

**DORSET
POLICE**



YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2026/27

Service	Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service
Head of Service	David Webb
Chair of YJS Board	Paul Dempsey

Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
2	Introduction, vision, strategy, and local context	4
2.1	Foreword	4
2.2	Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Statement of Purpose	4
2.3	Who We Are and What We Do.....	4
2.4	Local Context	5
3	Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements	6
4	Update on the previous year	8
4.1	Progress on priorities in last year's plan	8
4.2	Performance.....	10
4.3	Risks and issues	22
5	Plans for the year ahead.....	23
5.1	'Child First' practice.....	23
5.2	Resources and Services.....	28
5.3	YJS Partnership Board Development.....	29
5.4	Workforce Development	30
5.5	Knife Possession Guidance.....	31
5.6	Evidence-based practice, innovation and evaluation	32
5.7	Standards for work with children in the youth justice system	34
5.8	Response to inspections, reviews and audits.	34
6	Local and National Priorities for 2026/27	35
6.1	Over-representation	35
6.2	Prevention	40
6.3	Diversion	41
6.4	Education, Training and Employment	42
6.5	Health and Communication Needs of Children in the youth justice system	44
6.6	Restorative Justice and Victims.....	48
6.7	Serious Violence and Extra-Familial Harm.....	50
6.8	Policing and Detention of children in police custody.....	51
6.9	Transitions to Probation	52
6.10	Remands.....	52
6.11	Custodial Sentences and Resettlement	54
6.12	Working with Families	54
6.13	National Youth Justice Reforms 2026.....	55
6.14	DCYJS Priorities and Plans for 2026/27	55
7	Sign off, submission and approval.....	57
8	Appendix 1 – Service Structure Chart	58
9	Appendix 2 – Budget Contributions 2026/27	62
10	Appendix 3 – Local Authority Demographic Information.....	63
11	Common youth justice terms – national glossary.....	65

Youth Justice Plan 2026/27

1 Executive Summary

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) works across the Dorset Council and BCP Council areas in a multi-agency partnership between the local authorities, Dorset Police, NHS Dorset and the Probation Service.

DCYJS helps children to make positive changes, keeping them safe, keeping other people safe, and repairing the harm caused to victims. When possible, we do this work outside the formal justice system, to avoid criminalising the child.

During the past year, DCYJS has made progress on the priorities set out in last year's Plan:

Continue to divert children from the formal justice system: the number of children across Dorset and BCP who received a first caution or court order dropped to 104 in 2025/26. This is the 6th consecutive year which has seen a significant reduction on the previous year.

Reducing over-representation of minority groups in the youth justice system: there was a small reduction in the proportion of children in care on the YJS caseload by March 2026. No children with Black, Asian or Mixed Heritage ethnicity were sentenced to custody in 2025/26.

Improve education outcomes for children in the justice system: DCYJS expanded its Discover You project at Upton Country Park, supporting young people to become ready for college or employment. Outcomes from this project are listed in section 6.4 of this document.

Earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs for children at risk of school exclusion: 152 children have now been referred to the Re-Engage project from 26 schools across both local authorities. From 90 completed assessments, 78% of children have been found to have communication needs.

Increasing public awareness and confidence in work undertaken by children to repair the harm from their offence: the YJS 'repairing the harm' team now works with an increased number of community projects. Over £2,000 was raised from the sale of items made by children as part of their work to repair the harm from their offence. This money is donated to charities and local community organisations.

The DCYJS Partnership Strategic Priorities for 2026/27 are:

- Respond to national and local reforms in youth justice and children's services
- Enhance Child First Practice
- Develop YJS and Partnership work with victims
- Reduce the Over-Representation of some groups of children in the justice system
- Make best use of available resources.

These priorities sit alongside ongoing commitments to help children in the youth justice system to achieve positive outcomes and to repair the harm caused to victims.

2 Introduction, vision, strategy, and local context

2.1 Foreword

This document is the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) for 2026/27. It sets out the key priorities and targets for the service for the next 12 months as required by the Crime & Disorder Act 1998. This Plan adheres to the Youth Justice Board's document 'Youth Justice Plans: Guidance for Youth Justice Services'.

This Plan has been developed under the direction and oversight of the DCYJS Partnership Board, alongside consultation with DCYJS staff and feedback from children, parents and victims working with DCYJS.

The Youth Justice Strategic Plan:

- summarises the DCYJS structure, governance and partnership arrangements.
- outlines the resources available to the DCYJS.
- reviews achievements and developments during 2025/26.
- identifies emerging issues and describes the partnership's priorities.
- sets out our priorities and actions for improving youth justice outcomes this year.

*Paul Dempsey, Executive Director People – Children, Dorset Council
Chair, Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Partnership Board.*

2.2 Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Statement of Purpose

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service works with children in the local youth justice system. Our purpose is to help those children to make positive changes, to keep them safe, to keep other people safe, and to repair the harm caused to victims.

We support the national Youth Justice Board Vision for a 'child first' youth justice system:

A youth justice system that sees children as children, treats them fairly and helps them to build on their strengths so they can make a constructive contribution to society. This will prevent offending and create safer communities with fewer victims.

2.3 Who We Are and What We Do

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) is a statutory partnership between Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council, Dorset Council, Dorset Police, The Probation Service (Dorset) and NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board.

We are a multi-disciplinary team which includes youth justice officers, restorative justice specialists, parenting workers, education and employment workers, police officers, a probation officer, mental health nurses, a psychologist, speech and language therapists and a volunteers and activities coordinator.

More information about the Youth Justice Service (YJS) partnership and the members of the YJS team is provided later in this document.

The team works with children who have committed criminal offences to help them make positive changes and to keep them safe and to keep other people safe. We also work with parents and carers to help them support their children to make changes.

We contact all victims of crimes committed by the children we work with. We offer those victims the chance to take part in restorative justice processes so we can help to repair the harm they have experienced. We also seek other ways to provide support to victims, particularly victims who are children.

The organisations in the YJS partnership also work together to prevent children entering the youth justice system, to improve the quality of our local youth justice system and to ensure that young people who work with the YJS can access the specialist support they need for their care, health and education.

The combination of direct work with children, parents and victims, and work to improve our local youth justice and children's services systems, enables us to meet our strategic objectives to:

- Reduce the number of children in the youth justice system.
- Reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system.
- Improve the safety and well-being of children in the youth justice system.
- Reduce and repair the harm caused to victims and the community.
- Improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system.

2.4 Local Context

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) is a partnership working across two local authorities: Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.

Dorset Council covers a large geographical, predominantly rural area with market towns and a larger urban area in Weymouth and Portland. Dorset Council has a population of about 389,947 (ONS 2024 mid-year estimates).

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole together form a conurbation with a population of 408,967 (ONS 2024 mid-year estimates).

Other members of the DCYJS Partnership, such as Dorset Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, NHS Dorset, Dorset HealthCare Trust and the Probation Service (Dorset) also work across both local authorities.

The following table provides comparative demographic information about young people in both local authorities at the start of 2026. Fuller versions of this data, including data source information, can be found in [Appendix 3](#):

Population Age 10-17	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	Dorset
Number of Children ¹	35,978	34,575
Male ¹	51.3%	51.0%
Female ¹	48.7%	49.0%
Pupils eligible for Free School Meals ²	21.6%	22.3%
Pupils with SEN Support ²	15.9%	14.7%
Pupils with an EHC Plan ²	5.7%	7.1%
Pupils from Non-white Minority Ethnic groups ³	17.8%	6.3%
Children living in Poverty after housing costs	27%	25.70%

Safeguarding Age 10-17		
Number of Children in Need ⁵	385	582
Male ⁵	53.2%	53%
Female ⁵	46.8%	47%
Number of Children with a Child Protection Plan ⁷	179	132
Number of Children in Care ⁶	388	341
Male ⁶	54.9%	60%
Female ⁶	44.8%	40%
Indeterminate ⁶	0.3%	
Number of children and young people at risk of exploitation		
High Risk/Significant	43 ⁸	19 ⁷
Medium Risk/Moderate	54 ⁸	46 ⁷
Low Risk/Emerging or Reducing	118 ⁸	43 ⁷

Although the two local authorities differ in geographical size and demography, they have similar population sizes for 10-17 year-olds. Dorset Council has slightly higher rates of children eligible for free school meals and slightly lower rates of children living in poverty after housing costs.

