SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE	**PAPER NO: AP26/48**

SUBMITTED TO:	**ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL – 20 NOVEMBER 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 April 2026 to October 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 The 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 has reviewed and updated its internal Children and Young People strategy accordingly.

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

2.1 Safeguarding Reforms

2.1.1 The period from April 2026 to October 2026 has been characterised by significant change across children's safeguarding arrangements as partners prepared for and commenced implementation of the national Families First Partnership Programme. The reforms aim to strengthen early intervention, improve multi agency safeguarding arrangements and create a

more integrated response to children and families through Family Help and Multi Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs).

2.1.2 Suffolk has been selected as an early adopter area for the MACPT model and commenced a Test and Learn programme in September 2026. Operating alongside Family Help services in North West and South West Ipswich, the programme brings together professionals from social care, policing, health and education within a strengthened multi agency child protection model. The pilot provides Suffolk with a significant opportunity to shape national learning and influence the future development of child protection arrangements before a full roll out in March 2027.

2.1.3 Alongside the Families First reforms, the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership has implemented revised governance arrangements, transitioning from a combined safeguarding structure to separate Adult and Child Safeguarding Partnerships with independent chairing and governance arrangements. The changes are intended to strengthen strategic oversight, accountability and delivery across both safeguarding systems whilst maintaining effective multi agency collaboration.

2.1.4 Throughout the reporting period, Suffolk Constabulary has played a key role in designing and implementing the new model, contributing to governance arrangements, information sharing processes and joint decision making frameworks. Central to the reforms is a greater focus on partnership working, earlier intervention and ensuring the voice of the child remains at the heart of safeguarding activity.

2.1.5 Throughout this report, reference is made to a number of children and young people's services that have recently been renamed by Suffolk County Council. Children in Care is now referred to as Parenting Together, Leaving Care as Next Steps, and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as Children Seeking Sanctuary. These changes reflect updated service terminology and operating arrangements across the partnership.

2.1.6 Whilst the reforms present significant opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families, the transition has also created challenges associated with workforce adaptation, revised pathways and changing operating models. These risks continue to be monitored through established governance arrangements to ensure safeguarding effectiveness is maintained throughout implementation and safeguarding effectiveness.

2.1.7 The Test and Learn programme will inform future decisions regarding governance, operating models and resourcing, with Suffolk Constabulary committed to supporting the delivery of MACPT whilst ensuring any future model remains sustainable and broadly cost neutral.

2.2 Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

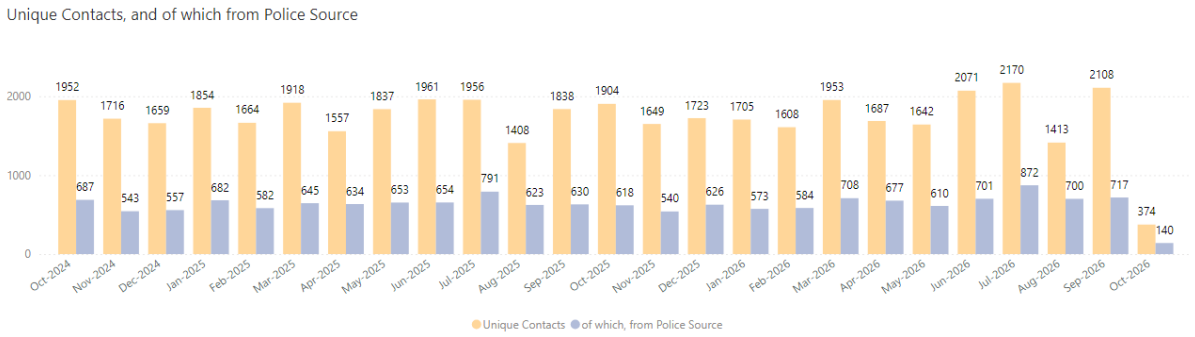
2.2.1 The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to provide the primary gateway for safeguarding concerns relating to children and young people in Suffolk. During the reporting period, demand remained consistently high, with over 11,000 contacts received between April and September 2026.

2.2.2 Demand fluctuated throughout the period, reducing during the summer months before increasing significantly in September 2026. This reflects established seasonal patterns and coincides with the return to education settings following the summer holidays. September recorded the highest monthly demand during the reporting period, with 2,171 contacts received.

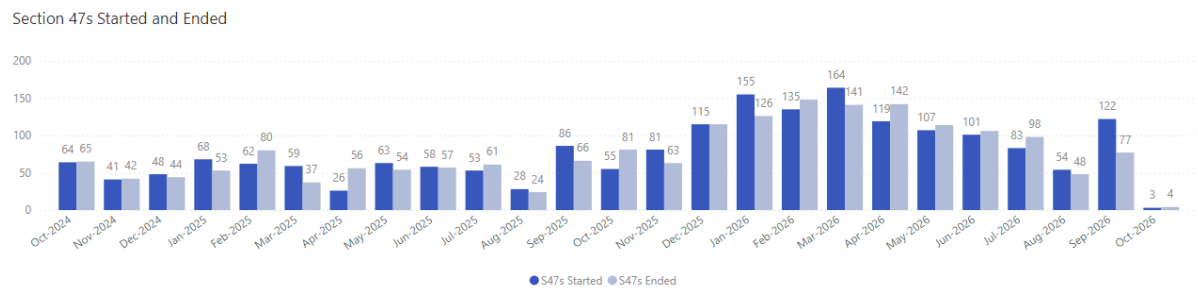
2.2.3 Education, policing and health partners continue to generate the majority of safeguarding contacts received by MASH, demonstrating the strength of Suffolk's multi agency safeguarding arrangements and the importance of early identification of vulnerability by frontline professionals. Whilst overall volumes have remained broadly consistent, the complexity of referrals continues to place significant demands on safeguarding services, with a substantial proportion requiring multi agency assessment and intervention.

2.2.4 MASH continues to provide an effective mechanism for information sharing, risk identification and multi-agency decision making, ensuring children receive timely and proportionate safeguarding responses.

