



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP26/21

SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
22 MAY 2026

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 2025 to April 2026 and provides an update on the areas reported on previously to the Panel.
- 1.2 Strategic oversight of Children and Young Persons (CYP) is shared across County Policing Command, Crime, Safeguarding and Incident Management, and Joint Justice Services. Portfolio responsibilities sit with the Superintendent for the County Partnership and Prevention Hub (CPPH), who is responsible for Children and Young People delivery against the National Strategy and Child-Centred Policing Framework, including Youth Justice Services (YJS) and schools; the Detective Superintendent responsible for the Safeguarding Partnership; the Detective Superintendent for Child Abuse Investigations; and a Chief Inspector responsible for Children in Custody.
- 1.3 Strategic Governance is led by the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing who chairs the Children and Young People's Delivery Board, providing leadership and oversight. There are delivery boards for CYP, Child Safeguarding (including custody) and missing persons.
- 1.4 A new National Chief Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Children and Young People Strategy was published in October 2024, introducing 3 new strategic pillars (Your Trust, Your Voice and Your Future). The wider police service will implement the National CYP Strategy and deliver against its nine pledges:
- Embed Child Centred Policing across the force.
 - Improve training and practice with CYP victims and witnesses.
 - Deliver a child centred custody experience.
 - Ensure the voice of children and young people is heard.
 - Deliver meaningful CYP engagement.
 - Work with partners to provide tailored safety guidance for CYP with additional needs.
 - Create opportunities for CYP to contribute to making their communities safer.
 - Promote the use of diversionary activity.
 - Refer children and young people to effective, bespoke support services.

Suffolk Constabulary is reviewing and updating its internal Children and Young People strategy, which will be published shortly.

- 1.5 This paper supports the relevant commitment in the Police and Crime Plan, which requires the Constabulary to ensure that the way it works with children and young people supports effective engagement, safeguards young people, prevents unnecessary criminalisation, and reduces reoffending, including through its triage arrangements with Suffolk Youth Justice Service.

2. KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

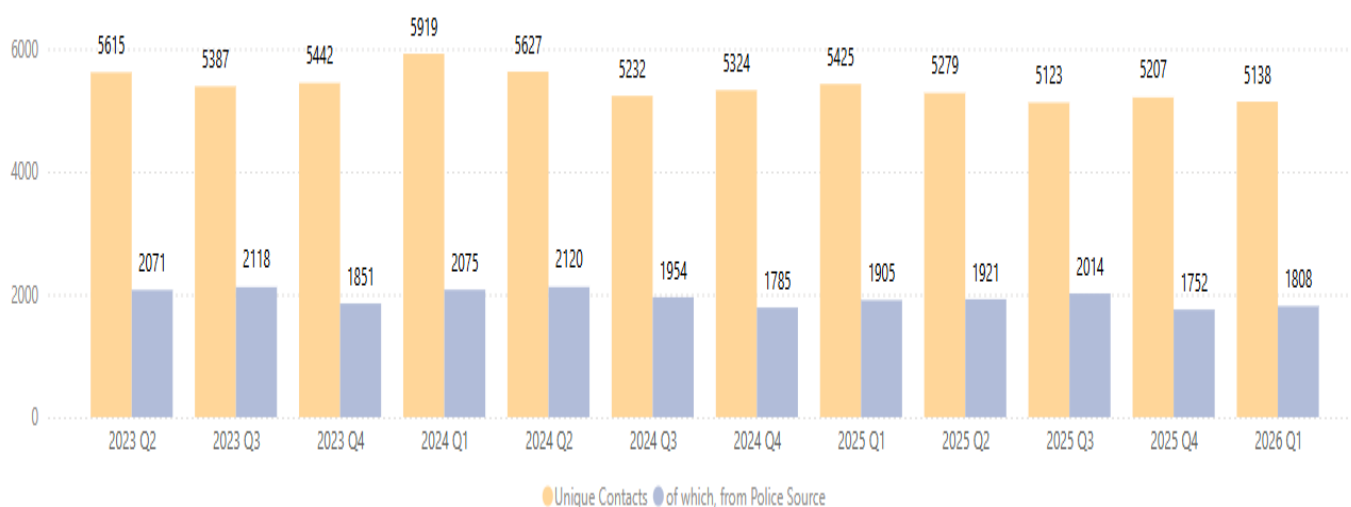
- 2.1 Suffolk Constabulary is a core statutory partner within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), co-located at Landmark House in Ipswich. Working alongside Suffolk County Council's Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), Adult Social Care (ASC), and health professionals, the Constabulary plays a central role in the collective safeguarding response

across the county. As part of its statutory responsibilities, the Constabulary remains the largest single source of child safeguarding referrals into MASH, consistently accounting for approximately 35% of all submissions. Of police-generated safeguarding concerns submitted to MASH, between 75% and 80% are proactively shared with partner agencies for joint assessment and action.

2.2 The graph below demonstrates steady demand into the wider partnership MASH, with police-generated referrals remaining broadly consistent, notwithstanding seasonal fluctuations. Data from the most recent quarter shows no unusual levels of reporting.

Unique Contacts, and of which from Police Source

Showing data based on Start Date



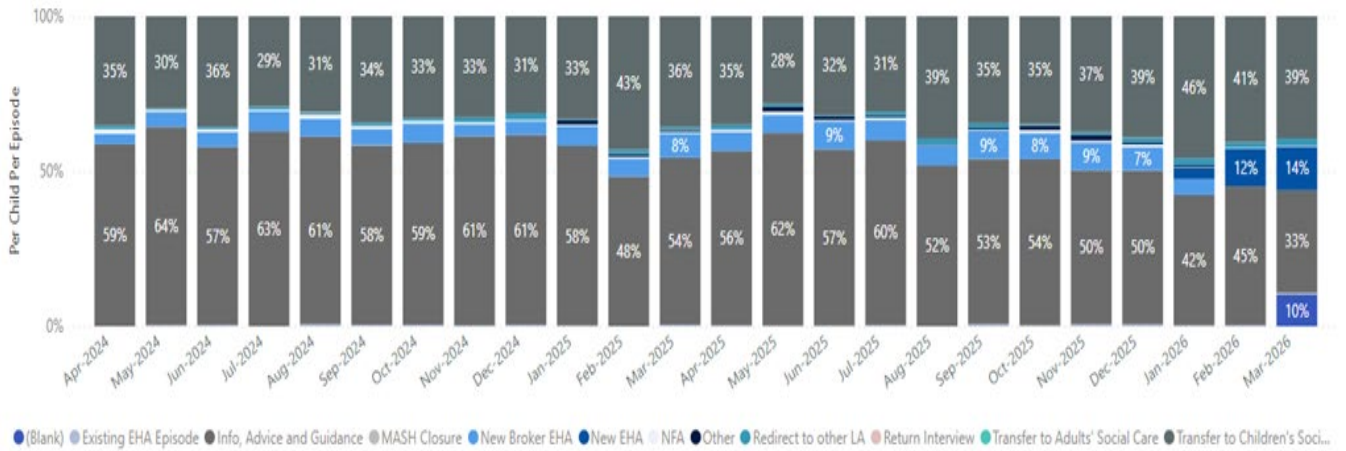
2.3 Following the Children and Young People’s Services Ofsted inspection, partners have implemented significant changes within the MASH, which have altered both the demographic profile of referrals and downstream decision-making. CYP has increased staffing capacity within MASH and introduced a pod-based operating model, enabling higher throughput and faster progression of contacts to decision.