The proportion of 10-17 year-olds identifying as being from non-white ethnicities is higher in BCP Council (17.8%) than in Dorset Council (6.3%).

3 Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements

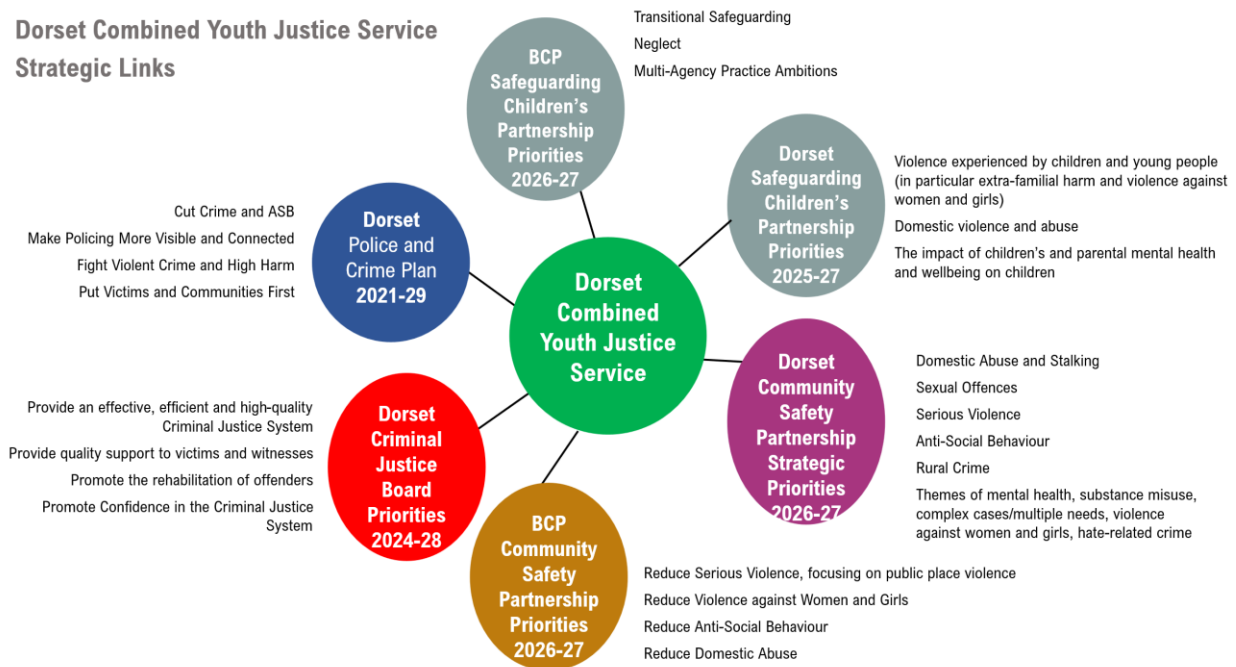
The work of the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service is managed strategically by a Partnership Board. The Partnership Board consists of senior representatives of the statutory partner organisations, together with other relevant local partners.

Membership:

- Dorset Council (chair)
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (vice-chair)
- Dorset Police
- The Probation Service (Dorset)
- NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board
- Public Health Dorset
- Dorset Healthcare University Foundation Trust
- Dorset Magistrates' Youth Panel
- Youth Justice Board for England and Wales
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Partnership Board oversees the development of the Youth Justice Plan. Board members and the DCYJS Head of Service sit on other strategic partnerships, helping to ensure that the Youth Justice Plan and other local strategic plans and priorities are integrated and that other plans consider the needs of children and victims in the local youth justice system. The links between DCYJS and local strategic groups, and their overlapping strategic priorities, are illustrated below:

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Strategic Links



Representation by senior leaders from the key partners enables the DCYJS Head of Service to resolve any difficulties in multi-agency working at a senior level and supports effective links at managerial and practitioner levels.

The DCYJS participates in local multi-agency agreements for information sharing, for safeguarding and for the escalation of concerns. The DCYJS Partnership Data Sharing Agreement underpins local multi-agency work to prevent offending and to reduce reoffending.

The DCYJS Partnership Board oversees activities by partner agencies which contribute to the key youth justice outcomes, particularly in respect of the prevention of offending.

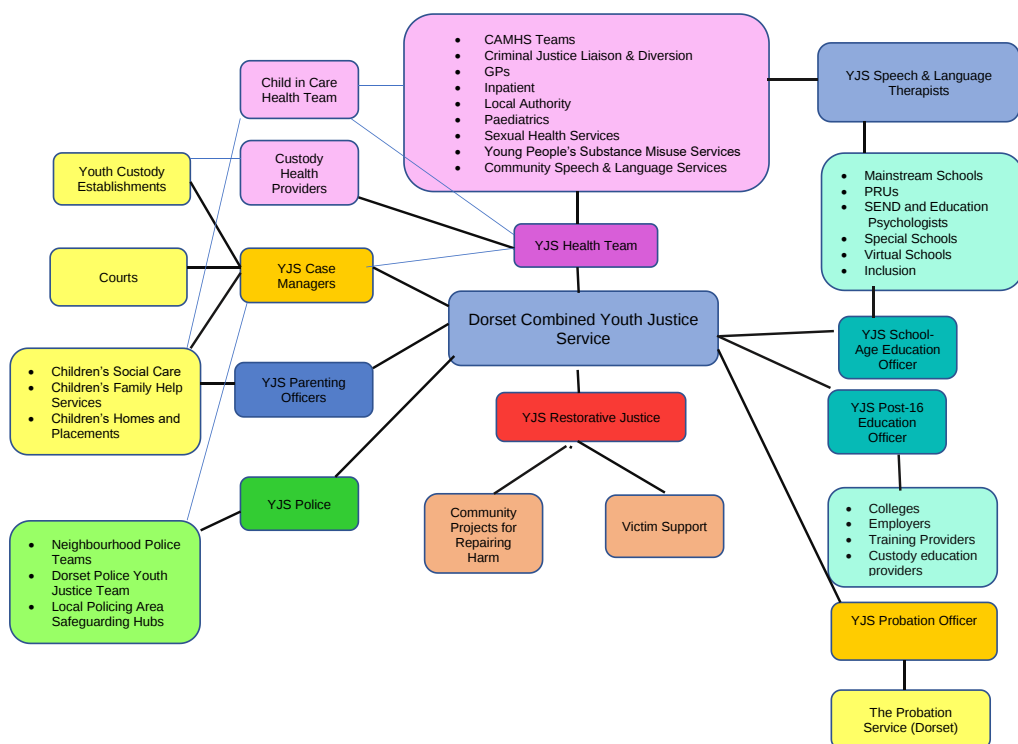
The Partnership Board also provides oversight and governance for local multi-agency protocols in respect of the criminalisation of children in care and the detention of children in police custody. The DCYJS Manager chairs multi-agency operational groups for each protocol and reports on progress to the DCYJS Partnership Board.

DCYJS is hosted by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. The Head of Service is a Tier 3 Manager, reporting to the Director of Children's Social Care. The Head of Service also reports to the Corporate Director for Care and Protection in Dorset Council.

[Appendix 1](#) includes the structure chart for DCYJS and structure charts showing where the YJS sits in each local authority.

DCYJS meets the statutory staffing requirements for youth justice services, set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Specialist staff members are seconded into the service by Dorset Police, the Probation Service and Dorset HealthCare University Foundation Trust. These workers have line managers in both the YJS and their employing organisation. They have direct access to their own organisation's case management systems, to enable the prompt and proportionate sharing of information. More details about the staffing and financial contributions from YJS partners are provided in [Appendix 2](#).

The YJS multi-disciplinary team also includes education specialists, parenting workers and restorative justice practitioners. The team works closely with other local services, as illustrated below:



4 Update on the previous year

4.1 Progress on priorities in last year's plan

The following section gives a brief summary of progress made against our strategic priorities for 2025-26:

Continue to divert children from the formal justice system:

- The rate of first-time entrants in 2025 was 7.6% lower than in 2024, and 58% lower than the rate in 2018, showing the progress that has been made in the past year and over a longer period.
- The Ministry of Justice Turnaround programme grant was used to fund an additional YJS worker, a Restorative Justice Practitioner and a Speech and Language Therapist to strengthen the offer to children on the cusp of the justice system.
- The Turnaround programme has enabled local implementation and consolidation of the police crime disposal option 'Outcome 22' for children with low level offences, as an alternative to a formal justice outcome.
- The YJS Speech and Language team's 'Re-Engage' programme provided speech and language assessments and support for children at risk of school exclusion. Funding was extended for a third year, to July 2027.
- Plans to establish local diversion options for children with motoring offences have not yet been finalised. 12% of First-Time Entrants in 2025/26 had motoring offences only.