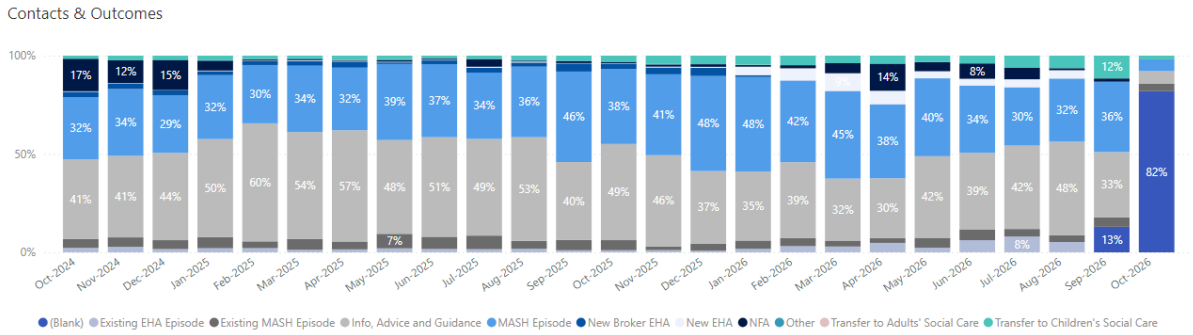
2.2.5 **Figure 1 (Below)** Demonstrates a sustained and stable level of demand into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) over the reporting period. Overall contacts have typically ranged between approximately 1,400 and 2,100 per month, with some seasonal variation evident throughout the year. Demand increased during summer 2026, peaking at 2,108 contacts in September 2026. Police-generated referrals have remained broadly consistent during the period and continue to represent a significant proportion of overall MASH activity. No unusual levels of reporting are evident within the most recent quarter. October 2026 represents a partial reporting month and should be interpreted with caution and is not directly comparable with previous months. The sustained level of activity highlights the continued demand placed upon safeguarding services and the importance of effective multi-agency identification and management of vulnerability and risk.



2.2.6 **Figure 2 (Below)** illustrates the number of Section 47 enquiries commenced and concluded following strategy discussions held within MASH. Activity increased significantly during late 2025 and early 2026, peaking in March 2026 with 164 Section 47 enquiries initiated. Whilst volumes have reduced since this peak, levels remain higher than those observed during most of 2024 and early 2025, indicating continued demand associated with higher risk safeguarding concerns. The close alignment between Section 47 enquiries started and concluded suggests that safeguarding activity is being progressed and managed in a timely manner across the partnership.



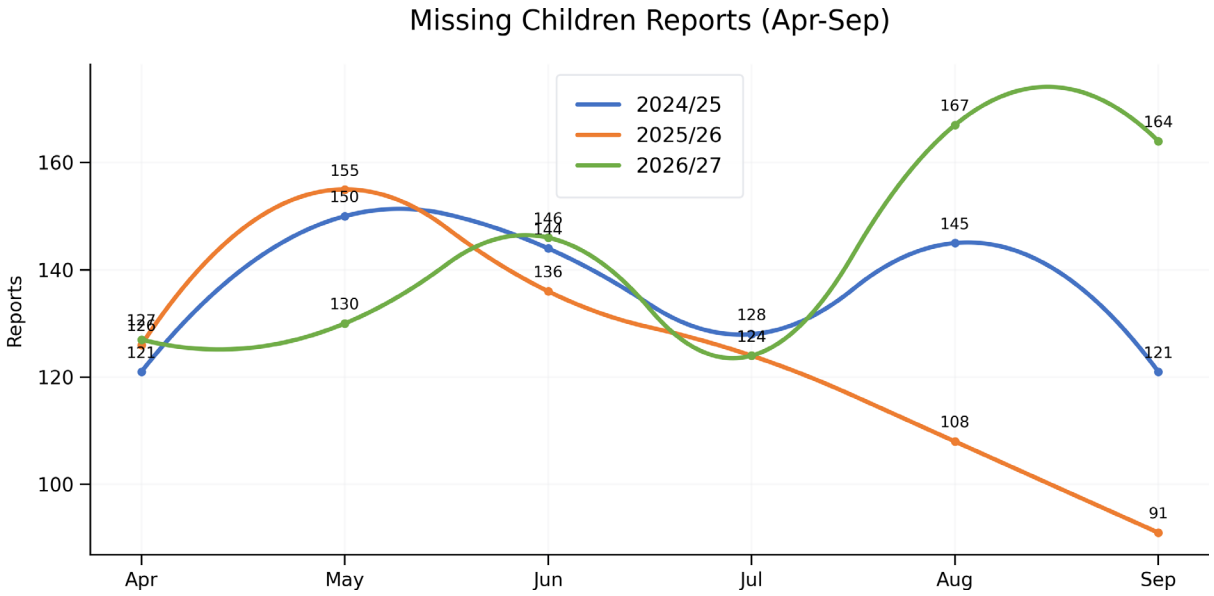
2.2.7 **Figure 3 (Below)** shows the outcomes of contacts received by MASH and demonstrates the balance between information, advice and guidance, multi agency assessment, and onward referral to statutory services. Throughout the reporting period, the majority of contacts were managed through existing MASH activity or advice and guidance, reflecting effective early triage and multi agency risk assessment. A consistent proportion of contacts progressed to Children's Social Care, typically accounting for between 30% and 45% of outcomes, demonstrating the continued level of safeguarding demand requiring statutory intervention. Smaller proportions were directed to Early Help and other partner services, ensuring children and families receive the most appropriate level of support at the earliest opportunity. Overall, the data indicates a stable operating model with MASH continuing to act as an effective gateway for identifying risk and directing children to the right service at the right time.



