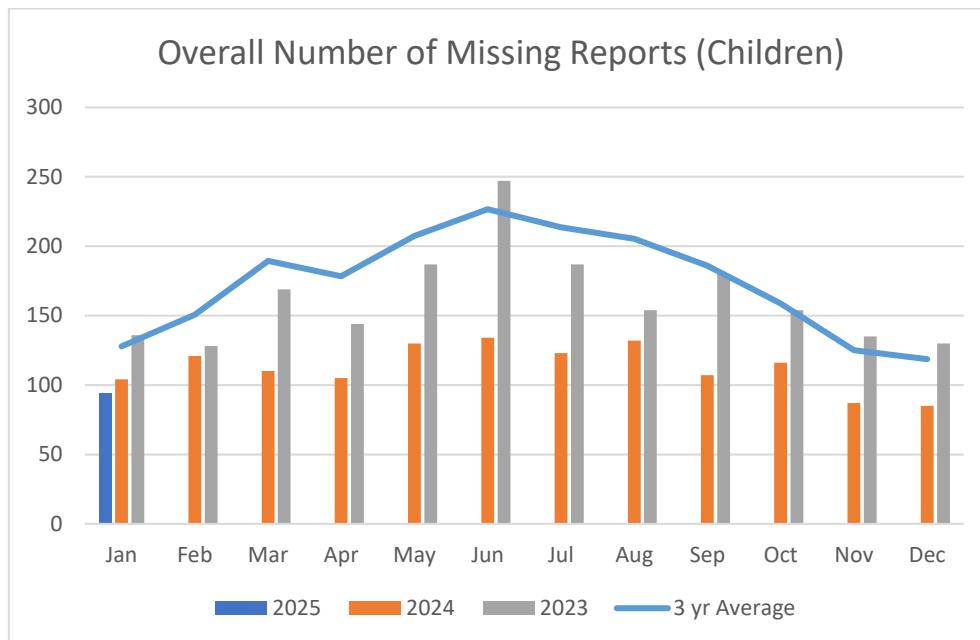


Fig 4 – Missing Children reports Suffolk 2023-2025

2.14 The Constabulary currently has 4 (four) designated areas for improvement (AFI) following the National Child Protection Inspection in 2022 and 2023. These focus upon initial risk assessments for children, ownership and oversight of missing investigations, use of language and continued use of the Philomena Protocol. Progress has been made in respect of all AFI's and further assessments of progress will be made in advance of future inspections.

2.15 Ongoing areas of work to improve the Constabulary response to Missing children include:

- Mandatory LMS training package released to improve knowledge, use of language and supervisor risk assessments.
- Improvements to COMPACT (Missing Person Management System) including moving to a task-based enquiry system in April 2025.

Voice of the Child, Section 47 Investigations & Serious Case Reviews

2.16 Voice of the Child (VOTC) entries are a key theme across all safeguarding partners and as shown in Fig 5 below the constabulary has performed well in maintaining its use within Athena reporting. It is now expanding to include child suspects and children who have returned from Missing Episodes.



Fig 5 – VOTC Entries within Athena Reports

- 2.17 Section 47 Investigations remain a focus of MASH and the Investigation Teams. The next Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership in May 2025 will focus upon MASH decision-making around joint S.47 investigations and consider the accuracy of the decision, its effectiveness and quality of the outcome. Local auditing has not revealed any concerning or questionable practices in practice.
- 2.18 There are no current Serious Case reviews being undertaken currently.

Child Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC's) and Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation Panel (MACE)

- 2.19 The Crime, Safeguarding and Incident Management. (CSIM) Detective Chief Superintendent is leading for the Constabulary regarding child safeguarding, attending the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Children's Delivery Board, and chairing the internal Child Safeguarding Delivery Group.
- 2.20 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a key factor in many cases reviewed at the multi-agency high risk missing children's Tactical Coordination Group, held monthly and led by a County Safeguarding Manager. Much work goes into safeguarding young people at risk of harm.
- 2.21 In late February 2025 Op Hydrant visited and met with numerous Constabulary representatives for a review of our current approach regarding child safeguarding, including CSE. Positive feedback has been received with helpful recommendations to consider how we might develop areas.
- 2.22 The County wide work programme to tackle Criminal Exploitation continues to receive funding (2024-2027). This includes the part-funded Partnership Officer (constable) role and the CE Hubs. The priorities are Innovation & Learning; Intervention & Exit; Breaking Drug Supply Chains; and Safeguarding Adolescents.
- 2.23 Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation (MACE) is a key component for partnership activity to address the Exploitation of children and young people up to the age of 24, including 'County Lines'. There is currently collaboration with The Children's Society to undertake a reflective self-assessment of MACE.