2.4 This has improved timeliness at the front door but has also generated increased demand on Police MASH, particularly in relation to research, intelligence development, and strategy discussion activity. In parallel, there has been a deliberate shift by partners towards more proactive and intrusive safeguarding practice, with greater professional curiosity and a lower tolerance for cumulative risk.

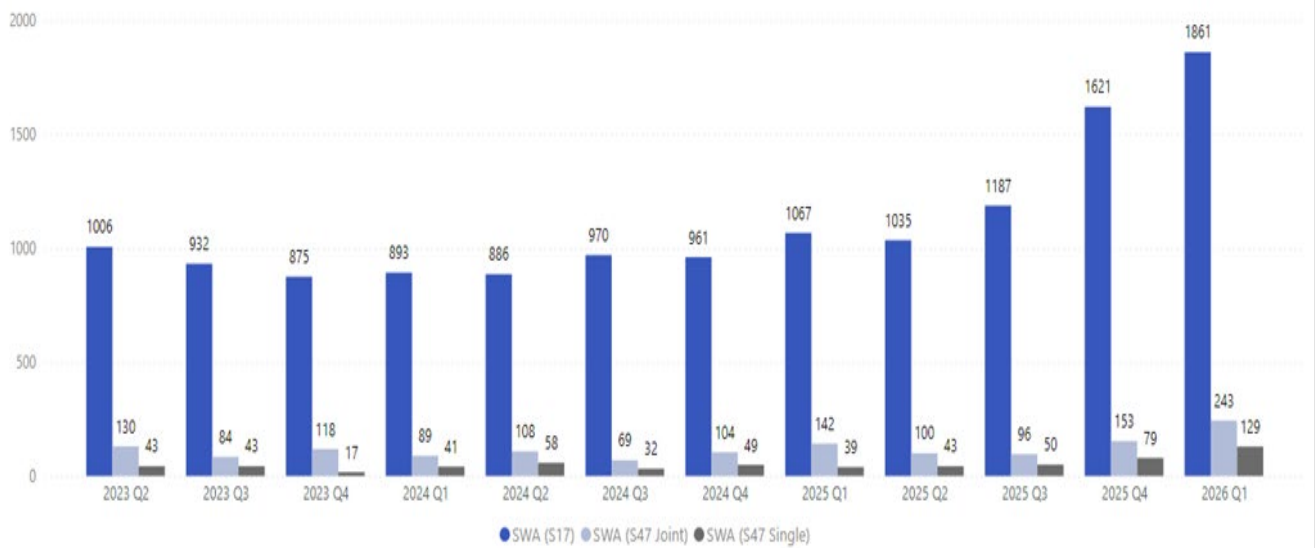
2.5 As a result, a higher proportion of referrals are now progressing to statutory outcomes, reflected in an increase in Section 17 single assessments and Section 47 enquiries. This represents a practice-driven change in outcomes rather than a simple increase in referral volume, and has materially reshaped workload, pace, and risk exposure across Police MASH and the wider safeguarding system.

2.6 The two charts below illustrate a clear shift in MASH outcomes over time, with a growing proportion of episodes progressing to statutory pathways. While overall volumes remain relatively stable, there is a sustained increase in outcomes requiring Section 17 single assessments and Section 47 enquiries, reflecting more intrusive and risk-focused decision-making. This change is driven by strengthened front door capacity and a lower tolerance for cumulative harm, rather than a simple increase in demand.

Episodes & Outcomes



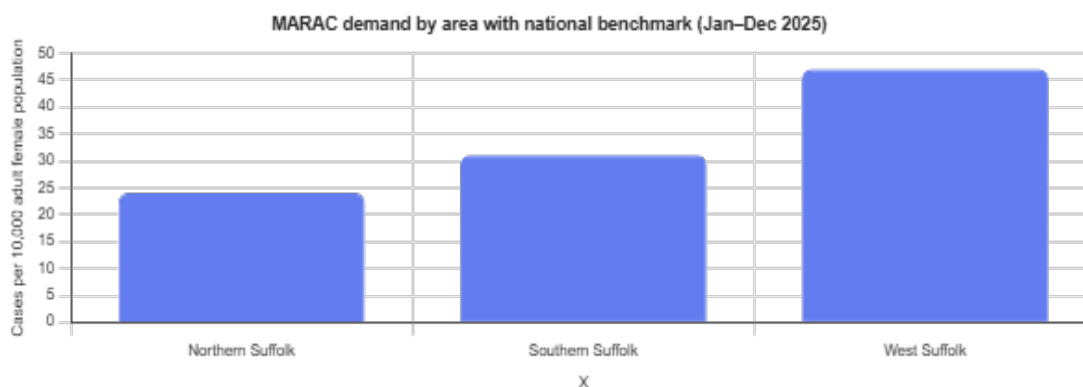
Of Children Transferred to Social Care, their Pathway - Numbers



- 2.7 Work is underway across Suffolk to deliver the Families First programme, which will fundamentally reshape early help and safeguarding through the introduction of an integrated Front Door and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) by April 2027. Children and Young People’s Services are leading a system-wide design and implementation programme to define operating models, governance, and resourcing requirements, with a strong focus on earlier intervention and coordinated decision-making.
- 2.8 Suffolk Constabulary is actively contributing to this work, with a Detective Inspector seconded to the programme two days a week to provide policing leadership, ensure alignment with statutory obligations, and support the development of effective multi-agency arrangements that prioritise timely, risk-focused outcomes for children and families.

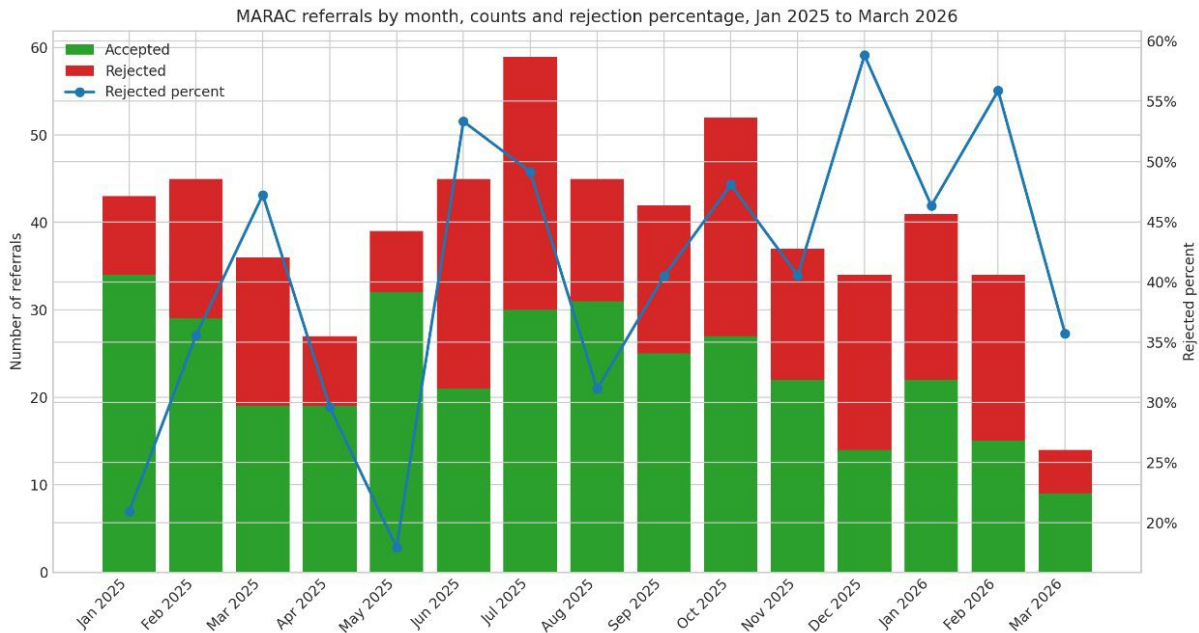
Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC)