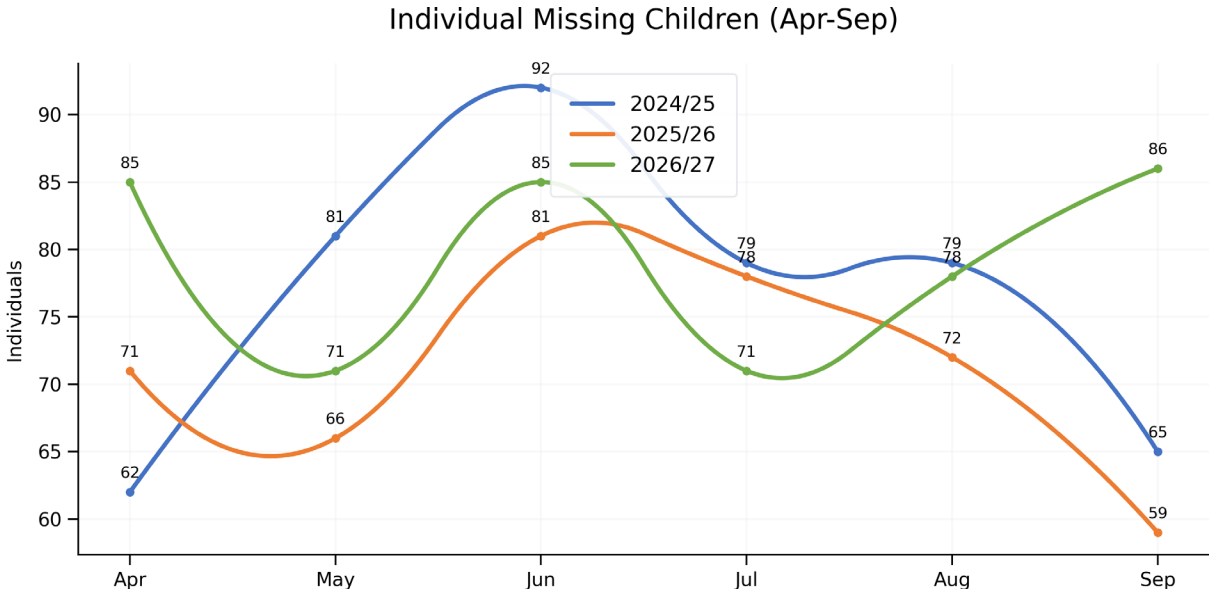
2.3 Missing Children

2.3.1 Missing children remain a significant safeguarding priority for Suffolk Constabulary and partners. During the most recent 12 month period, 1,365 missing episodes involving children were recorded, representing a 9% reduction compared to the previous year. However, the number of individual children reported missing remained unchanged at 487, indicating that whilst overall episodes have reduced, the cohort of vulnerable children requiring safeguarding intervention remains broadly consistent.

2.3.2 **Figure 4 (Below)** shows the number of missing children reports recorded between April and September over the last three financial years. During 2026/27, 858 missing reports were recorded, compared with 740 during the same period in 2025/26 and 809 in 2024/25. Demand remained broadly consistent during the first four months of the reporting period before increasing significantly during August and September, which recorded the highest monthly volumes across the three year comparison. This increase continues to be monitored through established safeguarding and exploitation governance arrangements, recognising the heightened vulnerability often associated with children who repeatedly go missing.



2.3.3 **Figure 5 (Below)** shows the number of individual children reported missing between April and September over the last three financial years. A total of 476 individual children were reported missing across the first six months of 2026/27, compared with 427 during the same period in 2025/26 and 458 in 2024/25. While missing reports have increased during 2026/27, the increase in individual children has been less pronounced, suggesting that demand continues to be influenced by repeat missing episodes involving a relatively small cohort of vulnerable children. This reinforces the importance of targeted safeguarding interventions, Return Home Interviews and exploitation prevention activity to reduce repeat missing behaviour and improve outcomes for children most at risk.



2.3.4 Children in Care continue to make a significant contribution to overall missing demand. Between April and September 2026, 447 missing reports (approximately 52%) related to children in care, involving 82 individual children. This reflects both local and national trends and indicates that overall missing demand continues to be influenced by repeat missing episodes involving a relatively small cohort of vulnerable children. The data reinforces the

importance of partnership activity through Parenting Together, Missing Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TTCG) and wider safeguarding arrangements, alongside targeted safeguarding interventions, Return Home Interviews and exploitation prevention activity, to reduce repeat missing behaviour and improve outcomes for some of Suffolk's most vulnerable children.

2.4 Return Home Interviews

2.4.1 Return Home Interviews (RHIs) remain a critical safeguarding intervention, providing an opportunity to understand the reasons children go missing, identify risks relating to exploitation and vulnerability, and inform subsequent safeguarding, prevention and disruption activity.

2.4.2 During this reporting period, Suffolk has experienced significant challenges in the delivery of RHIs as a consequence of the wider transformation of Children's Services associated with the Families First Partnership Programme. Changes to service structures and workforce arrangements have impacted capacity within the existing RHI provision, resulting in an increase in outstanding interviews and a reduction in return interviews taking place. Whilst this has been recognised as a developing risk across the safeguarding partnership, it has been subject to ongoing scrutiny through established governance arrangements and continues to receive focused attention from senior leaders.

2.4.3 Of the 659 episodes involving children placed by Suffolk County Council out of the county, 197 RHIs were completed, with 290 remaining outstanding at the time of reporting. A similar picture is evident for Suffolk children missing within the county, where 79 interviews were completed and 63 remained outstanding. These figures reflect the operational challenges associated with maintaining RHI capacity during a period of significant system change.

2.4.4 Suffolk Constabulary continues to hold partners to account for the timely delivery of RHIs and has worked closely with Children's Services to understand and address the underlying causes of reduced performance. Positively, Children's Services have recognised the need to strengthen capacity and are currently recruiting dedicated independent Return Home Interview practitioners. This investment is intended to improve both the quality and volume of RHIs completed, ensuring children benefit from a more consistent and independent opportunity to share their experiences, identify safeguarding concerns and influence future interventions.

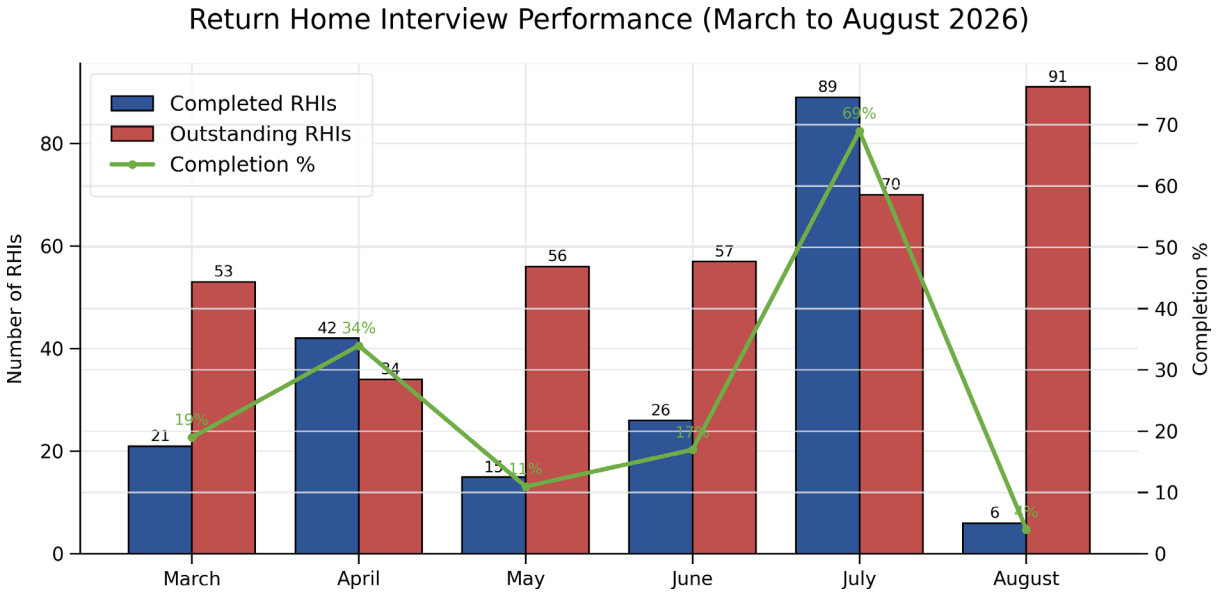
2.4.5 Despite the current challenges, priority continues to be afforded to children assessed as presenting the highest levels of vulnerability, including repeat missing children and those at risk of child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation and contextual safeguarding concerns. Learning obtained through RHIs continues to be shared with MACE, exploitation panels and wider safeguarding partners to support risk assessment, disruption opportunities and early intervention activity.