Reducing over-representation of minority groups in the youth justice system:

- YJS performance data reporting is broken down by disadvantaged groups to check for any over-representation.
- Children in Care continue to be over-represented in our local youth justice system, in both local authorities. The proportion of Children in Care on the YJS caseload in March 2026 was 18.5% (compared to 22% in September 2025). Good practice in multi-agency work with Children in Care in the justice system has been identified and is being shared to ensure that it is applied consistently.

- Children from minority ethnicities are under-represented in the youth justice system in the Dorset Council area.
- In the second half of the past year, the percentage of children from minority ethnicities in the youth justice system in the BCP Council area has exceeded the percentage in the population (based on 2026 school census data). This data is being analysed and monitored to understand if this is a temporary issue and to look for possible reasons.
- Children from minority ethnicities are no longer over-represented among local children receiving custodial sentences.
- Amongst children remanded in custody, 1 out of 5 had mixed ethnicity and another had White European ethnicity.
- The DCYJS Head of Service represents DCYJS and other local YJS Managers in the Local Criminal Justice Boards' 'Wessex Disproportionality Group'.
- Dorset Police report annually to the YJS Partnership Board on the local use of stop and search and of strip search for children.
- Analysis of YJS Speech and Language assessments, explained later in this document, has improved understanding and responses to children's specific communication needs.
- Although girls are not over-represented in the justice system, they have specific needs which require tailored support. The YJS successfully ran its first 'Girls Group' in 2025, with more groups planned for 2026.

Improve education outcomes for children in the youth justice system:

- During the past year we have expanded the Discover You project at Upton Country Park. The project supports children and young people who are not in employment, education or training. Young people have worked on Maths and English qualifications, prepared for their CSCS card assessments, gained AQA awards, developed an allotment area, and worked on conservation.
- The use of AQA awards to certificate learning by young people during YJS activities has continued to develop, with the award moderation process now established.
- YJS Education Officers, and their line manager, now meet regularly with the allocated worker for all YJS children to review the child's education, training or employment and to take actions as required.
- The weekly ETE Allocations meeting enables a swift response to emerging issues, such as the risk of exclusion.

Earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs for children at risk of school exclusion:

- The 'Re-Engage' project offers speech and language assessments, alongside an offer of coaching and training for school staff, for children at risk of school exclusion, before they are known to the YJS.
- 152 children have been referred to the project, from 26 schools across both local authorities, by the end of March 2026.
- 90 assessments had been completed by March 2026. 78% of the children assessed were identified as having communication needs. These needs had not previously been identified.
- 29% were identified as having significant communication needs, such as Developmental Language Disorder.
- Support and training had been provided to 24 schools.
- 48 children had received additional coaching, delivered jointly with a member of the school's teaching staff.

Increasing public awareness and confidence in work undertaken by children to repair the harm from their offence

- The YJS Community Resources team have increased the number of local community projects and settings where children undertake activities to repair the harm from their offence
- We now work with 12 community organisations across the BCP Council and Dorset Council areas
- Over £2,000 was raised from the sales of items made by children as part of their repairing the harm work in 2025. Donations will be made to charities and organisations to benefit our communities, directed when possible by the victims of the children's offences.
- Community projects and children have given positive feedback about their experience with our repairing the harm activities.

4.2 Performance

DCYJS was inspected in late 2022 under the HMI Probation 'Full Joint Inspection' framework. The inspection report was published in January 2023, rating the service as 'Good'. The inspection report can be found at this link: [A joint inspection of youth offending services in Dorset \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/jipr/reports/2023/joint-inspection-of-youth-offending-services-in-dorset/).

DCYJS was also inspected in February 2025 as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on 'Out of Court Disposals'. The inspection report, published in October 2025, highlighted good practice in Dorset in respect of partnership work between Dorset Police and DCYJS, local evaluation of Out of Court Disposal, work to engage victims, and support for children's speech, language and communication needs.

The three primary key performance indicators for youth justice partnerships are:

- The rate of first time entrants to the criminal justice system.
- The rate and frequency of reoffending by children in the criminal justice system.
- The use of custodial sentences.

The YJB publish quarterly performance data for youth justice services, compiled nationally, in relation to these three indicators. The information reported below is drawn from the data published in March 2026 for the period ending December 2025.

First Time Entrants

A 'First-Time Entrant' is a child receiving a formal criminal justice outcome for the first time. A Youth Caution, a Youth Conditional Caution or a court outcome all count as a formal criminal justice outcome.

Dorset Police and DCYJS look for opportunities to divert children from the justice system, by using informal justice outcomes, which do not make the child a First-Time Entrant. It is recognised that receiving a formal justice outcome is in itself detrimental for children.

Dorset Police, DCYJS and other children's services work closely together to decide the appropriate outcome for a child who has committed a criminal offence. Whenever possible we seek to use an informal option which does not criminalise the child.

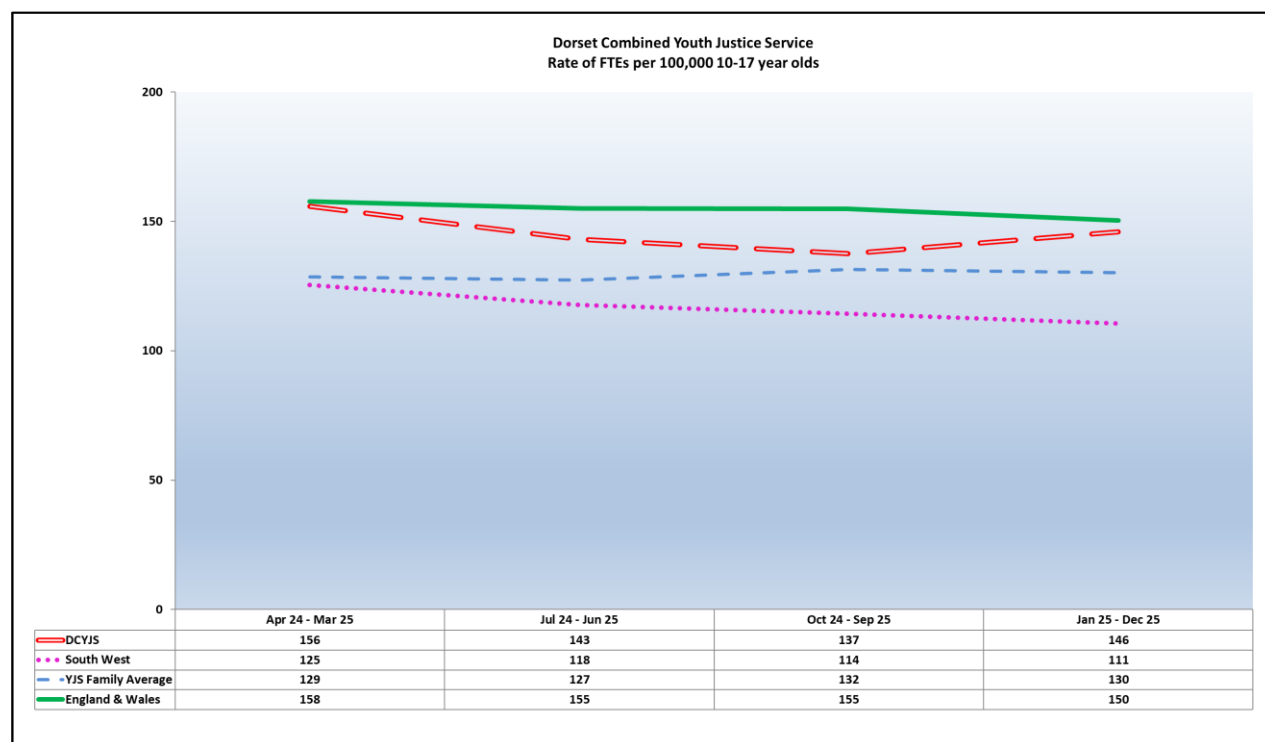
HMI Probation published an Effective Practice Guide in October 2025, as part of their thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals. The Effective Practice Guide identified our local joint-decision making arrangements as an example of good practice. The Guide stated that the Dorset decision-making model "*provided a consistent, auditable, and child-centred approach to OoCDs, balancing the needs of the child, the victim, and public safety*".