- 2.9 Suffolk’s MARACs continue to provide a critical safeguarding mechanism for victims of domestic abuse, with consistent representation from Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) to address child protection concerns. All MARAC referrals are processed through MASH, supported by a dedicated Constabulary MARAC Coordinator and Administrator.
- 2.10 MARAC data is collated externally, allowing comparison with the Most Similar Group (MSG), and is therefore reported a quarter in arrears, with the latest data covering up to December 2025. During the reporting period, a total of 889 cases were discussed at MARAC across Suffolk, with Southern Suffolk accounting for approximately 41% (367 cases) of all discussions. Police referrals represented 68.6% of cases, broadly consistent with national patterns and reflecting sustained frontline identification of high-risk domestic abuse.
- 2.11 When benchmarked, Suffolk’s MARAC volume remains below the Most Similar Group average and below the UK-wide average rate, indicating proportionate demand relative to peer forces rather than excessive referral levels. On a population-adjusted basis, Suffolk records 34 cases per 10,000 adult female population, compared with 48 nationally, reinforcing that MARAC demand is proportionate and remains below national average levels.
- 2.12 The chart below illustrates variation in MARAC demand across Suffolk. It shows that while overall demand remains proportionate, there is clear geographic variation, with West Suffolk recording higher rates relative to population. Northern and Southern Suffolk remain below the national benchmark, indicating lower relative demand, whereas West Suffolk is more closely aligned with national levels.



MARAC demand varies across Suffolk, with West Suffolk recording the highest rate per population and broadly aligning with the national average, while Northern and Southern Suffolk remain below the UK benchmark.

- 2.13 The chart below illustrates monthly MARAC activity, including referral volumes and rejection rates. While overall demand remains stable, variability in rejection rates indicates ongoing refinement of referral quality and threshold application, consistent with the recent strengthening of governance and operational processes.



2.14 Operational and governance changes introduced during the previous year are now fully embedded and continue to deliver clear benefits. In the Eastern area, the move from a single monthly MARAC meeting to two half-day sessions has improved the timeliness of case progression and reduced delays in hearings. The introduction of a chair rota system, supported by the training of additional chairs across partner agencies, has further strengthened resilience and consistency. This has been complemented by a standardised agenda and agreed tactical options for chairs, supporting greater consistency of practice across all areas. The use of structured meeting time slots has also improved partner availability and engagement, contributing to improved attendance levels reflected within the performance data.

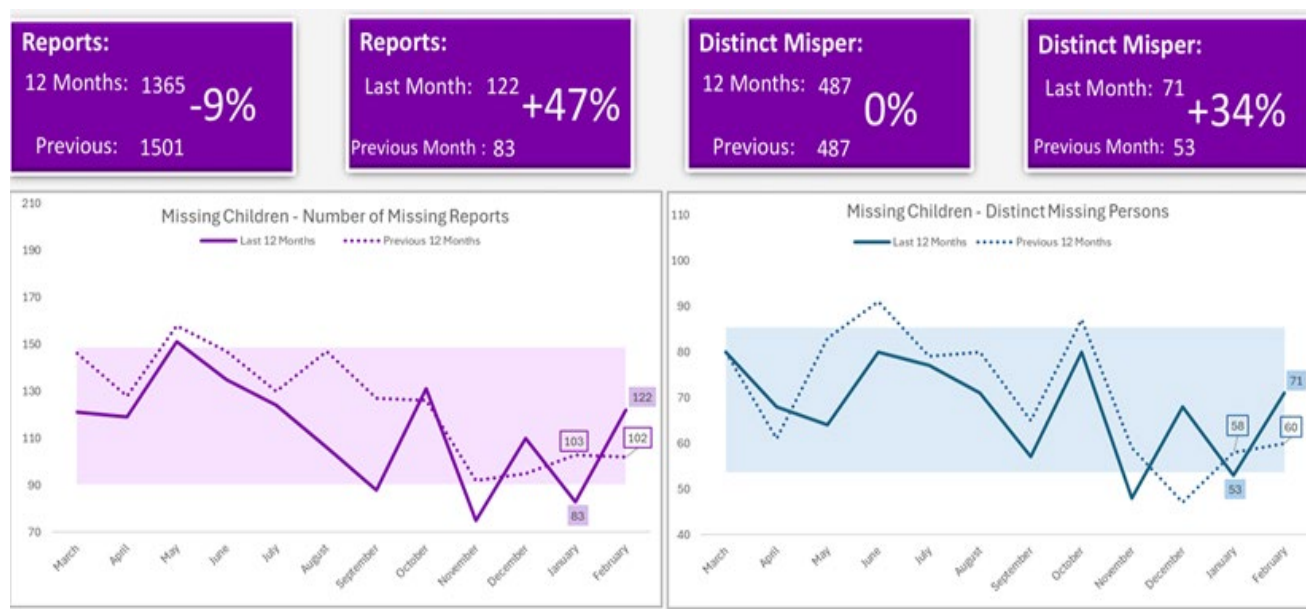
2.15 Together, these changes provide stronger assurance around timeliness, consistency, and partner accountability. Over the next six months, governance activity will focus on embedding these improvements, reducing outstanding actions, improving attendance where it remains inconsistent, and decreasing rejected referrals. This will ensure MARAC continues to operate as an effective safeguarding forum, focused on preventing serious harm and protecting life.

Missing Children

2.16 Notwithstanding the overall reduction across the year, an internal 2024 audit aligned to His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) standards identified areas for improvement in the quality and consistency of operational missing person investigations. In response, a Task and Finish Group was established, resulting in several improvements that are now embedded in practice.

2.17 These include the introduction of a task-based enquiry model within COMPACT from April 2025, supported by a mandatory Learning Management System (LMS) training package to strengthen supervisory risk assessment, safeguarding-focused language, and professional understanding of Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation (CE). The Constabulary continues to hold four Areas for Improvement arising from the National Child Protection Inspections in 2022 and 2023, relating to initial risk assessment, ownership and oversight of missing investigations, consistent use of appropriate language, and the sustained application of the Philomena Protocol.