2.24 MACE panels continue to be held in each policing command area, panel has had the following referrals from October 2025 to March 2025.

MONTH	NEW Pre MACE Referrals	Referrals not adopted to MACE		Referrals adopted to MACE	
October 2024	20	West - 4 South - 12 East - 4	6	West - 1 South - 3 East - 2	14
November 2024	26	West - 5 (1 carried over to next month) South - 12 East - 9 (2 carried over to next month)	6	West - 0 South - 6 East - 0	17
December 2024	17	West - 4 (1 carried over to next month) South - 8 East - 5 (1 carried over to next month)	4	West - 0 South - 2 East - 2	11
January 2025	12	West - 3 South - 4 East - 5 (2 carried over to next month)	2	West - 1 South - 1 East - 0	8
February 2025	14	West - 3 South - 6 East - 5	8	West - 2 South - 2 East - 4	6
March 2025	14	West - 8 South - 4 (1 carried over to next month) East - 2	6	West - 4 South - 1 East - 1	7

Table 1 - Referral numbers between October 2024 – March 2025.

2.25 Engaging, supporting and preventing Children and Young People (CYP) from exploitation is multi-faceted; working closely with key stakeholders, early intervention by Criminal Exploitation (CE) Hubs, Make a Change Team (MAC) and other supporting third sectors. Once a CYP is identified at risk of exploitation, the pathway is via a MACE referral where interventions can be recommended by all stakeholders.

Child Sexual Abuse and Online Investigation

2.25 Globally, reports of Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) from industry continue to rise year-on-year. This increase, caused by increased levels of online offending and changes to industry reporting processes, has led to an increase in referrals into the National Crime Agency (NCA) over the last 4 years. NCA are now facing unprecedented and persistent high demand from National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), with 181% increase in actionable work in four years (25,645 in 2019 to 72,161 in 2023). Figures for 2024 are broadly comparable with 2023.

2.26 Compounded by recruitment and retention difficulties, the increase affected the NCA's ability to process and deliver a regular flow of disseminations to UK forces. This led to a back log of unprocessed referrals, which ultimately caused a decrease in referrals received into Suffolk's Internet Child Abuse Investigation Team (ICAIT) between December 2022 and March 2024. During the latter months of 2024, particularly from July onwards, the number of referrals rose significantly with each month seeing an increase on the previous years.

2.27 As shown in Fig 6 below Suffolk has seen a significant increase in referrals, as the backlog is being drip fed on top of the natural increase experienced each year. The reporting period of

October 2024 to March 2025 saw 208 referrals compared to 90 during the same period in October 2023 to March 2024. This is an increase of 131%