2.4.6 The effectiveness of these arrangements will continue to be monitored throughout the implementation of Families First, with performance and emerging themes overseen through the Multi Agency Child Protection Delivery Board and Child Protection Delivery Group. The partnership remains committed to restoring performance and improving outcomes for vulnerable children through a strengthened and sustainable RHI model.

2.4.7 Emerging themes identified through completed Return Home Interviews continue to reflect concerns around peer association, conflict at home, emotional wellbeing, online relationships and vulnerability to exploitation. Whilst there is no single dominant factor, the findings

reinforce the close relationship between missing behaviour, mental health need, contextual safeguarding concerns and child exploitation risk. These themes continue to inform MACE discussions, Missing TTCG activity and wider safeguarding interventions.

2.4.8 **Figure 6 (Below)** demonstrates Return Home Interview (RHI) performance between March and August 2026. Performance fluctuated throughout the reporting period, with a notable improvement during July when 89 interviews were completed, representing a 69% completion rate. However, performance deteriorated significantly during August, coinciding with the implementation of the Families First Programme and wider changes within Children's Services. This resulted in a substantial increase in outstanding RHIs and a corresponding reduction in completion rates.



2.5 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), Children Seeking Sanctuary (formerly Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) and Multi Agency Criminal Exploitation Panel (MACE)

2.5.1 Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) remain significant safeguarding threats within Suffolk. Exploitation is identified as a strategic priority within the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Child Delivery Board and remains closely associated with missing episodes, mental health concerns, neurodiversity, online harm and wider contextual safeguarding risks. Suffolk Constabulary and safeguarding partners continue to prioritise the early identification of vulnerability, safeguarding of children at risk and disruption of those seeking to exploit children and young people.

2.5.2 In recognition of the evolving exploitation threat and increasing complexity of safeguarding demand, Suffolk Constabulary has further strengthened its Child Exploitation Team (CET). As of October 2026, the team has increased from one Sergeant and five Constables to one Sergeant and seven Constables, alongside the addition of a dedicated Criminal Exploitation Partnership Officer, bringing the establishment to one Sergeant and eight Constables. The team now operates as a countywide resource, providing specialist support, advice and intervention in respect of children and young people assessed as being at heightened risk of exploitation. This increased capacity enhances the Constabulary's ability to identify vulnerability, coordinate safeguarding activity, support investigations and disrupt those responsible for exploiting children across Suffolk.

2.5.3 The CET works closely with safeguarding partners through Child Exploitation Hubs (CE Hubs), MACE, Missing Children governance arrangements and the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership. Activity focuses on the early identification of risk, coordinated safeguarding interventions, disruption of perpetrators and supporting children to reduce vulnerability and build resilience. During the reporting period, Suffolk has continued to strengthen its exploitation response through intelligence development, missing person investigations, Return Home Interviews, partnership information sharing and targeted safeguarding activity. This activity is supported by the Suffolk Child Exploitation Strategy and associated Improvement Plan, which provide a framework for prevention, early intervention, disruption, partnership learning and safeguarding practice across the county.

2.5.4 Children identified as presenting the highest levels of exploitation risk through local Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group processes are adopted to Operation Strobe and allocated to the Child Exploitation Team for enhanced safeguarding oversight, disruption activity and partnership intervention. The Constabulary continues to promote a child centred and trauma informed approach, recognising children affected by exploitation as victims first, whilst pursuing those responsible through intelligence led enforcement and disruption activity.

2.5.5 **Multi Agency Criminal Exploitation Panel (MACE)** - MACE remains a key safeguarding mechanism for identifying and managing children and young people up to the age of 24 who are assessed as being at heightened risk of exploitation. Panels continue to operate across each policing area under locally nominated chairs, providing multi agency oversight of a relatively small but highly vulnerable cohort of children where the risk of exploitation is assessed as significant. Once adopted into MACE, coordinated intervention plans are developed to reduce vulnerability, disrupt perpetrators and improve safeguarding outcomes.

2.5.6 Referral levels continue to fluctuate throughout the year, reflecting the intelligence led nature of exploitation investigations and safeguarding activity. Referral numbers should not be viewed as a direct measure of exploitation risk. Activity often increases following the identification of emerging individuals, peer groups, locations or exploitation networks and reduces as safeguarding interventions become embedded. MACE therefore remains appropriately focused on those children presenting the highest levels of vulnerability and harm.

Quarter	New Pre-MACE Referrals	Adopted to MACE	Not Adopted	Reviews (Quarter End)
Q3 2025/26 (Oct-Dec)	44	26	18	28
Q4 2025/26 (Jan-Mar)	42	24	18	31
Q1 2026/27 (Apr-Jun)	45	30	15	37
Q2 2026/27 (Jul-Sep)	59	36	23	40

2.5.7 **Missing Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group (TTCG) -** The Missing TTCG provides multi agency oversight of children who are reported missing repeatedly or present with the

highest levels of vulnerability and risk. The forum brings together key safeguarding partners to review complex cases, coordinate interventions and ensure appropriate action is being taken to reduce repeat missing episodes, address exploitation risks and improve outcomes for vulnerable children. The TTCG complements existing MACE and child exploitation arrangements by ensuring that children subject to repeated missing episodes receive focused partnership attention and oversight.