National Performance Data

National performance data for First-Time Entrants is drawn from the YJB's uploads of information from YJS case management systems.

In the past, DCYJS had a noticeably higher rate of First-Time Entrants than the national and regional averages. In recent years there has been a consistent and sustained reduction in local First Time Entrants, with DCYJS now having a lower rate than the national average.

The following chart shows the last four quarters of national First-Time Entrants data, with a consistent rate of around 145 First-Time Entrants per 100,000 10-17 year-olds. This compares to a rate of 234 First-Time Entrants per 100,000 10-17 year-olds in the year to December 2022.



Local Performance Data

DCYJS tracks data on its own case management system to monitor the number and characteristics of children entering the justice system. Local data shows a significant reduction in the number of children entering the justice system compared to the year before the pandemic:

Year	BCP First Time Entrants	Dorset First Time Entrants	Total DCYJS First Time Entrants	% Difference from previous year
2019-20	104	78	182	
2020-21	78	48	126	-30.8%
2021-22	77	47	124	-1.6%
2022-23	79	39	118	-4.8%
2023-24	52	56	108	-8.5%
2024-25	58	49	107	-0.9%
2025-26	56	48	104	-2.8%

The overall trend of reducing numbers of First-Time Entrants continued in 2025/26, though there may be limited scope for further reductions.

There was a notable reduction in First-Time Entrants in BCP in 2023-24, which has been sustained since then.

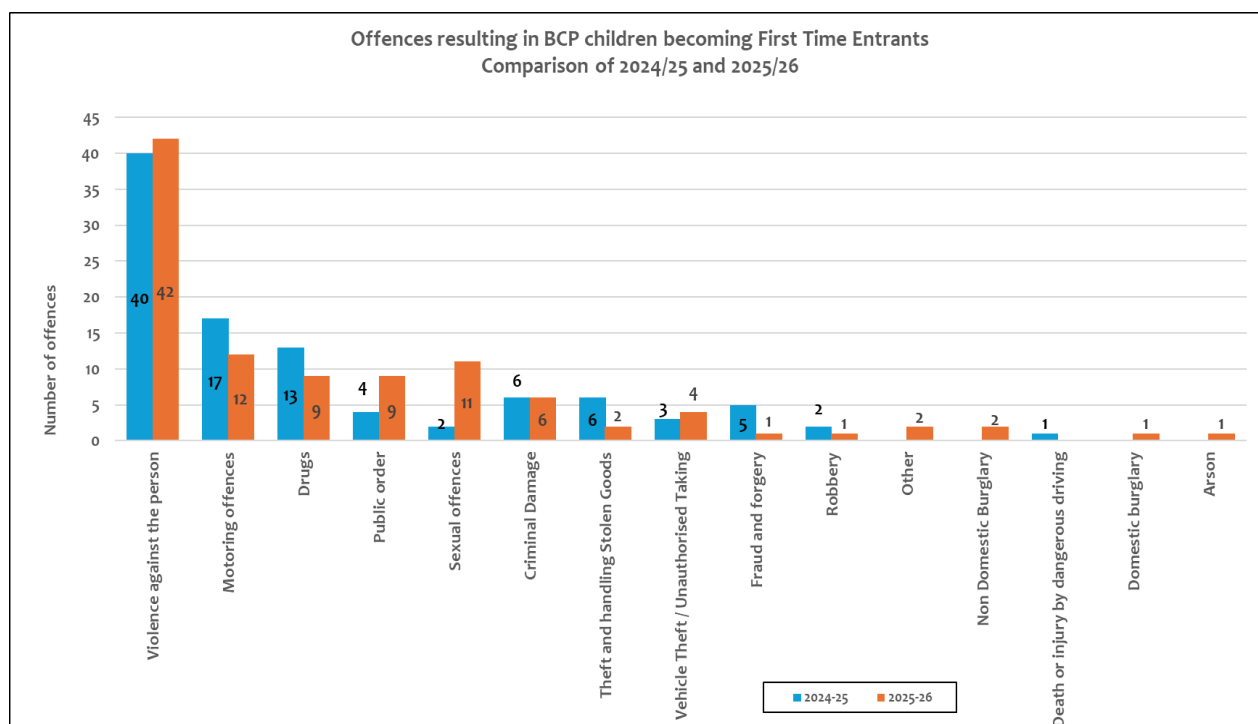
The increase in Dorset First-Time Entrants in 2023-24 reflected delays in the previous year in dealing with some older offences. Numbers of First-Time Entrants have been stable in Dorset since a significant reduction in 2020/21.

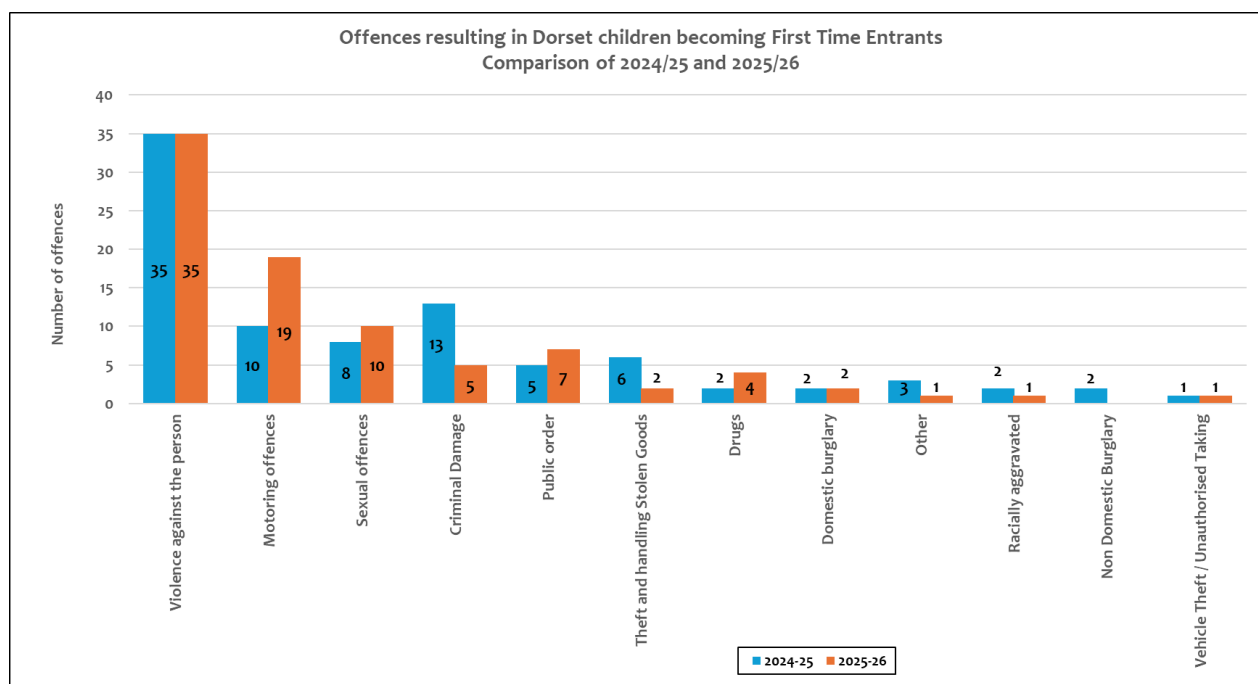
Offences Leading to Children Entering the Justice System

Decisions about whether to offer a diversion option, instead of a caution or court appearance, depend to some extent on the type of offence committed by the child.

If a child is found in possession of a weapon they will receive a formal outcome in almost every instance, unless significantly exceptional circumstances apply. The new Knife Crime Guidance which applies from April 2026 requires almost all children with a knife possession offence to receive either a Youth Conditional Caution or a court outcome. In practice this does not represent a significant change of policy in Dorset, whereas some other areas have been using diversion options for knife offences. Those areas are likely to see an increase in their First-Time Entrants rate from April 2026.