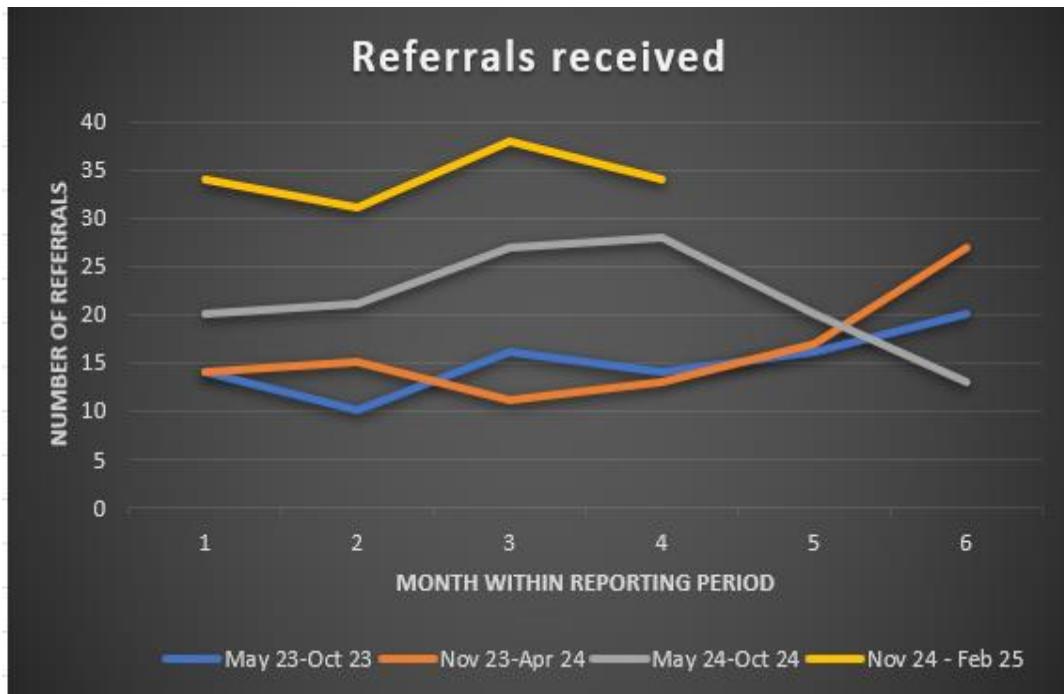


Fig 6 - ICAIT Referrals 2023 – 2025

2.28 Despite the sharp increase in referrals, Suffolk Constabulary, in comparison to similar Force groups, is in a very strong position with only a small number of investigations wherein the risk is unknown. All referrals are recorded, risk assessed and developed by ICAIT's Intelligence Development Officer (IDO). The team are reactive to risk by executing timely enforcement which is evident in the consistent number of suspects arrested, interviewed, and charged. In addition to this, two further staff have been seconded into ICAIT to assist with the increase in demand. A second Detective Sergeant has also been recruited and started in role in March 2025.

2.29 Suffolk Constabulary has three Victim Identification (VID) Officers, who are trained to utilise specialist VID software and techniques for the purpose of identifying the victims within the Child Sexual Abuse Material found on suspects' devices. The number of victims identified, safeguarded, and referred to the NCA's Victim ID unit by Suffolk has increased significantly over the past 18 months. The reporting period of November 2024 to April 2025 saw an increase of 30% on the same reporting period in the previous year, November 2023 to April 2024.

Schools Liaison and CYP Engagement

2.30 School engagement continues to be delivered by Community Police Officers (CPOs) supported by content produced by the CYP PCs. Pol-Ed has now been rolled out across the county, with 60% of all schools signed up, and CYP officers and CPOs delivering sessions alongside those delivered by teachers. CYP officers will shortly start delivery of this year's Crucial Crew. This is delivered to all year 6 children in Suffolk – this year's policing topics are online safety, harassment and exploitation.

2.31 A new CYP dashboard is in process of being built by the Strategic Business and Operational Services (SBOS) department. This will enable a greater understanding of the data relating to a range of CYP areas. This dashboard is designed to show crime data relating to those committed on and by under 18s, offence locations, demographics of suspects & victims, custody and stop search data. This will enable a better understanding of offence/suspect and victims' profiles, as well as looking at disproportionality, which can be used to better deploy resources and targeted interventions.

2.32 Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating of the schools (which is used to set engagement levels) has been reviewed, creating a greater focus on offences committed on and by under 18s, to tailor in school delivery.

2.33 CYP officers have produced supportive material for CPOs to use for in-school delivery to individual or small groups on topics like 'School Gate Chats', the risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Youth Produced Sexual Imagery.

2.34 All school engagement is recorded using the Engagement App and data captured includes the number of students engaged with, their age, demographic and the topics discussed or delivered.

2.35 The CYP Police Constables continue to support local and national police operations such Hate Crime Awareness Week, Prevent awareness, County Lines Intensification Week, Safer Internet Day, Sexual Abuse, Op Sceptre (Knife Crime) and Crucial Crew.