2.5.8 **Exploitation and Vulnerability Profile -** Analysis of missing children data demonstrates the significant overlap between missing episodes, exploitation and wider vulnerability. During the reporting period:

- Mental health concerns were identified in 391 missing episodes involving 83 children.
- Child Sexual Exploitation indicators were identified in 316 missing episodes involving 64 children.
- Child Criminal Exploitation indicators were identified in 228 missing episodes involving 57 children.
- Neurodiversity was identified in 204 missing episodes involving 63 children.
- Suicide or self-harm concerns were identified in 172 missing episodes involving 41 children.

These figures highlight the complexity of the safeguarding landscape and demonstrate that children who go missing are often exposed to multiple and interconnected vulnerabilities requiring coordinated multi agency specialist responses.

2.5.9 The data indicates that exploitation risk remains concentrated amongst a relatively small cohort of highly vulnerable children who frequently come to notice through multiple safeguarding pathways. Many children identified as vulnerable to exploitation are also subject to missing person investigations, child protection activity, youth justice interventions and wider contextual safeguarding concerns. This reinforces the importance of trauma informed safeguarding approaches and effective partnership working to address both immediate risks and underlying vulnerabilities. Importantly, we recognise that exploitation rarely exists in isolation. Mental health concerns, neurodiversity, self-harm and missing behaviour frequently coexist alongside indicators of CSE and CCE, highlighting the complexity of safeguarding need and reinforcing the importance of coordinated partnership responses through MACE, CE Hubs, Missing TTCG and Families First arrangements.

2.5.10 Alongside MACE, partners continue to utilise Missing Person Response Plans and targeted safeguarding interventions to manage risk and reduce repeat vulnerability. These arrangements provide enhanced oversight, clear partner accountability and coordinated intervention planning, ensuring that support is directed towards those children assessed as being at greatest risk of harm and exploitation.

2.5.11 The number of Children Seeking Sanctuary (previously referred to as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) reported missing within Suffolk remains comparatively low and does not currently represent a significant driver of overall missing demand. However, recognising the national risks associated with trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery, Suffolk Constabulary's response to missing children remains strong, with robust investigative and safeguarding arrangements in place to identify risk, locate vulnerable children and support positive safeguarding outcomes.

2.6 Emerging Risks and Future Challenges

2.6.1 Whilst Suffolk has developed strong multi agency arrangements to identify and respond to exploitation, a number of emerging strategic risks have been identified during the reporting period.

2.6.2 The Criminal Exploitation Programme is now entering its final phase, with funding secured until March 2027. Partners have recognised the importance of ensuring that the expertise, learning, partnership infrastructure and specialist capability developed since 2018 are retained and embedded within future business as usual arrangements. There is clear recognition across the partnership that exploitation remains a significant safeguarding threat and that the demand driving current activity is not reducing. Work is currently underway to deliver the remaining priorities contained within the Child Exploitation Improvement Plan whilst developing longer term legacy arrangements for exploitation services across Suffolk.

2.6.3 Particular consideration is being given to the future sustainability of specialist exploitation resources, partnership coordination and CE Hub provision. There is growing interest in understanding how elements of the current exploitation model may align with the emerging Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) agenda, Families First reforms and wider adolescent safeguarding arrangements. This provides an opportunity to ensure that learning and capability developed through the Criminal Exploitation Programme continue to support vulnerable children through future safeguarding structures.

2.6.4 Digital harm and online exploitation have also been identified as developing areas of risk. Whilst significant progress has been made in responding to traditional forms of criminal and sexual exploitation, partners recognise that online harm, technology enabled exploitation and digital vulnerability require increased focus. Work is underway through existing exploitation and partnership structures to strengthen awareness, improve referral pathways and develop capability to respond more effectively to emerging online threats affecting children and young people.

2.6.5 In addition, Suffolk continues to support national and regional activity relating to Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation (GBCSE). Through Op Beaconport funding, police and safeguarding partners are working to strengthen understanding of risk, develop partnership capability and contribute to emerging learning in this area. This work complements existing exploitation arrangements and supports Suffolk's wider response to child exploitation.

2.6.6 Taken collectively, the most significant strategic risks facing the partnership during the next 12 months relate to the implementation of Families First reforms, sustainability of exploitation services beyond March 2027, Return Home Interview capacity, and the continued growth in online child sexual abuse investigations. These issues will remain subject to oversight through established governance arrangements.

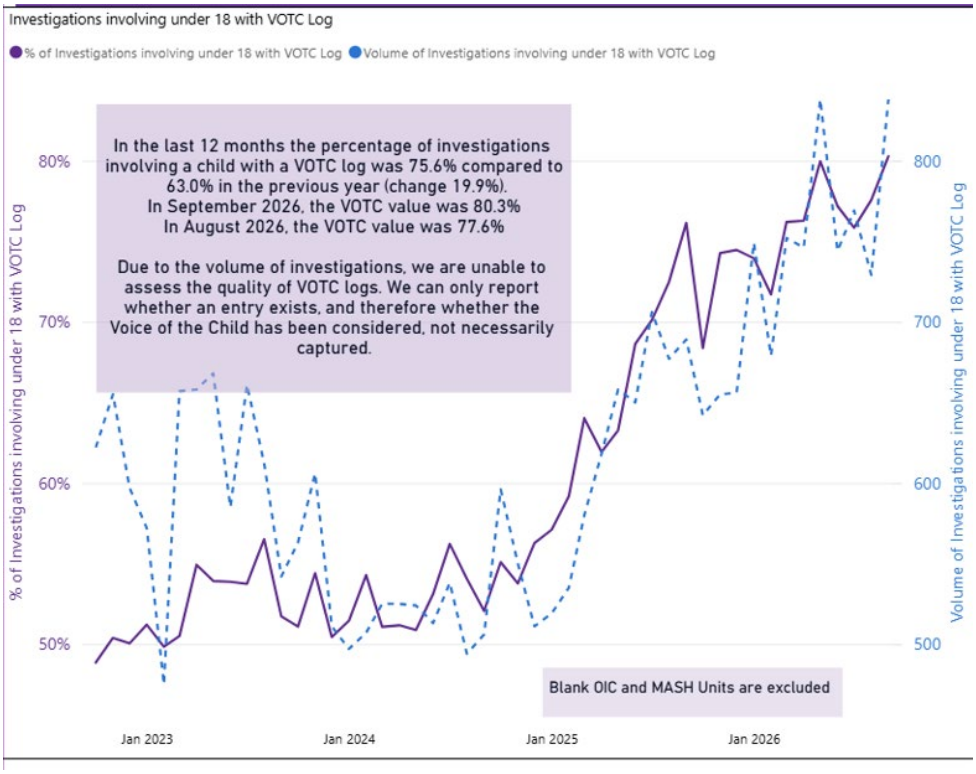
2.7 Voice of the Child

2.7.1 Ensuring the voice of the child is understood and recorded remains a key component of Suffolk Constabulary's safeguarding approach and continues to be an area of positive performance. During the reporting period, voice of the child recording was present in over 75% of investigations involving children, compared with 63% during the previous year. Performance has continued to improve throughout 2026, reaching 80.3% in September 2026.