The following charts shows the offences which led to children in each local authority becoming First-Time Entrants during the past year. The number of offences exceeds the number of children because some children committed multiple offences.





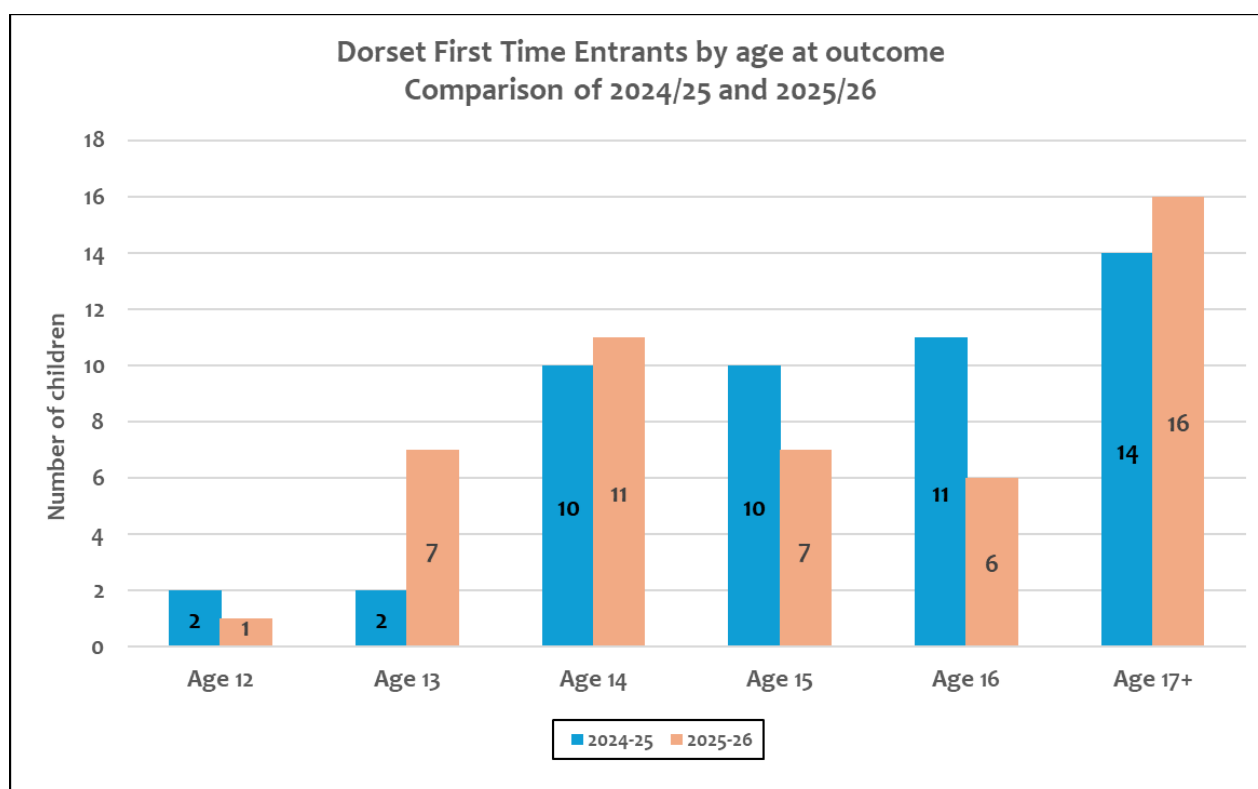
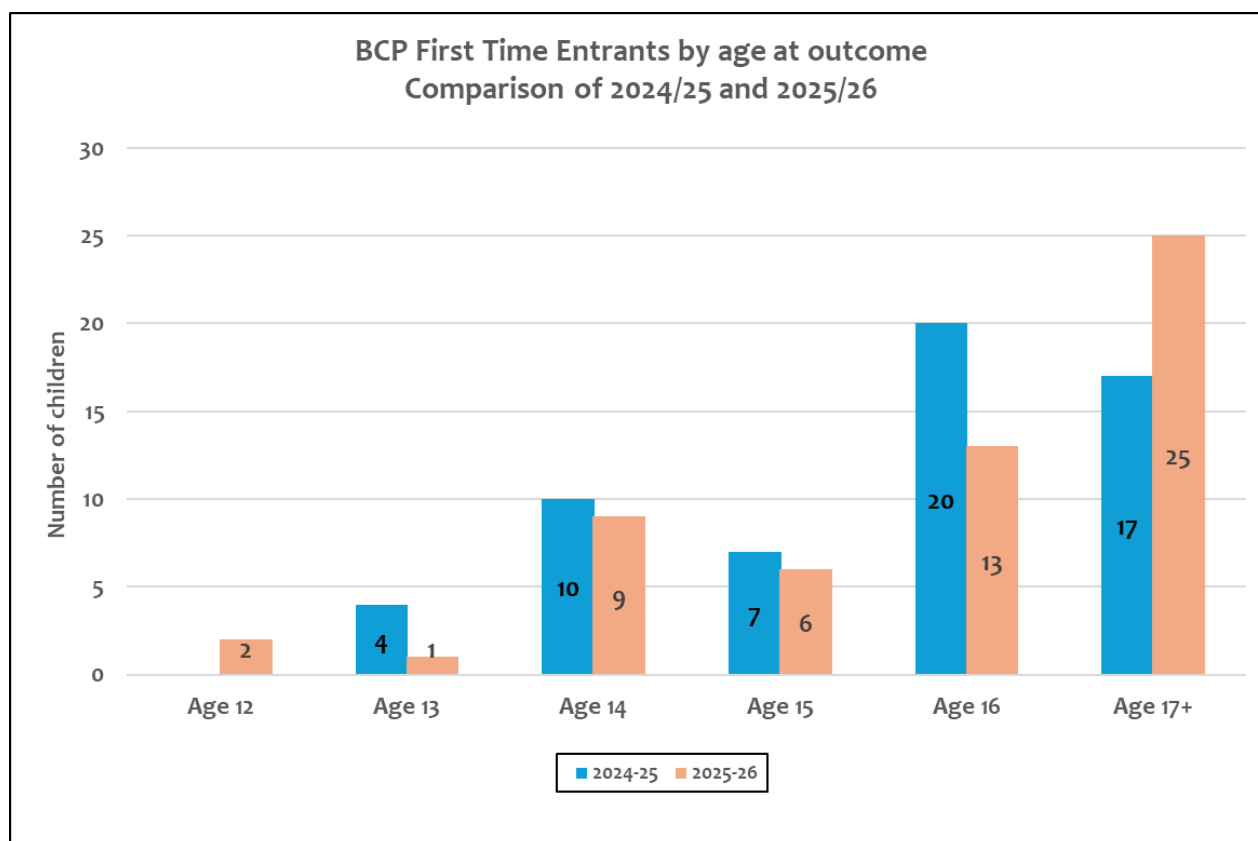
Offences involving possession or use of a weapon, or assaults on emergency workers, are included in the 'Violence against the Person' category and in almost all cases result in a caution or court disposal. Diversion options for these offence types are only considered in exceptional circumstances. The numbers of Violence against the Person offences leading to children becoming First-Time Entrants has remained stable in both local authorities over the past two years, after a notable reduction compared to 2023/24.

There was an increase in sexual offences in 2025/26. 6 children committed a total of 21 offences across both local authorities. 3 of the children committed contact sexual offences, the other 3 committed offences involving indecent images.

Some children are counted as entering the justice system for motoring offences which result in a court appearance for points to be added to the young person's driver's licence. DCYJS and Dorset Police are working locally and regionally, with support from the Youth Justice Board, to agree diversion options for young people with motoring offences.