Pol-Ed

2.36 October saw introduction of Pol-Ed, which is an education programme that provides schools with free lessons, assemblies and resources covering a range of police topic areas which link to Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) and Citizenship in schools. It has been designed by West Yorkshire Police, who currently use the package, alongside Bedfordshire and Northumbria Police.

2.37 Pol-Ed aims to reduce youth offending by proactively educating young people around law and offences. Resources created in conjunction with PSHE experts, provide teachers with the tools to deliver information on the law, crime prevention and safeguarding, building an understanding of resilience, peer to peer support and how to access help if needed.

2.38 The programme works along 3 distinct phases: Phase 1 is teacher/school led and is the largest used phase, Phase 2 is police inputs, which are officer led sessions and Phase 3 is Intervention 22.

2.39 Intervention 22 is a means to deliver Outcome 22 diversion activities to young people who have entered the criminal justice system.

2.40 Pol-Ed provides the police with an early intervention and prevention programme to reduce crime both in the short term and long term and provides greater consistency of the topics and themes delivered across schools. It helps to teach pupils how to keep themselves and their peers safe and how to make better decisions in response to a range of situations, which results in a safer community.

Suffolk Youth Justice Service and Suffolk Constabulary Partnership

2.41 In May 2024, Assistant Chief Constable local policing Suffolk became the new chair of the Suffolk Youth Justice Board, and the Youth Justice Plan 2024-2025 was agreed with the focus remaining on preventing young people from being unnecessarily criminalised, reducing the number of first-time entrants (FTE) into the criminal justice system and addressing any identified disproportionality.

2.42 Police are currently working with the Youth Justice Service (YJS) to improve data sharing and onward analysis so that this can be used to better inform intervention with highlighted demographic groups and support the reduction of first-time entrants. The data will also enable trends amongst victims to be mapped, which will lead to targeted support and prevention work with any identified groups.

2.43 To support this work, changes are currently being made to the Police Electronic Notification to Youth Offending Teams (PENY) to capture data not already recorded on other systems, such as children in care, mental health and disabilities. This will be rolled out in August following the Digital Team making OPTIK changes. Improvements are also being made to the process of consulting with YJS, before the police apply for preventative orders (CBO etc..). This will move forward the consulting point to earlier in the process, so that all options can be considered and concerns addressed, before the application is started.

2.44 The Multi-Agency Out of Court Resolution Panels continue to work well across Suffolk. The changes made to those referred to the panels for sexual offences, are seen as suitable in preventing children being inadvertently subject to notification requirements under Sexual Offences Act. There has also been an improvement in those referred to the Harmful Sexual Behaviours Teams (SCC team) for support. Working with YJS, a process has been introduced to add an extra layer of oversight to ensure that the most appropriate offence is progressed and that the Out of Court Resolution Panel is fully informed of impact of any disposal and the appropriate diversion options open to the young person.

2.45 A paper recommending the use of deferred prosecution, that is widely used nationally, will be presented to the Children and Young People (CYP) Board in May for approval. This process defers for three months the application of a charge or caution, if the young person successfully engages with diversion activities directed by the police or YJS. This provides the young person with meaningful diversion to reduce onward offending, opens Restorative Justice opportunities and supports the reduction of First Time Entrants.

2.46 Work continues to ensure that creative and flexible outcomes are encouraged when it comes to bespoke diversion that is meaningful, effective and meets requirement for Home Office disposal option, and has achieved our objectives without criminalising the young person. Work is being finalised on a police delivered restorative justice intervention, aimed at those with no previous contact with the police, having been linked to a low-level offence. The intervention will be delivered by the officer dealing, at the point of first contact, with the child, using a restorative justice approach. This will reduce the need for referrals to YJS, reducing demand in the wider system, but improve the overall outcome for the child.

2.47 Home Office funding for the Turnaround programme has been extended for a further year. This funding is used by YJS to target children particularly at risk from committing crime or antisocial behaviour (ASB) and divert them to meaningful interventions at an early stage.