2.7.2 This sustained improvement provides increased assurance that children's views, experiences and lived realities are being considered within safeguarding investigations and decision

making. The Constabulary will continue to monitor performance and promote child centred practice through supervisory oversight, training and quality assurance processes.

2.7.3 **Figure 7** below demonstrates the continued improvement in Voice of the Child recording over the last 12 months, with both compliance rates and overall recording volumes increasing significantly compared to previous years.



2.8 Serious Case Reviews & Areas for Improvement

2.8.1 Suffolk Constabulary continues to meet its statutory and partnership responsibilities across the full range of review activity, including Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs), Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), thematic reviews and single agency learning reviews. Learning from all review activity remains central to the Constabulary's continuous improvement approach.

2.8.2 At the time of reporting, the Constabulary remains actively engaged in several safeguarding reviews across Suffolk and neighbouring partnerships, reflecting both ongoing safeguarding demand and a commitment to continuous organisational learning. This includes four CSPRs relating to children and young people, two One-Off Learning Events and a multi-agency review being led by a neighbouring safeguarding partnership. During the reporting period, a number of reviews have also been concluded, including a thematic review and single agency reviews, enabling learning to be embedded across safeguarding practice.

2.8.3 Current reviews include CSPRs concerning *Young Person HW, Young Person KD, Young Person BC* and *Young Person IV* together with One-Off Learning Events relating to *Young Person DS* and *Young Person PS (all pseudonyms)*. In addition, Suffolk Constabulary continues to contribute to the review concerning *Young Person OP*, which is being led by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership.

2.8.4 All findings and recommendations arising from reviews, whether single agency or multi agency, are centrally coordinated, tracked and monitored to ensure effective delivery and organisational learning. This provides assurance that learning from harm is translated into tangible improvements in policy, practice, supervision and partnership working, strengthening the Constabulary's ability to identify risk earlier, safeguard vulnerable people more effectively and prevent future harm.

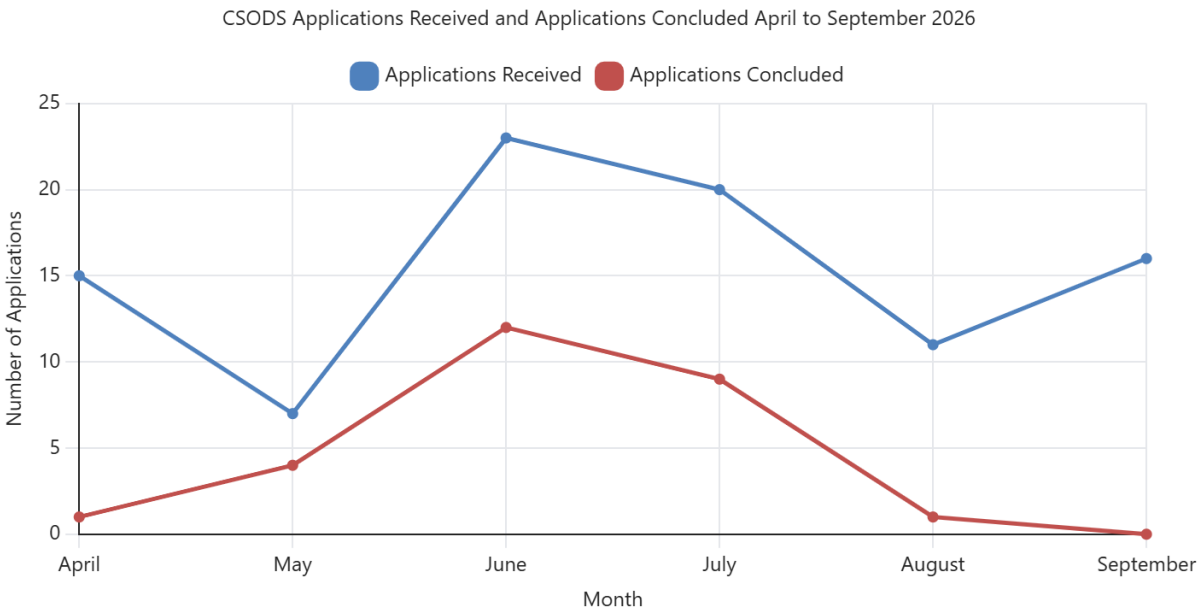
2.8.5 The Constabulary's Areas for Improvement (AFIs) largely derive from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, national and thematic inspections, joint inspections and super complaint findings. One 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 Group (TTCG). Governance arrangements and terms of reference have subsequently been refreshed to improve clarity of purpose, strengthen accountability and ensure safeguarding activity remains focused on those children at greatest risk.

2.8.6 All AFIs are centrally monitored through established governance arrangements to ensure they continue to drive sustainable improvement. Several actions have now been closed following evidence of embedded change, whilst the remaining AFIs continue to be subject to scrutiny and assurance. Alongside this work, the Constabulary continues to utilise learning from CSPRs, DHRs and SARs to strengthen safeguarding practice, improve partnership responses and reduce the risk of future harm.

2.9 Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS)

2.9.1 The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS) remains an important safeguarding mechanism, enabling information to be shared where necessary to protect children and young people from individuals who may pose a risk of sexual harm. Between April and September 2026, Suffolk Constabulary received and managed 52 CSODS applications, of which 19 remained under active consideration at the end of the reporting period. During the same period, 13 applications resulted in a disclosure to support the safeguarding of children and young people. The Constabulary continues to work closely with safeguarding partners to ensure applications are assessed promptly, risks are appropriately managed and disclosures are made where necessary. Whilst the majority of applications were progressed within the statutory 28 day timeframe, a small number exceeded this target due to the complexity of enquiries, partner agency involvement and the practical arrangements required to safely deliver disclosures.