- 2.18 Progress against these areas remains subject to ongoing internal assurance and governance oversight. While the data below highlights monthly variation, which can result in significant percentage fluctuations, the overall annual position remains stable.
- 2.19 The charts below summarise missing children demand across Suffolk, showing a modest reduction over the longer term alongside recent short-term increases. The data highlights a stable overall position, with some variability in monthly reporting that continues to be closely monitored.



- 2.20 Performance in relation to Return Home Interviews (RHIs), as illustrated below, has improved significantly compared to the position a year ago, driven largely by stronger and more effective partnership working. Over the last six months to February 2026, completion rates have remained broadly consistent, typically ranging between 47% and 69% of under-18 missing incidents. This represents a sustained improvement in the delivery of RHIs as a key safeguarding intervention.
- 2.21 The majority of outstanding RHIs relate to children placed in Suffolk by other local authorities, where completion arrangements sit outside the direct control of Suffolk CYPS. These cases are actively monitored and escalated where appropriate through established partnership arrangements. Priority continues to be given to repeat missing children and those identified as at heightened risk, ensuring that learning from RHIs informs early help, exploitation prevention, and disruption activity.
- 2.22 The table below is an extract from monitoring data summarising RHI delivery over the last six months, showing sustained completion levels alongside a breakdown of outstanding and declined interviews. This provides a clear view of both performance and areas requiring continued focus.

Return Home Interviews

Monthly Summary:

Last 6 months (to February 2026)

Figures shown relate to Suffolk CYPS only. Outstanding RHI totals also include interviews requested by other local authorities, which are not included in this monthly breakdown.

	Completed	Outstanding	Not Required	Offered But Declined	Refused By Parent Guardian	Not Completed For Another Reason	Total RHI	Number of U18 missing reports	% of RHI
September	37	0	1	12	0	1	51	88	58%
October	42	0	3	12	0	4	61	131	47%
November	16	0	2	16	0	6	40	75	53%
December	34	3	2	9	1	12	61	110	55%
January	16	2	2	13	0	13	46	83	55%
February	14	24	2	7	0	2	49	71	69%

Voice of the Child

2.23 Voice of the Child (VoTC) remains a key priority across all safeguarding partners. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the Constabulary has maintained strong performance in recording VoTC within Athena. This approach is now being extended to include child suspects and children returning from missing episodes, ensuring that children’s experiences and perspectives are consistently captured across both safeguarding and investigative activity.

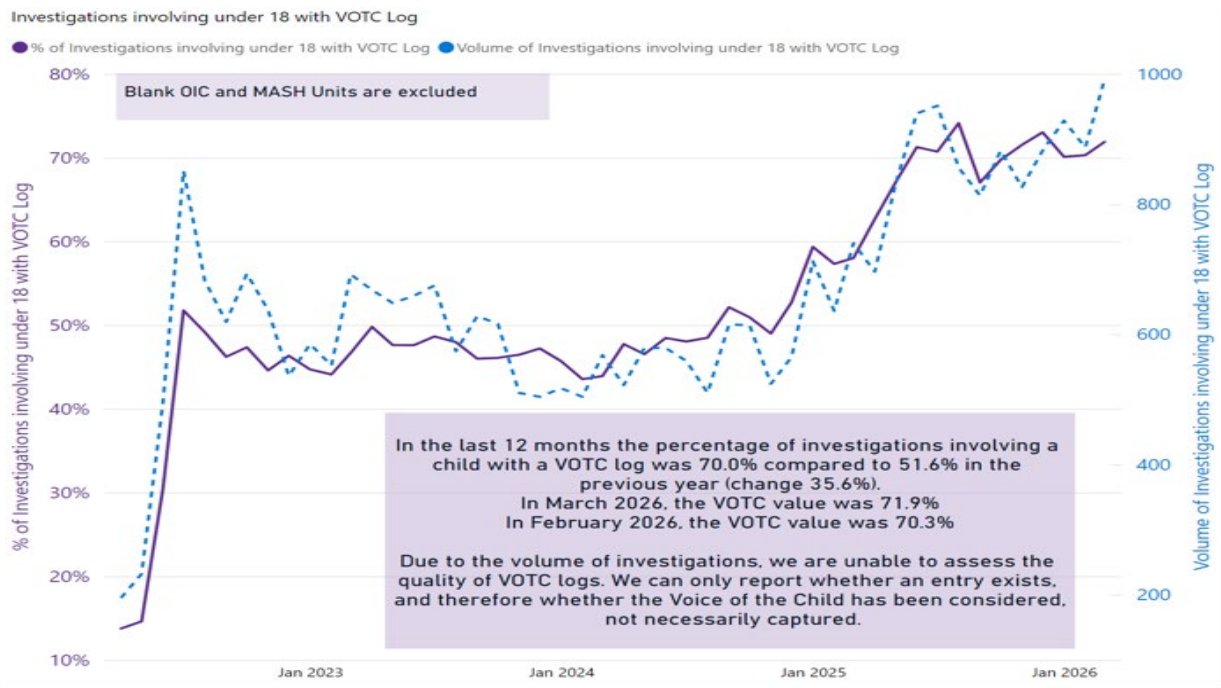
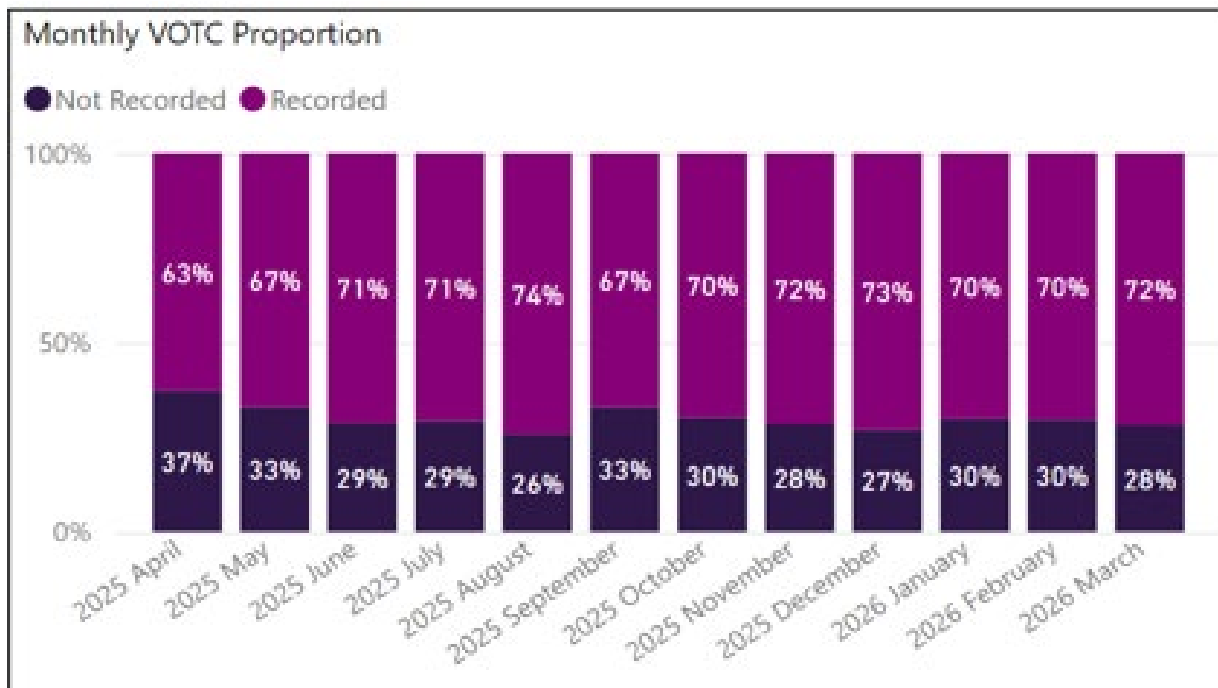


Fig 1 – VOTC Entries within Athena Reports

2.24 The chart below shows the monthly proportion of Voice of the Child (VoTC) recording over the last 12 months, highlighting sustained performance and consistency in capturing children’s views within Athena.