Age of Children Entering the Justice System

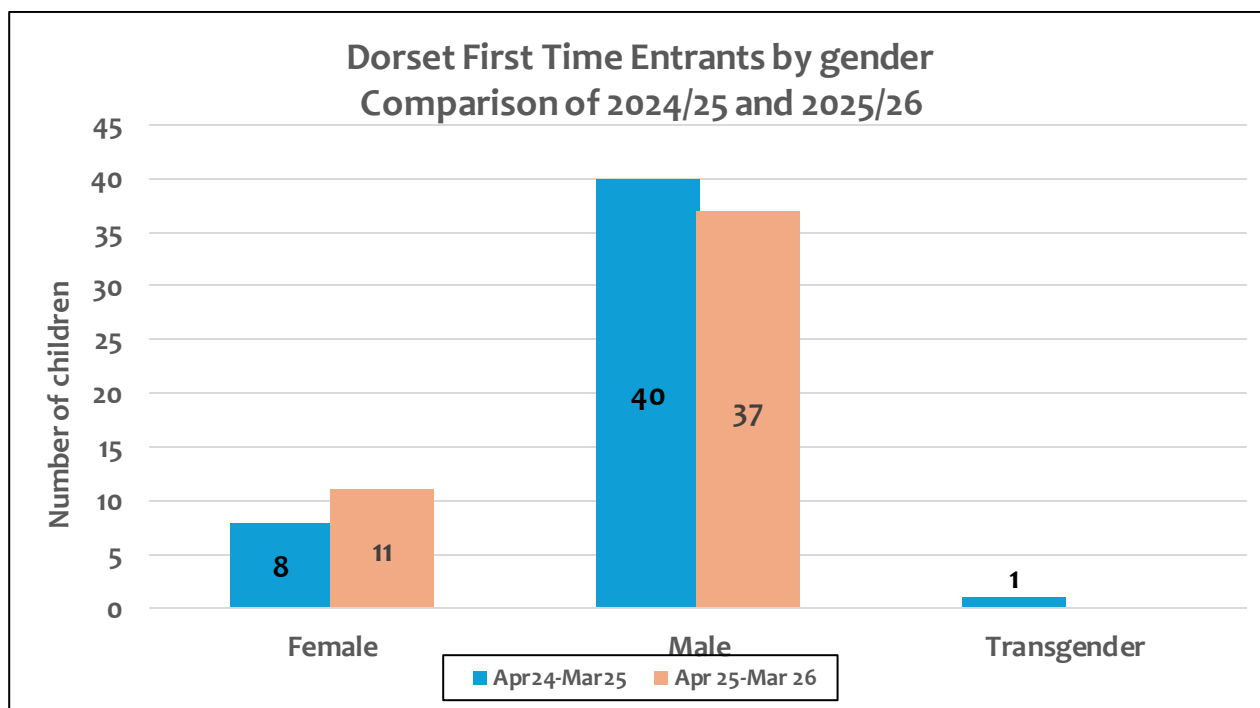
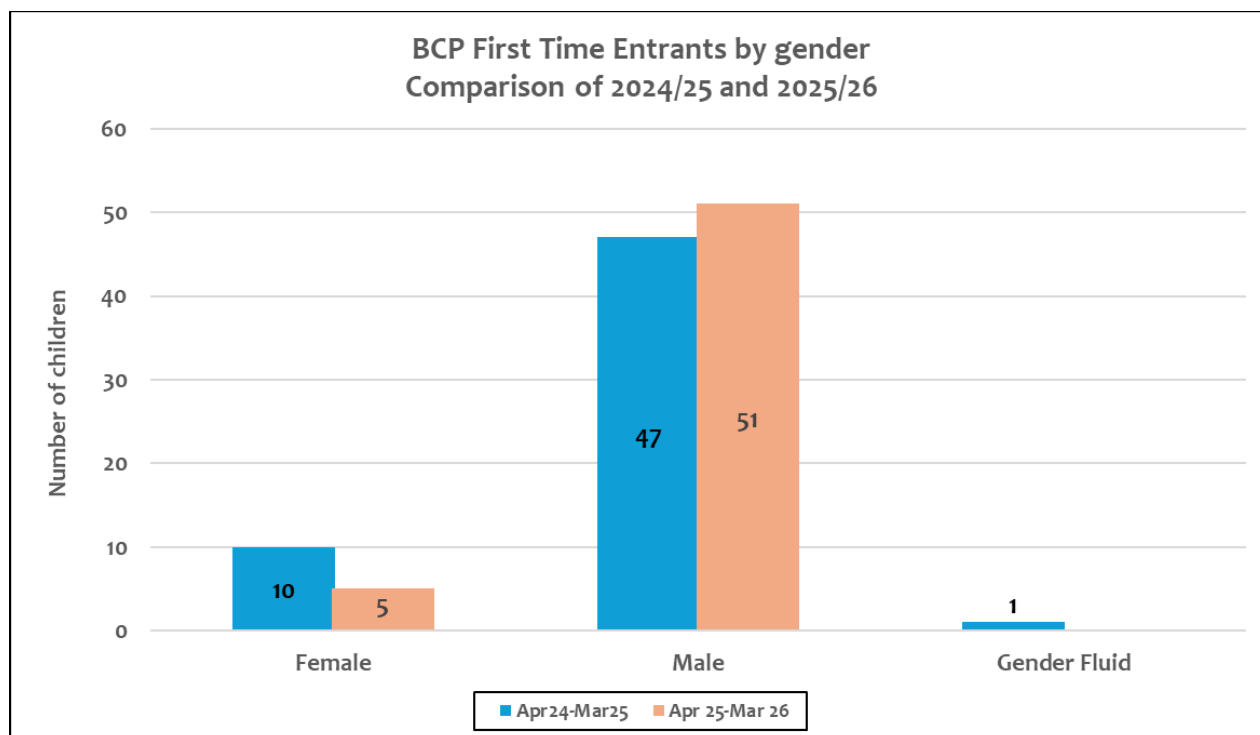
The following charts show the ages of First-Time Entrants in each local authority in the past two years. There has been a shift in recent years in that the age of First-Time Entrants in the BCP Council area has been rising, so that 68% of BCP First-Time Entrants are now aged 16 or 17. Conversely, the age for First-Time Entrants in Dorset has been falling, so that 46% are aged 16 or 17, and 40% are aged 14 or under.



Previous analysis has shown that children who enter the justice system before the age of 14 are likely to have complex needs and may go on to commit further, more serious offences. During 2024-25, a total of 8 children under the age of 14 entered the justice system across our two local authorities. This year, 2025-26, saw a total of 11 children under the age of 14 who entered the justice system, with a notable increase in young First-Time Entrants in the Dorset Council area.

Gender of Children Entering the Justice System

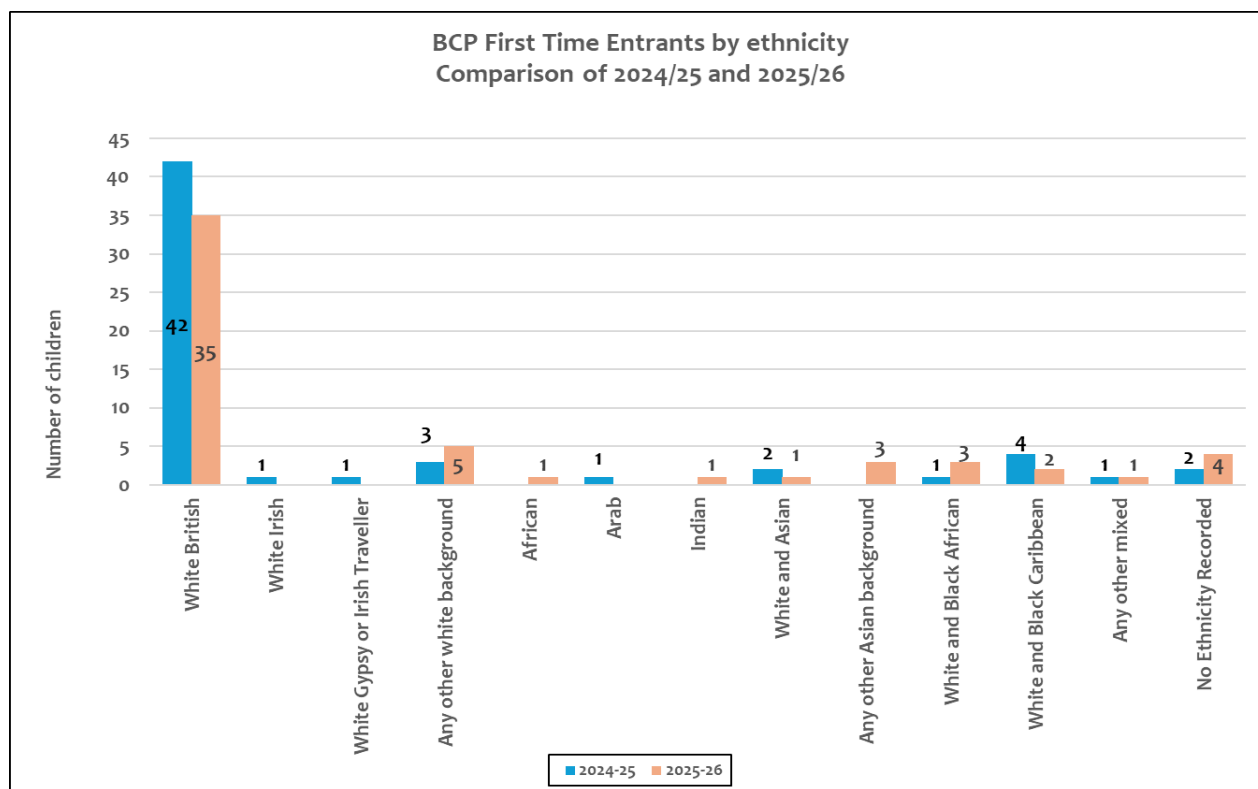
The following charts show the gender of First-Time Entrants in each local authority over the past two years.