2.9.2 **Figure 8 (below)** showcases the previously described volume and concluded applications. A time lag exists between application receipt and conclusion. Applications received in September may not be concluded until subsequent reporting periods and are therefore not yet fully represented within the conclusion data.



3. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND ONLINE INVESTIGATION

3.1 Globally, reports of Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) from industry sources continue to increase significantly year-on-year. This growth is being driven by increasing online offending, improved industry detection capabilities and expanded reporting mechanisms. The National Crime Agency (NCA) Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Referral Bureau (CSERB) reports sustained increases in industry referrals over more than a decade, rising from an average of 211 referrals per week in 2014, 1,350 in 2023 to 2,638 referrals per week during 2026 (+1250%).

3.2 Between 2025 and 2026, the NCA saw a 49% increase (1774 to 2638) and highlights the continuing acceleration of unprecedented demand being experienced nationally.

3.3 Suffolk Constabulary has experienced a substantial increase in NCA CSERB referrals over recent years. The force received 118 referrals in 2023, 188 referrals in 2024 and 391 referrals in 2025, representing a 59% increase between 2023 and 2024 and a 231% increase between 2023 and 2025. Suffolk currently receives approximately 1.05% of all national CSERB disseminations.

3.4 National modelling undertaken by the NCA and NPCC predicts that Suffolk Constabulary will receive between 545 and 708 referrals from the NCA CSERB during 2027. This would represent an increase of between 361% and 500% compared with 2023 levels.

3.5 In response to increasing demand, Suffolk Constabulary introduced Operation Horkstow in September 2025 and seconded two additional Detective Constables into the Internet Child Abuse Investigation Team (ICAIT). The operation introduced demand-management arrangements enabling a limited number of lower-risk investigations to be allocated to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Safeguarding Investigation Unit (SIU) investigators, alongside enhanced intelligence development support and the provision of overtime. Since implementation, 37 investigations have been allocated under these arrangements. This demand management mechanism will remain under review.

3.6 The introduction of a dedicated Detective Inspector role within ICAIT continues to be assessed. 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.

3.7 Suffolk Constabulary continues to maintain specialist victim identification capability within ICAIT, with two dedicated police staff investigators undertaking victim identification responsibilities alongside Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) grading duties. These investigators coordinate local and national victim identification enquiries, support safeguarding interventions, manage requests from other police forces and the NCA, and maintain records on the Child Abuse Image Database (CAID). Their work remains critical to the identification and safeguarding of children depicted in child sexual abuse material and to supporting wider national victim identification efforts

4. SCHOOLS LIAISON AND CYP ENGAGEMENT

4.1 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 are now delivered in the Eastern area. This programme is delivered to all Year 6 pupils in Suffolk, with policing topics including online safety and AI.

4.2 A cross public sector data pack and dashboard have been developed by the Strategic Business and Operational Services (SBOS) department in partnership with Suffolk County Council. 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.

4.3 The Suffolk Police Child Engagement Plan agreed in December 2025 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.

4.4 The first Youth forum will be starting on 2nd November 2026 in Ipswich. Young people from across Ipswich will be able to engage directly with Suffolk Constabulary, partner agencies and specialist police units, influencing service delivery, building trust and confidence, and helping shape responses to issues affecting young people.

4.5 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.

4.6 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.

4.7 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.

5. POL-ED (POLICE EDUCATION)

5.1 Pol-Ed continues to support the Constabulary's preventative approach to youth offending and vulnerability through the delivery of educational inputs across Suffolk schools and youth settings.

5.2 Between April and October 2026, education providers delivered 1,170 school-based lessons, reaching more than 28,000 children and young people. In addition, 144 police-led sessions were delivered, engaging almost 9,000 children and young people.

5.3 The continued uptake of Pol-Ed demonstrates the value of prevention activity in increasing awareness of risk, safeguarding, crime prevention and personal safety amongst children and young people.

5.4 Police Cadets-Suffolk Police Cadets continue to provide opportunities for young people to engage positively with policing and contribute to their communities. During the reporting period, Pol-Ed resources were incorporated into the cadet programme, introducing two years' worth of educational content and supporting the delivery of crime prevention, safeguarding and personal development themes.

5.5 Police Cadets currently operate from six locations across Suffolk, with approximately 150 young people attending each week. The scheme continues to provide positive engagement opportunities, supporting personal development, community involvement and early intervention objectives.

6. SUFFOLK YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE AND SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY PARTNERSHIP

6.1 The Constabulary remains an active member of the Youth Justice Board and is progressing delivery of the Youth Justice Plan 2026–27. 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.

6.2 Suffolk Youth Offending Service will be subject to an inspection by His Majesty’s Inspector of Probation in late October. The constabulary is supporting this process, through providing officers to partnership focus groups and attending multi agency case reviews. Whilst primarily directed toward the council’s delivery, some areas of the constabulary work will be reviewed, notably our contact with victims, assessment of offenders and partnership working.

6.3 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.

6.4 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.

6.5 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.

6.6 Deferred prosecution continues to be used effectively. 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. Between October 2025 and September 2026, it had been used in 74 cases, with 45 completed successfully, 3 unsuccessful, and a further 26 children currently engaged in diversion.

6.7 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 has now been started, 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.

6.8 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.

6.9 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.

6.10 The Constabulary continues 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.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE IN CUSTODY

7.1 There are in the region of 6146 persons arrested or attending police custody as a voluntary

interviewee in Suffolk between April and September 2026. Of these, 1370 detainees were 24 or under.

7.2 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 necessity have been met, and other options have been either tried and failed, or considered and negated, then custody can be considered for juveniles. There are some benefits to having this cohort in custody including the services such as Liaison and Diversion and Youth Justice located within the buildings.

7.3 As seen in Fig 9 and 10 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 juveniles throughput compared to other forces.