Serious Case Reviews & Areas for Improvement

- 2.25 Suffolk Constabulary continues to meet its statutory and partnership responsibilities across the full range of review activity, including Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews.
- 2.26 All findings and recommendations arising from these reviews, whether single-agency or multi-agency, are centrally coordinated, tracked, and overseen to ensure effective delivery and organisational learning.
- 2.27 This approach provides clear assurance that learning from harm is being systematically embedded into policy, practice, and partnership working, strengthening the Constabulary's ability to identify risk earlier, safeguard vulnerable individuals more effectively, and prevent future loss of life.
- 2.28 The Constabulary's Areas for Improvement (AFIs) largely derive from HMICFRS Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, national and thematic inspections, joint inspections with criminal justice partners, and super-complaint findings. Collectively, these focus on improving risk assessment, information sharing, supervisory oversight, consistency of practice, use of data, and performance management.
- 2.29 An AFI has prompted a comprehensive review of key multi-agency safeguarding forums, including the Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation Panel (MACE) and Missing Tactical Tasking and Coordination Groups. As part of this work, the terms of reference for these forums have been fully reviewed and refreshed to ensure clarity of purpose, alignment with their intended aims and objectives, and consistency with wider safeguarding responsibilities across the partnership. This review has strengthened accountability, reduced duplication, and ensured that intelligence, risk, and disruption activity is focused on those children at greatest risk.
- 2.30 All AFIs are centrally tracked and overseen through established governance arrangements to ensure they continue to drive sustained improvement. A number have already been closed following demonstrable embedment of learning and changes in practice, with the remaining AFIs subject to ongoing scrutiny, assurance, and delivery oversight.

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

- 2.31 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a significant safeguarding concern for Suffolk Constabulary and its partners. Exploitation is identified as a strategic priority within the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Child Delivery Board, with the relevant focus group led by a Detective Superintendent. The Southern Area Criminal Exploitation and Gangs Team is focused on safeguarding both victims and those involved in offending, while disrupting individuals responsible for exploitation. In recognition of the team's effectiveness, plans are in place to expand this capability force-wide during the second quarter of 2026.
- 2.32 CSE is routinely reviewed through a range of multi-agency forums, including Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation (MACE), MAPPA, the Missing Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (TCG), the Op Hull Partnership, Youth Justice risk panels, and child protection meetings and conferences. These forums focus on safeguarding children and young people identified as being at risk of harm. Suffolk Constabulary continues to work with Op Hydrant to review group-based CSE cases using a more trauma-informed approach, as part of a phased national priority.
- 2.33 The county-wide programme to tackle Criminal Exploitation (CE) continues to receive funding for the period 2024–2027. This includes a part-funded Partnership Officer (Constable) role and the development of CE Hubs. Priority areas include innovation and learning, intervention and exit pathways, disruption of drug supply chains, and safeguarding adolescents. Suffolk's Criminal Exploitation Partnership has contributed to the development of a national disruption toolkit, for which the force has received national recognition, with the toolkit now available for wider use.
- 2.34 Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation (MACE) continues to operate as a key safeguarding mechanism for children and young people up to the age of 24. Following independent reviews supported by The Children's Society and Survivors of Domestic Abuse (SODA), the recommendation to introduce a dedicated MACE chair has been implemented across all three policing areas to ensure consistency of approach. Once a child or young person is adopted into MACE, coordinated intervention planning is undertaken by all relevant partners, including CE Hubs, Make a Change teams, and third-sector organisations, ensuring safeguarding measures are implemented promptly and proportionately.
- 2.35 MACE Panels continue to operate across each policing command area. Referral volumes between October 2025 and March 2026 reflect the intelligence-led nature of MACE activity.

MONTH	New Pre MACE Referrals		Referrals not adopted to MACE		Referrals adopted to MACE		Reviews	
October 2025	16	West-2 South-7 East-7	7	West-2 South-2 East-3	9	West-0 South-5 East-4	15	West-6 South-2 East-7
November 2025	16	West-5 South-4 East-7	4	West-2 South-1 East-1	12	West-3 South-3 East-6	27	West-10 South-11 East-6
December 2025	12	West-3 South-7 East-2	7	West-2 South-5 East-0	5	West-1 South-2 East-2	28	West-8 South-9 East-11
January 2026	13	West-3 South-6	4	West-1 South-2	9	West-2 South-4	27	West-10 South-5

		East-4		East-1		East-3		East-12
February 2026	15	West-8 South-4 East-3	5	West-2 South-2 East-1	10	West-6 South-2 East-2	28	West-7 South-10 East-11
March 2026	14	West-8 South-4 East-2	9	West-6 South-3 East-0	5	West-2 South-1 East-2	31	West-11 South-7 East-13

- 2.36 The table above shows variation in activity across the year, consistent with the intelligence-led and cohort-based nature of MACE. Activity typically increases when specific children or networks are identified, and reduces as safeguarding and disruption plans are implemented and become embedded.
- 2.37 Analysis of missing children data over this period provides important contextual insight. A significant proportion of missing episodes were associated with indicators of exploitation and vulnerability, including Child Sexual Exploitation risk (538 reports relating to 87 children), Criminal Exploitation (459 reports relating to 88 children), and County Lines (61 reports relating to 17 children). Wider vulnerability factors were also prevalent, particularly mental health (586 reports involving 231 children) and neurodiversity (336 reports involving 92 children), highlighting the complexity of need within the missing cohort and reinforcing the importance of coordinated multi-agency safeguarding responses.
- 2.38 A total of 133 missing reports, relating to 26 individual children, were flagged as currently, or recently, subject to MACE, indicating that these children had been considered or discussed within the process. This confirms that MACE remains focused on a relatively small, high-risk cohort rather than being applied broadly across the missing population. This is supported by the use of Missing Person Response Plans, recorded across 350 missing reports involving 31 children, which provide tailored intervention and oversight outside formal meeting structures where appropriate.
- 2.39 The cohort of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) remains small within the overall missing population for this reporting period, with 10 missing reports relating to 9 children. This provides assurance that, while this group requires careful safeguarding oversight, it does not currently represent a significant driver of missing demand.
- 2.40 Overall, the data for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 indicates that MACE continues to operate effectively as a safeguarding and disruption mechanism, focused on those children at highest risk of exploitation. Governance arrangements, including refreshed terms of reference and improved alignment with related safeguarding forums, provide clarity of purpose, reduce duplication, and support consistent risk management across the partnership system.