2.48 The Constabulary continues to work with Ipswich Town Foundation on several projects to divert children away from crime and ASB. The projects include the “divert” project which focuses on a small group of children in the Ipswich area, referred to the foundation by the Constabulary Child Exploitation and Gangs Team (CEGT), from those that they have engagement with. Year 8 students at four Ipswich secondary schools are taking part in Diversionary Workshops specially designed for them through a partnership between Ipswich Borough Council, Ipswich Town Foundation and Suffolk Constabulary. The students explore issues relating to gangs or county lines and carrying a knife and ask them where they would like to see change in Ipswich to address issues around knife crime and gangs.

2.49 The Constabulary has started to use virtual reality (VR) headsets to deliver sessions covering ASB/Gangs and knife crime awareness. The sessions take the user through a scenario, which makes them think about what positive choices they could make and the outcomes if they choose a different route. We are currently aiming these at year 8 students in selected schools and those working with CEGT.

Young People in Custody

2.50 There are in the region of 28,500 persons arrested across Norfolk and Suffolk in the previous 12-month period, of which 6348 were aged 24 and under.

2.51 It is widely accepted that custody should not be a place for juveniles. However, when dealing with matters on a case-by-case basis if the legislative criteria for arrest necessities have been met, and other options have been either tried and failed, or considered and negated, then custody can be considered for juveniles.

2.52 As seen in Fig 7 and 8 below the throughput and disposal data is relatively unremarkable, and relatively consistent. It must be noted however that nationally, Norfolk and Suffolk have the lowest number of juvenile throughput compared to any other force