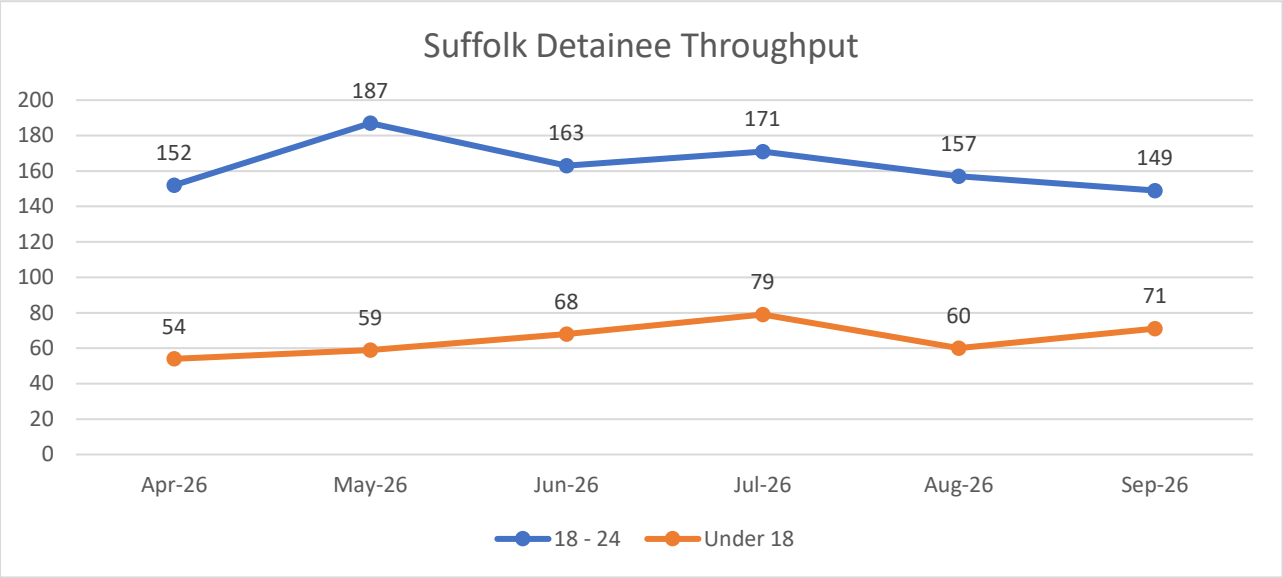


Fig 9 – Suffolk Custody child throughput

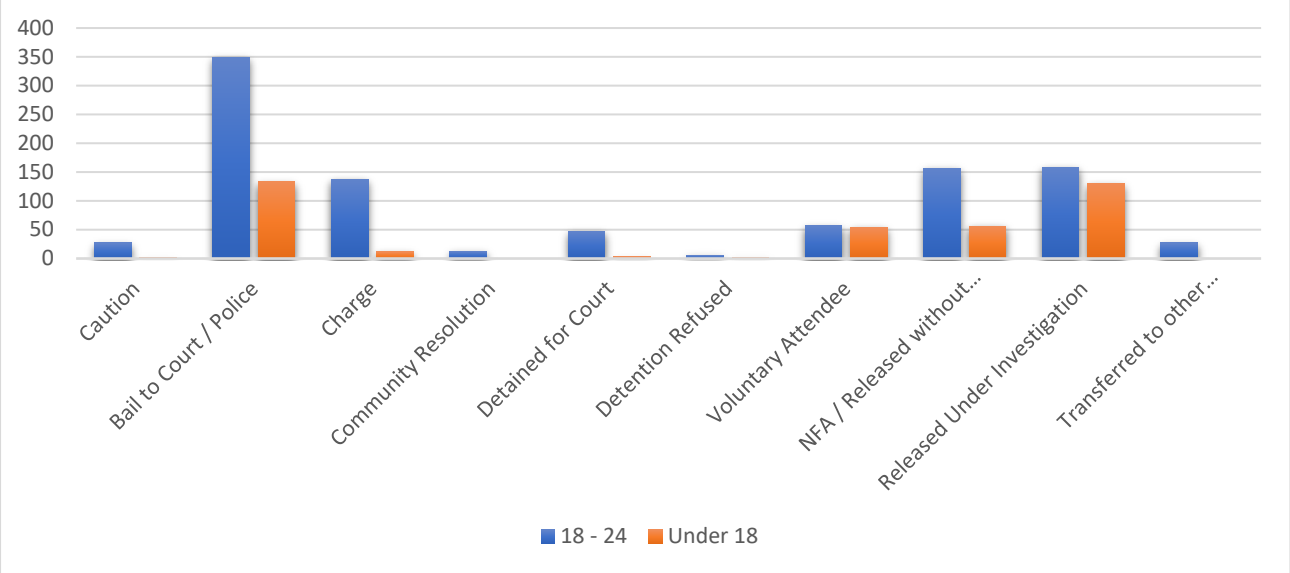


Fig 10 - Suffolk custody child disposals

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

7.5 Norfolk and Suffolk (Joint Custody) are recognised nationally for 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, drawing/writing equipment), processes which include automatic legal representation for all under 18's and custody procedures being dealt with in discreet booking in room or 'comfortable consultation room'.

7.6 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.

7.7 Suffolk custody was inspected by HMICFRS during February 2026, the findings of this are generally positive noting Suffolk Constabulary only arrests children as a last resort and seeks to keep them in custody for the shortest possible time. Additionally, it was noted that Suffolk makes efforts to keep children away from adults in custody and decisions to remand overnight were appropriate and clearly recorded.

7.8 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 Suffolk averages fall below this and continues in a downward trend of detention time from previous reporting period.

Average Detention Time	Apr-26	May-26	Jun-26	Jul-26	Aug-26	Sep-26
18 - 24	12:23	11:31	11:40	05:25	11:02	10:50
Under 18	10:43	08:23	12:47	10:52	12:18	11:05
Grand Total	**11:57**	**10:44**	**12:00**	**07:04**	**11:20**	**10:55**

7.9 Suffolk are currently undergoing an evaluation of CYP reviews with the first Inspector review taking place at 3 hours instead of 6. This will focus on additional scrutiny on the progress of the detained person and understanding what other options have been explored as alternatives to custody. Accompanying this will be an updated review template which will record this review consistently.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Continue to embed the child centred policing strategy with ongoing governance, workforce capability and partnership capacity to maintain pace with rising and increasingly complex demand across Children and Young People services.

8.2 Consider and monitor the impact of increasing safeguarding demand, particularly within MASH and online child sexual abuse investigations, whilst maintaining strategic oversight of the Families First Partnership Programme and Suffolk's Multi Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) Test and Learn programme to support successful implementation and readiness for national rollout.

8.3 Consider emerging strategic risks identified within this report, including the Return Home Interview performance and capacity.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

10.1 None at this time.

11. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

11.1 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 is supporting timelier, risk-focused decision-making.

11.2 The impact of the structural changes to accommodate Families First improvements particularly on the delivery of RHI is being appropriately addressed by our Local Authority colleagues and overseen with accountability through the CYP board.

11.3 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, unprecedented 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.