Child Sexual Abuse and Online Investigation

- 2.41 Globally, reports of Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) from industry continue to increase year-on-year. This growth, driven by both increased online offending and changes to industry reporting processes, has resulted in sustained increases in referrals to the National Crime Agency (NCA) over the past five years.
- 2.42 The NCA continues to experience unprecedented demand from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). The Child Sexual Exploitation Reporting Board (CSERB) also continues to manage significant demand, receiving an average of 1,774 referrals per week in 2025, representing a 31% increase on the previous two years. In February 2026,

this increased further to an average of 2,561 referrals per week, equating to a 44% increase on the 2025 weekly average and a 90% increase compared to the 2023/24 baseline.

- 2.43 This increase, alongside recruitment and retention challenges, has impacted the NCA's ability to process and disseminate referrals consistently to UK policing. As a result, a backlog of unprocessed referrals developed, leading to a reduction in referrals received by Suffolk's Internet Child Abuse Investigation Team (ICAIT) between December 2022 and March 2024. During the latter part of 2024, particularly from July onwards, referral volumes increased significantly, with each month exceeding the same period in the previous year.
- 2.44 Consequently, Suffolk ICAIT processed 281 investigations during 2024. In 2025, this increased to 535 investigations, representing a 90% increase compared to 2024 and a 189% increase compared to 2023. In the first three months of 2026, ICAIT received 121 investigations, reflecting a 4% increase on the same period in 2025. The NCA backlog continues to rise, and current demand remains in excess of processing capacity, despite an increase in referrals being disseminated to forces.
- 2.45 Projected NCA demand over the next 12 months indicates a potential increase in Suffolk's monthly referral volume from approximately 45 to 70 cases, with further increases anticipated beyond this period. Additional referral pathways into ICAIT include CSERB Designated Reporting Body (DRB) referrals, separate from NCMEC CyberTipline submissions, alongside Child Rescue Coalition (CRC) referrals via the Child Protection System (CPSys).
- 2.46 As shown in Fig 2 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 2025 to March 2026 saw 262 referrals compared to 214 during the same period in October 2024 to March 2025. This is an increase of 22%.

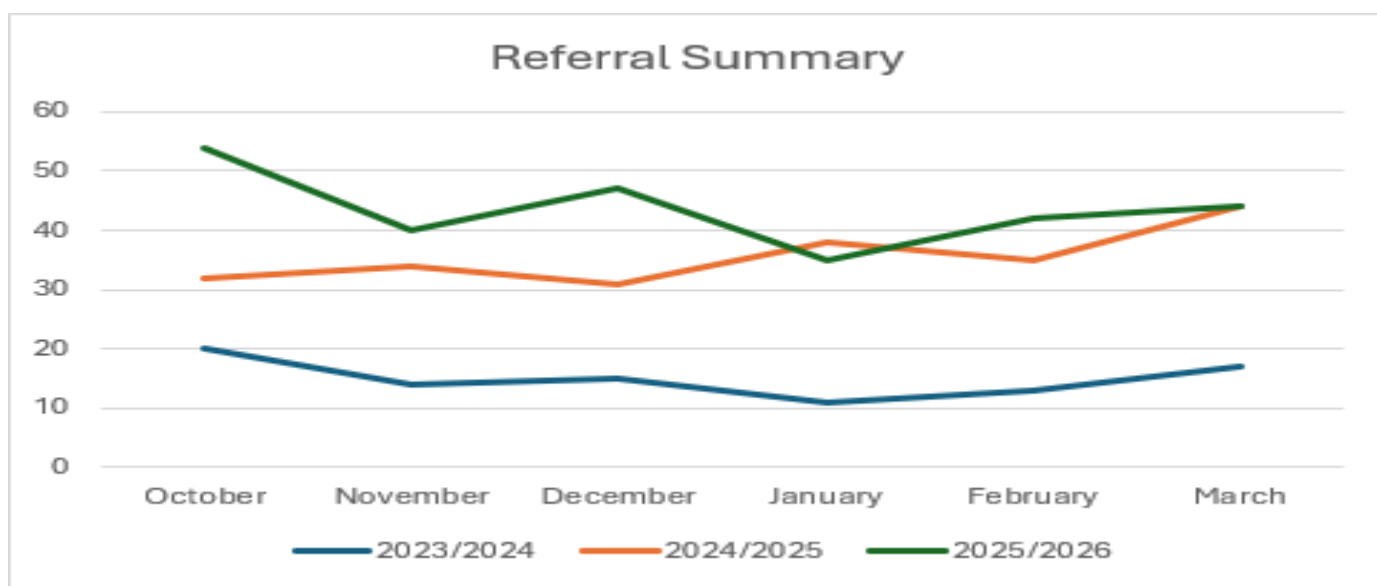


Fig 2 - ICAIT Referrals 2023 – 2026

- 2.47 In response to increased demand within ICAIT, Suffolk Constabulary has increased staffing levels within the unit over the past 12 months and adapted its operating model to distribute demand to Safeguarding Investigation Units where appropriate. All referrals are recorded, risk assessed and developed by ICAIT's Intelligence Development Officer (IDO). The team remains responsive to risk, delivering timely enforcement activity, evidenced by consistent levels of suspects arrested, interviewed, and charged.

- 2.48 In addition to the uplift in investigators during 2025, a dedicated Detective Inspector role has been established within ICAIT, having previously been managed under a Safeguarding Unit Detective Inspector. This role provides focused oversight of operational delivery and will lead a review of the current operating model to ensure optimal effectiveness and efficiency in managing demand.
- 2.49 Suffolk Constabulary continues to deploy two specialist Victim Identification Officers, whose work focuses on identifying and safeguarding victims depicted in child sexual abuse material. Between November 2025 and April 2026, referrals to the NCA's Victim Identification Unit increased by 80%, reflecting enhanced identification activity and improved safeguarding outcomes.

Schools Liaison and CYP Engagement

- 2.50 School engagement continues to be delivered by Community Police Officers (CPOs), supported by content produced by CYP Police Constables (PCs). Pol-Ed is now fully established within Suffolk, with police-led sessions delivered alongside those delivered by teachers. CYP officers, supported by CPOs, delivered Crucial Crew in the South area during the summer term and will shortly begin delivery in the Eastern area. This programme is delivered to all Year 6 pupils in Suffolk, with policing topics during 2025 including online safety, harassment, and exploitation. Planning for 2026 is already underway.
- 2.51 A CYP data pack and dashboard has been developed by the Strategic Business and Operational Services (SBOS) department. This provides improved insight across a range of CYP-related areas. The dashboard includes data on offences committed by and against under-18s, offence locations, and the demographics of suspects and victims, as well as custody and stop and search data. This supports a better understanding of disproportionality and enables more targeted deployment of resources and interventions.
- 2.52 The Suffolk Police Child Engagement Plan was agreed in December and sets out a force-wide approach to child-centred policing, focused on building trust, preventing harm, and amplifying the voice of children and young people under 18. Aligned with the NPCC Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy, the plan prioritises early, positive engagement in settings where children live, learn, and socialise, including schools, care settings, online platforms, and community activities. It emphasises listening to children, involving them in decision-making and scrutiny, and providing inclusive opportunities such as education programmes, police cadets, and youth forums. By embedding consistent language, safeguarding principles, and measurable engagement activity, the plan aims to improve legitimacy, reduce unnecessary criminalisation, and ensure policing responses are informed by the lived experiences of children across Suffolk.
- 2.53 Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating of schools, used to inform engagement and intervention levels, has been reviewed, with a focus on targeting schools experiencing higher levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. This is aligned with the same dataset used to identify hotspots under Operation Spotlight and within Clear, Hold, Build locations.
- 2.54 All school engagement is recorded using the Engagement App, capturing data including the number of students engaged, their age, demographics, and the topics delivered. Schools receive termly updates on local offence patterns involving under-18s, alongside recommended Pol-Ed content to address emerging risks.
- 2.55 CYP Police Constables continue to support a range of local and national policing operations, including Hate Crime Awareness Week, Prevent awareness activity, County Lines Intensification Week, Safer Internet Day, sexual abuse awareness campaigns, Operation Sceptre (knife crime), and Crucial Crew.

