

The Rt Hon Shabana Mahood MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London

Our ref:TP/AH11

20 November 2025

Dear Home Secretary

**RE: The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety and preventing reoffending**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this National Thematic report.

There was a single recommendation affecting police forces, for which Suffolk Constabulary has provided a formal response. This response is attached and will also be published on my website.

The Constabulary maintains a reciprocal data-sharing arrangement with the Youth Justice System and continues to work collaboratively to enhance the tracking and quality of outcomes. Revised NPCC guidance on Outcomes 20 and 21, along with the Child Gravity Matrix, is fully embedded within the force's decision-making processes. The force response also outlines robust procedures to ensure that decisions regarding out-of-court disposals are taken at the correct level, and that appropriate adults and cautions are in place before issuing community resolutions to individuals under 18. I will continue to monitor these measures through the *Supporting Children and Young People* paper presented at my Accountability and Performance Panels.

Yours sincerely



Tim Passmore, Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk



## **Response to HMICFRS' report: The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety and preventing reoffending, October 2025**

In October 2025, HMICFRS jointly with HM Inspectorate of Probation published the national thematic report into the use of youth out-of-court disposals in England and Wales. The inspectorates found that the current system for diverting children from the criminal justice system is fragmented and inconsistent, creating a 'post-code lottery' for outcomes. The recommendations made in the report aim to support strong governance, clearer guidance and more consistent practice in the use of out-of-court disposals for children.

Of the 18 recommendations made in the report, only one of these is for police forces. Suffolk Constabulary accepts this recommendation and the below sets out the constabulary's response to it.

### **Recommendation 11**

Chief constables should improve how out-of-court disposals are managed by:

- working with YJSs to establish formal data-sharing arrangements to ensure timely and consistent access to information on all types of out-of-court disposal
- ensuring decisions about the use of crime Outcomes 20 and 21 are consistent and appropriate and reflect revised NPCC guidance
- ensuring that police always use the NPCC child gravity matrix guidance when making decisions relating to outcomes for children and that the rationales for those decisions are always recorded
- ensuring that joint decisions with the youth justice service about out-of-court disposals are made at the appropriate level of seniority
- ensuring that children's legal rights are met before issuing a community resolution; this includes the need to caution and make sure that an appropriate adult is present
- ensuring that safeguarding referrals are made when appropriate.

*Suffolk Constabulary's response to each part of the recommendation is as follows:*

#### *Working with YJSs to establish formal data-sharing arrangements to ensure timely and consistent access to information on all types of out-of-court disposal*

*Suffolk Constabulary and the Youth Offending Service (Youth Justice Service; YJS) maintain a reciprocal data-sharing arrangement. The police provide quarterly data packs to YJS containing crime outcomes, offence types and demographic information. YJS shares data via access to their dashboard and bespoke data packs. Both teams are currently working to align datasets to enable whole system tracking of a child's journey through prevention, intervention and justice pathways. Future developments include enhanced tracking of outcomes, improved scrutiny of disproportionality and strengthened outcome resulting.*

*Ensuring decisions about the use of crime Outcomes 20 and 21 are consistent and appropriate and reflect revised NPCC guidance*

Frontline supervisors in Suffolk Constabulary are empowered to apply Outcomes 20 and 21 in line with NPCC guidance and school policies for low-level youth offending, including youth-produced sexual imagery guidance. This streamlines decision-making without immediate YJS consultation, provided supervisors record full rationale and notify the YJS Police Officer for their area. Dedicated Decision Makers oversee Outcome 21 compliance against Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) criteria. YJS Police Officers screen all PENY (Police Electronic Notification to the YJS) referrals and advise on appropriate use of Outcomes 20 and 21, including first-time, low-impact offences. Multi-Agency Panels provide updates and plans for Outcome 20 cases. New monthly audits by the Suffolk Constabulary County Partnership and Prevention Hub (CPPH) YJS Sergeant will ensure correct application and compliance.

*Ensuring that police always use the NPCC child gravity matrix guidance when making decisions relating to outcomes for children and that the rationales for those decisions are always recorded*

YJS Police Constables centrally apply the Child Gravity Matrix in Suffolk Constabulary's decision-making process for children, ensuring consistency and accountability. While supervisors are encouraged to reference the matrix during reviews and referrals to YJS, the YJS PCs own its application and enforce compliance through a robust escalation process at the Out-of-Court Resolution (OoCR) panel to prevent outcomes deviating without strong and evidence-based rationale. The inspector owner of the YJS portfolio will make the final determination on any outcome through the escalation process holding partners to account and retaining the gravity matrix at the core of decision-making.

*Ensuring that joint decisions with the youth justice service about out-of-court disposals are made at the appropriate level of seniority*

Decisions on Out-of-Court Disposals (OoCDs) are made by a multi-agency panel chaired by a YJS manager. Police are represented by seconded YJS officers, with attendance under review to ensure suitable and effective representation. An escalation process exists for complex or contested cases, which are jointly considered by the deputy head of YJS and a police inspector. Final decisions rest with the police, ensuring accountability while maintaining a collaborative approach. Deferred Outcomes are utilised. However, the panel must reach an agreed outcome using the gravity matrix before requesting consideration of police deferring the outcome. Police must be satisfied that the proposed work is suitable in each case, and police will make the decision on any non-compliance issues within the identified OoCR panel.

*Ensuring that children's legal rights are met before issuing a community resolution; this includes the need to caution and make sure that an appropriate adult is present*

Joint Suffolk and Norfolk Constabulary policy on Community Resolutions (CR) already highlights the need to ensure an appropriate adult is present when a CR is issued to a suspect under 18 years of age. This guidance has been updated to further outline the need to ensure that legal rights are met with the offender being cautioned (where necessary). The internal YJS intranet page on CRs has also been updated to reflect this advice.

Since 1 February 2023, all investigations with a suspect under 18 years old, where the Office in Case (OIC) wishes to issue a CR, will first need to come through YJS via the PENY form. Suffolk YJS and Suffolk Constabulary have made the decision for all OoCD options to come into YJS, including CRs, to ensure that a holistic, consistent approach is taken across Suffolk and provides a further level of quality assurance on the allocation of CRs. A mechanism is in place to monitor non-compliance with this process and remedial action is taken by the CPPH Inspector owner of the YJS portfolio.

*Ensuring that safeguarding referrals are made when appropriate*

*Suffolk Constabulary police officers must complete safeguarding referrals via the force record management system for all children linked to investigations. YJS police officers provide twice-daily custody updates to Suffolk County Council (SCC) partners, confirming referrals for child suspects and victims. Missing referrals are escalated by SCC partners to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Additionally, YJS now consider bail support packages to assist children appropriately while on bail.*