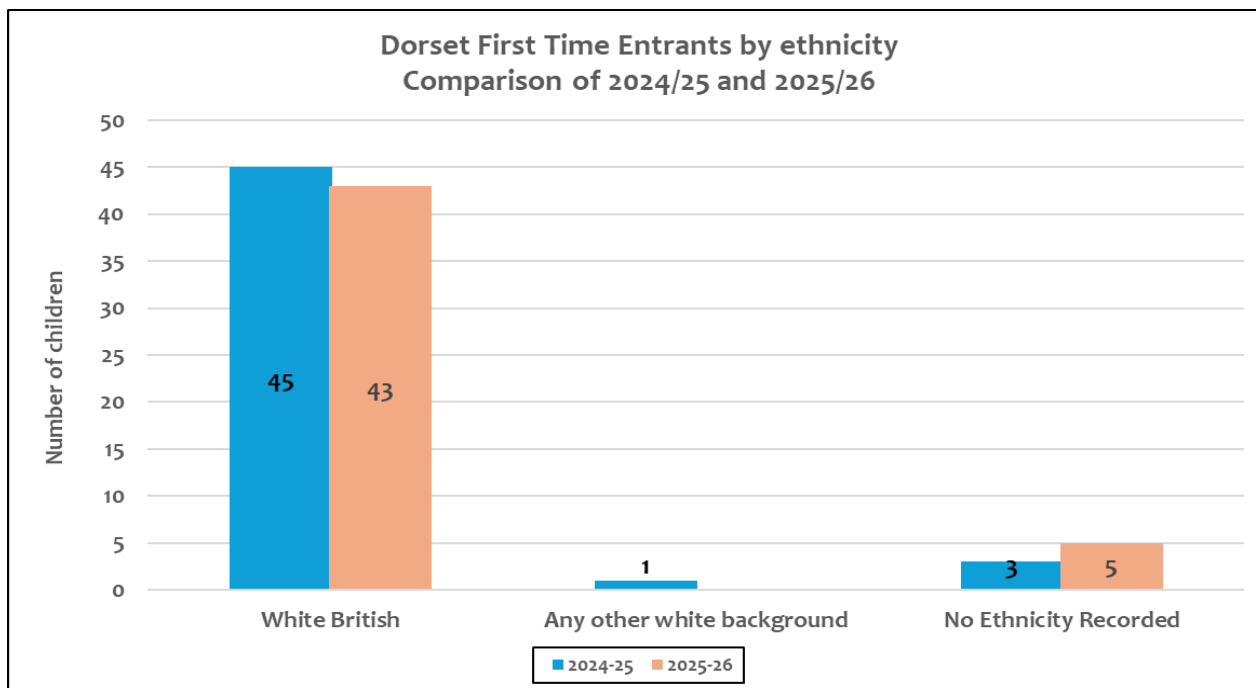
The proportion of girls on the YJS caseload is usually around 18-20%. The low numbers of First-Time Entrants mean that small shifts in numbers can disproportionately affect the percentage figures. The charts show that there has been a drop in the numbers and proportion of girls among BCP Council First-Time Entrants, making up 9% of the total in the past year. There has been an increase in the numbers and proportion of girls among Dorset Council First-Time Entrants, making up 23% of the total in the past year.

Ethnicity of Children Entering the Justice System

The following charts show the recorded ethnicity of children entering the justice system. Ethnicity recording is taken from the child's self-definition. In some instances the YJS has no contact with the child, such as when a child is taken to court for a motoring offence and receives a fine or a discharge. In this situation, ethnicity is based either on information from the Police or is described as No Ethnicity Recorded.



The proportion of First-Time Entrants with Black, Asian or mixed ethnicity has risen in the BCP Council area from 16% in 2024/25 to 21% in 2025/26, an increase from 8 to 11 children. Data from the January 2026 school census shows that 17.8% of BCP children are from 'non-white backgrounds'. There is therefore now a slight over-representation of these children amongst those entering the justice system. Section 6.1 of this document provides more analysis of the ethnicity of children on the YJS caseload.



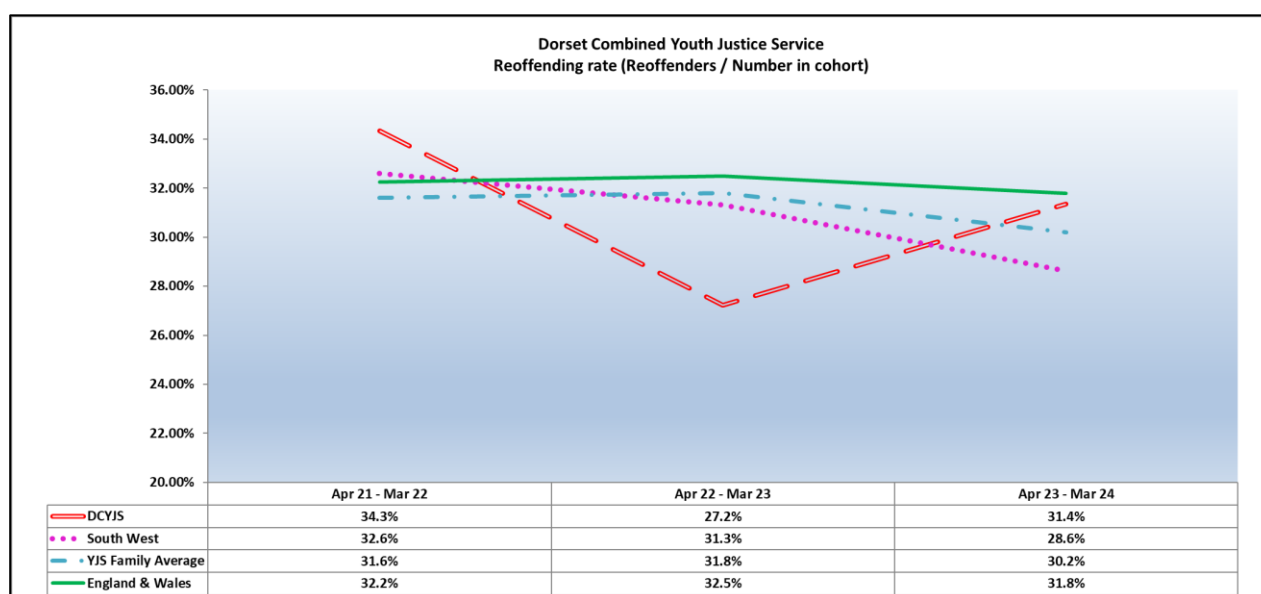
In the Dorset Council area, the January 2026 school census shows that 6.3% of children are from 'non-white backgrounds'. This compares to 100% of Dorset First-Time Entrants either identifying as White British or having No Ethnicity Recorded.

Rate of Proven Reoffending

National re-offending data is published in two formats: the 'binary' rate shows the proportion of children in the cohort who go on to be convicted for subsequent offences in the 12 months after their previous justice outcome; the 'frequency' rate shows the average number of offences per reoffender.