Pol-Ed (Police Education)

- 2.56 October 2024 saw the introduction of Pol-Ed, an education programme that provides schools with free lessons, assemblies, and resources covering a range of policing topics. These are aligned to Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), and Citizenship within schools.
- 2.57 Pol-Ed aims to reduce youth offending by proactively educating young people about the law and associated risks. Resources, developed in conjunction with PSHE experts, provide teachers with the tools to deliver content on the law, crime prevention, and safeguarding, while building resilience, peer support, and awareness of how to access help.
- 2.58 The programme operates across three distinct phases: Phase 1 is school-led and teacher-delivered, representing the most widely used element; Phase 2 consists of police-led sessions; and Phase 3 is Intervention 22.
- 2.59 Intervention 22 provides a mechanism to deliver Outcome 22 diversionary activity to young people who have entered the criminal justice system.
- 2.60 Pol-Ed supports early intervention and prevention, contributing to both short-term and long-term reductions in youth offending, while ensuring greater consistency in the delivery of key topics across schools. It equips pupils with the knowledge and skills to keep themselves and others safe, and to make informed decisions in a range of situations. Between November 2025 and April 2026, 387 school-based lessons were delivered by education providers, reaching over 27,000 children, alongside 281 police-led inputs reaching nearly 19,000 children and young people.

Suffolk Youth Justice Service and Suffolk Constabulary Partnership

- 2.61 A new independent Chair was appointed in September 2025 to lead the Youth Justice Board and is progressing delivery of the Youth Justice Plan 2025–2026. The focus is on reducing unnecessary criminalisation of young people, lowering the number of first-time entrants (FTE) into the criminal justice system, and addressing identified disproportionality.
- 2.62 Work is underway to improve data sharing between partners, including Suffolk County Council (YJS, CYP, education) and health. This will bring together shared metadata to create a “whole system” dataset, providing a clearer understanding of a child’s journey through the youth justice system and any underlying factors. This will support improved analysis, more targeted interventions for key demographic groups, and reduction in first-time entrants. It will also enable trends among victims to be identified, supporting targeted prevention and safeguarding activity.
- 2.63 To support this, changes are being made to the Police Electronic Notification to Youth Offending Teams (PENY) to capture additional data not held on other systems, such as children in care, mental health needs, and disabilities. A full review of out-of-court processes for children has been completed, ensuring alignment between police and YJS with Youth Justice Board guidance, child-centred policing principles, and national best practice.
- 2.64 Following updated Home Office guidance on child knife possession, police and YJS have reviewed local processes to ensure compliance. All child knife possession investigations are now referred to YJS within 24 hours of coming to police attention (approximately 20 cases per

year). The guidance also supports increased use of charging over out-of-court disposals for knife possession, an approach already adopted within Suffolk.

- 2.65 Multi-Agency Out of Court Resolution Panels continue to operate effectively across Suffolk. Recent changes ensure that children referred for sexual offences are not inadvertently subject to notification requirements under the Sexual Offences Act. Referrals to Harmful Sexual Behaviours Teams have also improved. Additional oversight, agreed with YJS, ensures that appropriate offences are progressed and that panels are fully informed of outcomes and diversion options.
- 2.66 Deferred prosecution was introduced in June 2025. This approach allows a charge or caution to be delayed for three months while a young person engages in diversionary activity led by police or YJS. It provides meaningful intervention, supports restorative justice, and reduces first-time entrants. By March 2026, it had been used in 47 cases, with 22 completed successfully, one unsuccessful, and a further 24 children currently engaged in diversion.
- 2.67 Work continues to promote creative and flexible diversion outcomes that are meaningful, effective, and compliant with Home Office requirements, while avoiding unnecessary criminalisation. A new police-led restorative justice intervention is being finalised, aimed at children with no previous police contact following low-level offences. This will allow officers to deliver immediate restorative engagement at first contact, reducing the need for referrals to YJS while improving outcomes for the child. Work is also underway with Norfolk Constabulary to develop alternatives to court for minor traffic offences involving children.
- 2.68 Home Office funding for the Turnaround programme has been extended for a further year. This programme targets children at risk of offending or anti-social behaviour, providing early intervention. Two YJS practitioners will be based within Police Investigation Centres to engage children at the earliest opportunity. Evidence shows that intervention at these “reachable moments” has the greatest impact in preventing further harm.
- 2.69 The Constabulary continues to work with Ipswich Town Foundation to deliver diversionary programmes. The “Divert” project focuses on a small cohort of children aged 14–16 in the Ipswich area, identified by the Child Exploitation and Gangs Team. These children, often excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, take part in tailored workshops delivered in partnership with Ipswich Borough Council and the Foundation. Sessions focus on issues such as gangs, county lines, and knife crime, encouraging participants to consider solutions and contribute to positive change in their communities.
- 2.70 The Constabulary has introduced the use of virtual reality (VR) headsets to deliver sessions on anti-social behaviour, gangs, and knife crime awareness. These immersive scenarios encourage participants to consider the consequences of their choices and promote positive decision-making. Delivery is currently focused on Year 8 pupils in selected schools and those working with the Child Exploitation and Gangs Team.

Young People in Custody

- 2.71 There are in the region of 4517 persons arrested or attending police custody as a voluntary interviewee in Suffolk between November 2025 and March 2026. Of these, 850 detainees were 24 or under.
- 2.72 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.

2.73 As seen in Fig 3 and 4 below the throughput and disposal data is relatively unremarkable, and relatively consistent. It must be noted however that nationally, Norfolk and Suffolk have low numbers of juvenile throughput compared to other forces.