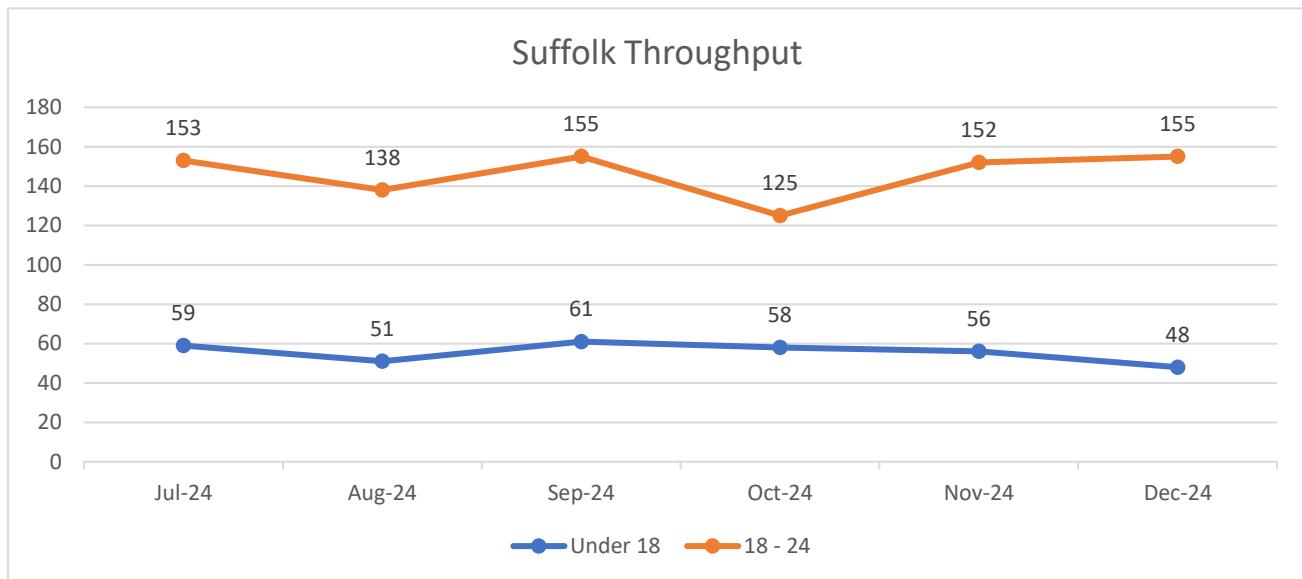


Fig 7 – Suffolk Custody child throughput

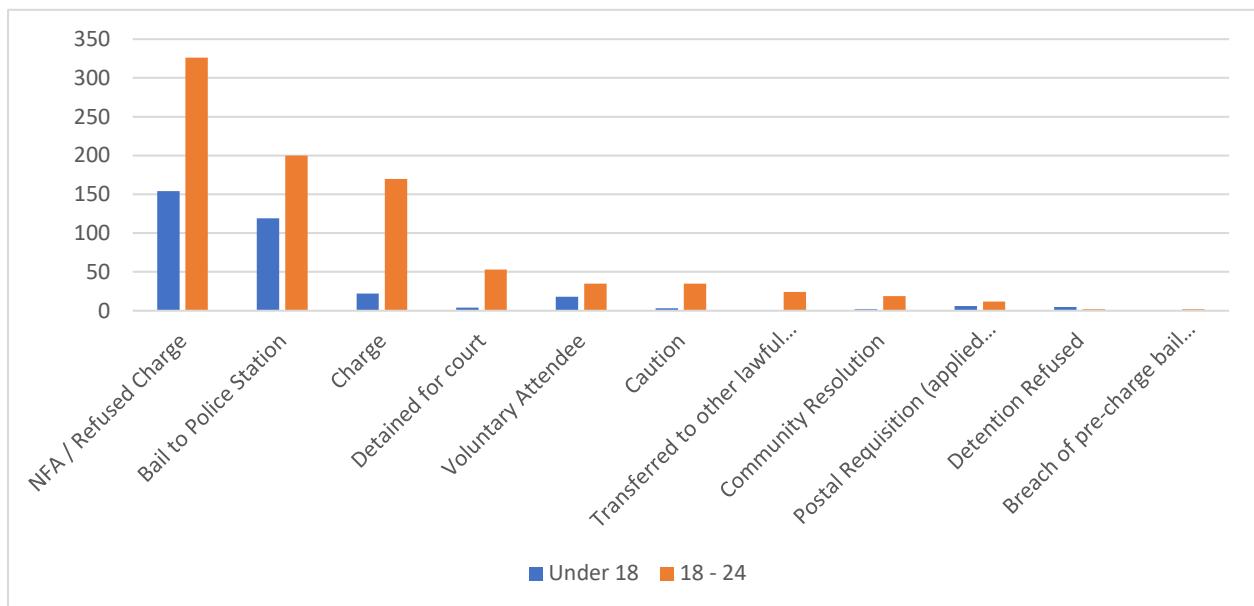


Fig 8 - Suffolk custody child disposals

2.52 Custody throughput is monitored through a number of processes within Suffolk Constabulary, including the Children and Young Persons Delivery Group, which specifically considers children and young people.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Whilst the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Children and Young Persons Strategy was launched in October 2024 the accompanying charter is still under development. Suffolk have responded to the request to support this development, providing examples of good and innovative practice from within force, and once the charter is published it is recommended that Suffolk reviews their CYP strategy to ensure that it still aligns and is delivering the recommended best practice.

3.2 Non-Crime diversion is not a statutory function of the Youth Justice Service and is currently provided in addition to its core responsibilities. Due to financial constraints, police are currently the only agency referring into this provision and consideration should be given regarding the long-term viability and availability of non-crime provision with the Youth Justice Service, and alternative services and funding should it no longer be sustainable. This work is key to support national priorities regarding the decriminalisation and diversion of children.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 In January Suffolk Youth Justice Service (SYJS) gave notice that they would not be renewing the funding arrangements for the 2.0 FTE Youth Justice Service Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Whilst this is technically a saving, as the force jointly funded these posts, the impact of the removal of these posts on demand of YJS and the officers seconded to it is yet to be fully assessed and will need to be monitored as we enter the 2025/26 financial year.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

5.1 None at this time.

6. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

6.1 The Constabulary can demonstrate strong governance and partnership arrangements where children and young people are concerned. There are clear plans around how to make further improvements to service and performance and these are commented on in this report.

6.2 There are growing demands in most areas of policing where child issues are concerned and there remains a strong commitment to avoidance of criminalising young people where appropriate. Both of these elements are evidenced in this report as are the approaches to ensure the Constabulary response is proportionate.

6.3 The previous HMICFRS inspection around child protection should be considered in conjunction with this report to provide wider understanding of areas of strength and those that require strengthening. These have been communicated separately and work is continuing to make progress against the highlighted areas that are not documented.