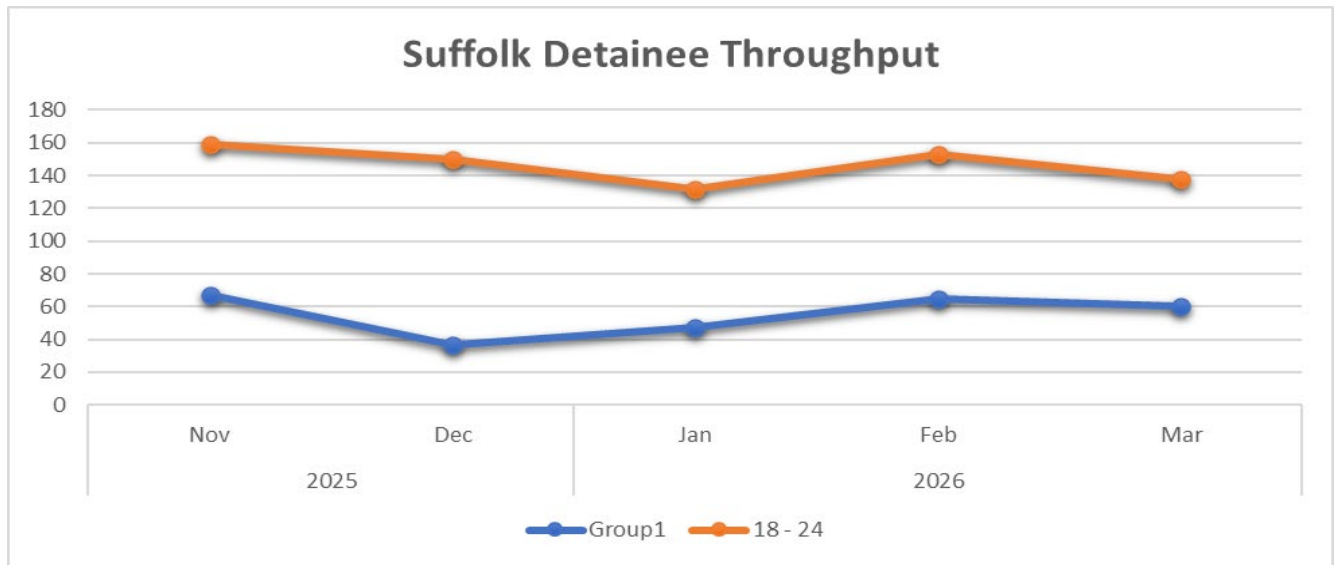


Fig 3 – Suffolk Custody child throughput

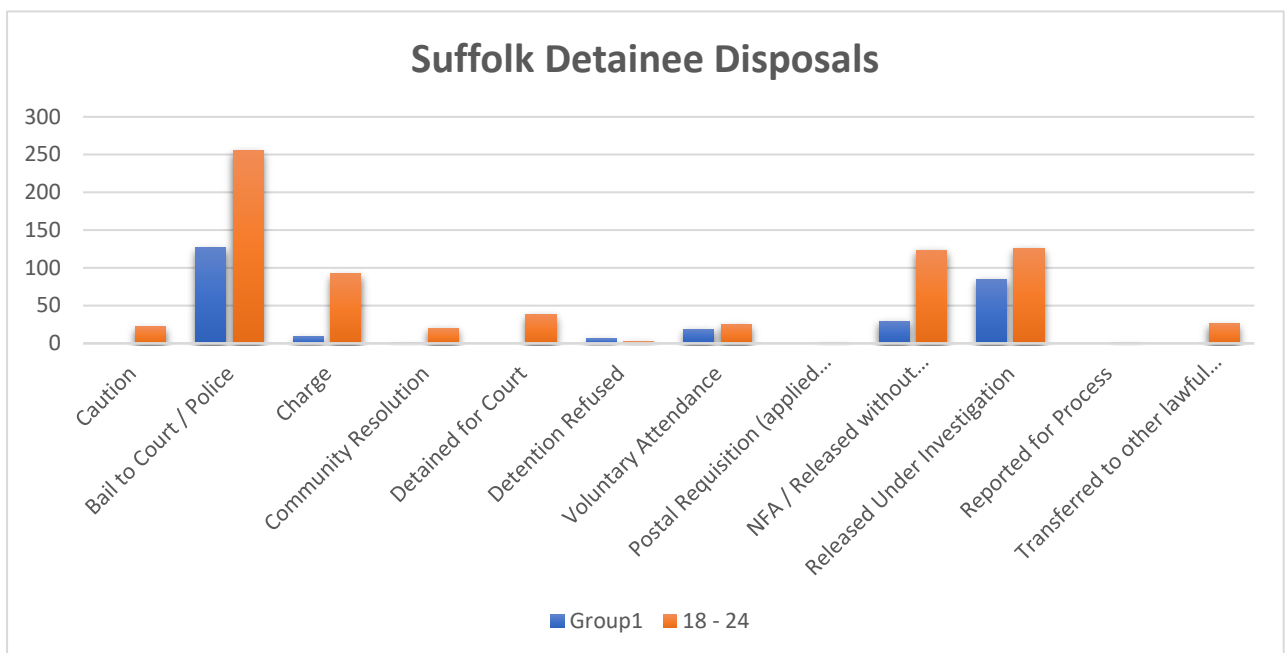


Fig 4 - Suffolk custody child disposals

2.74 Custody activity involving children and young people is monitored through established governance processes, including the Children and Young People’s Delivery Group.

2.75 Norfolk and Suffolk (Joint Custody) are recognised nationally as best practice in dealing with children and young adults. This is due to several reasons including our child focussed cells with distraction elements (targets on wall, whiteboard etc.), processes which include automatic legal representation for all under 18’s and custody processes being dealt with in discreet booking in room or ‘comfy consultation room’.

- 2.76 Operation Harbinger checks remain embedded, ensuring that Children’s Social Care is notified within one hour of a child’s detention to support joint decision-making and safeguarding.
- 2.77 Suffolk custody was inspected by HMICFRS during February 2026, whilst we await our full inspection report, the initial feedback has been positive particularly around our physical estate and the diversionary activities that we have for children.
- 2.78 Consideration has been made to reduce PACE clock for children to 12 hours which has been done in other forces, however as the following table shows our averages fall below this and continues in a downward trend of detention time from previous reporting period.

Average Detention Time	Nov-25	Dec-25	Jan-26	Feb-26	Mar-26	Total
18 - 24	13:02	09:45	09:51	11:11	12:35	11:18
Under 18	08:59	09:55	10:09	09:40	10:14	09:44
Grand Total	11:51	09:47	09:56	10:42	11:50	10:52

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Now that the child centred policing strategy is in place it is recommended that there is ongoing governance, workforce capability and partnership capacity to continue to keep pace with rising and increasingly complex demand across Children and Young People services.
- 3.2 Consider and monitor the impact of increasing safeguarding demand, particularly within MASH and online child sexual abuse investigations, evaluating current resourcing, recovery plans and longer-term operating models.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The organisation continues to pay an ongoing yearly contribution in addition to 3 funded PC posts as part of Youth Justice Service delivery.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 5.1 None at this time.

6. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Suffolk Constabulary continues to deliver an effective, partnership-led approach to safeguarding children and young people, with stable demand and improved outcomes across key areas. Strengthened multi-agency working, particularly within MASH and MARAC, is supporting timelier, risk-focused decision-making, while improvements in missing children processes and Return Home Interviews are enhancing outcomes for vulnerable children.
- 6.2 Targeted activity to address exploitation and online harm is well established, supported by strong governance and early intervention through partnership delivery and youth diversion programmes. While overall performance is strong, increasing demand particularly in online child abuse investigations remains a key pressure, requiring continued focus on capacity, early intervention, and partnership working to sustain progress.