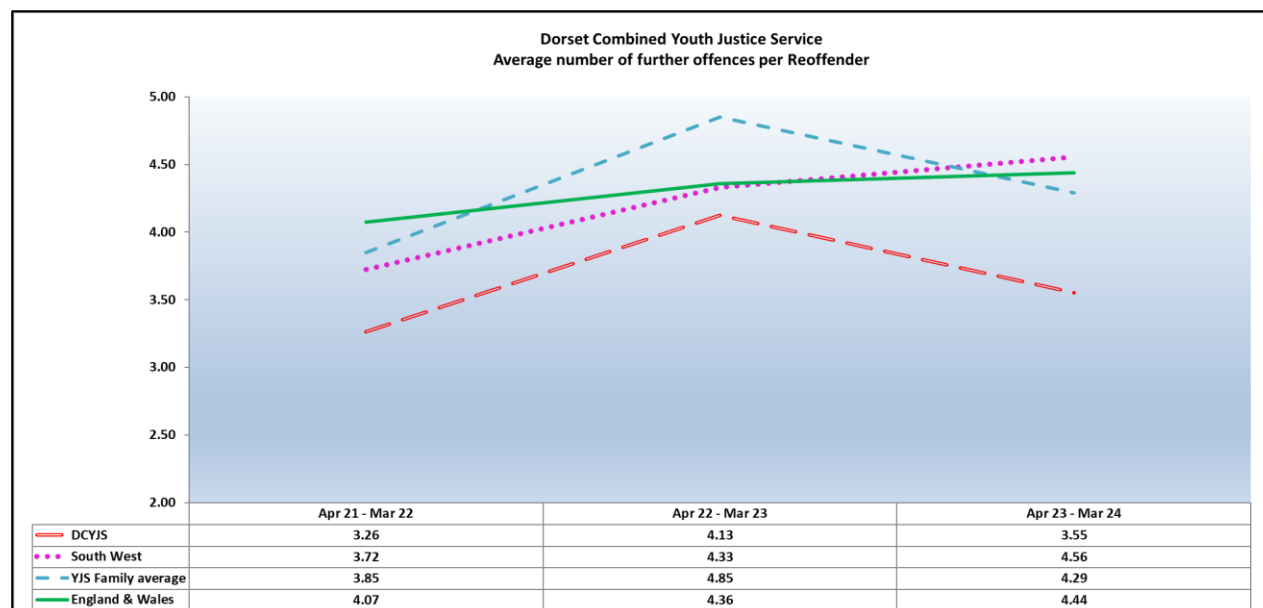
Reoffending data is necessarily delayed in order to allow time to see if the child is reconvicted and for that later outcome to be recorded. The following data therefore relates to children with whom the service worked up to March 2024.

Reoffending rate (Reoffenders/Number in cohort)

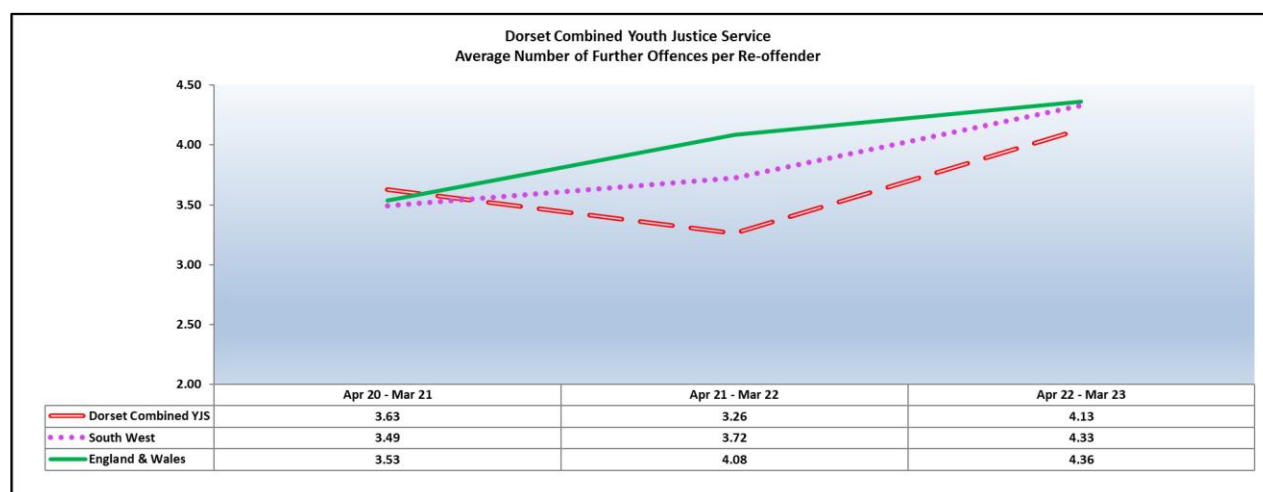


The binary reoffending rate for the most recent year, to March 2024, shows an increase on the previous year, reflecting the fluctuations in this data measure. DCYJS performance sits between the regional, national and 'YJS Family' averages.

Reoffences/Reoffenders

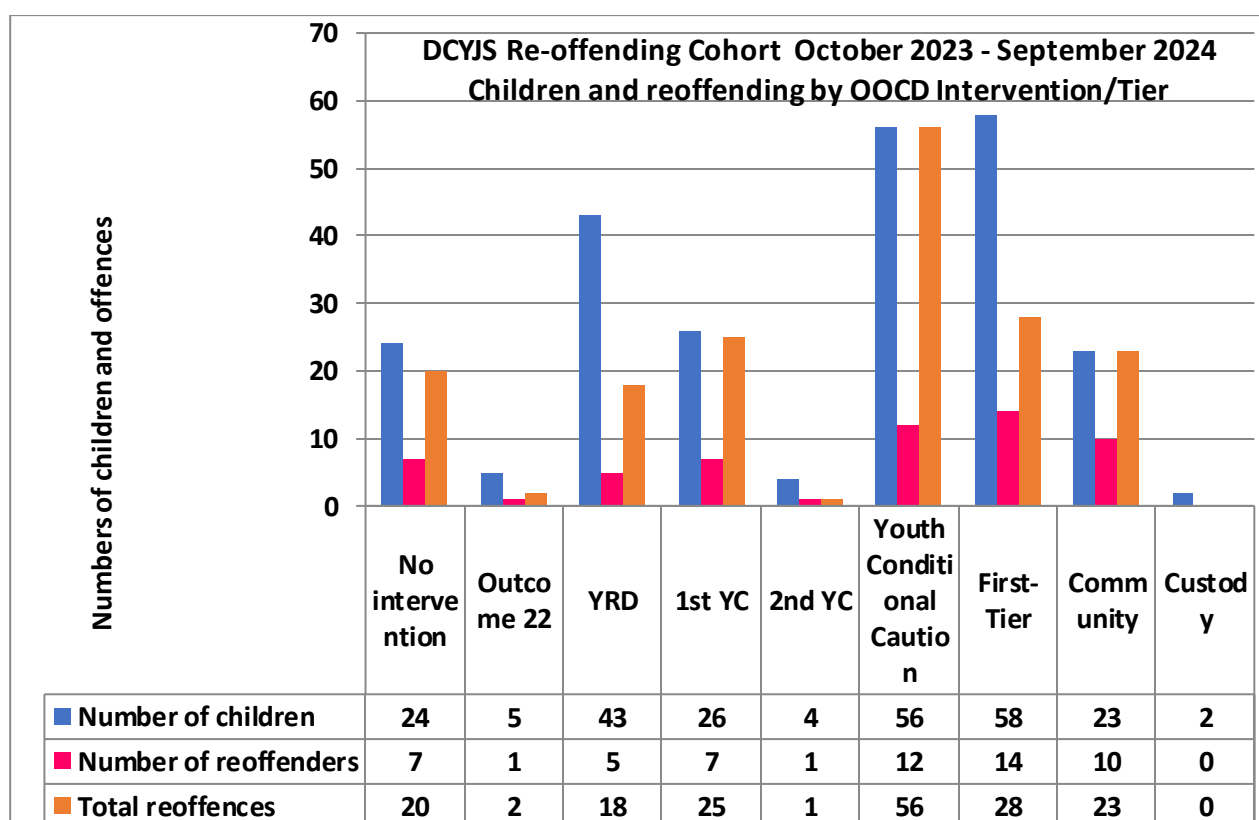
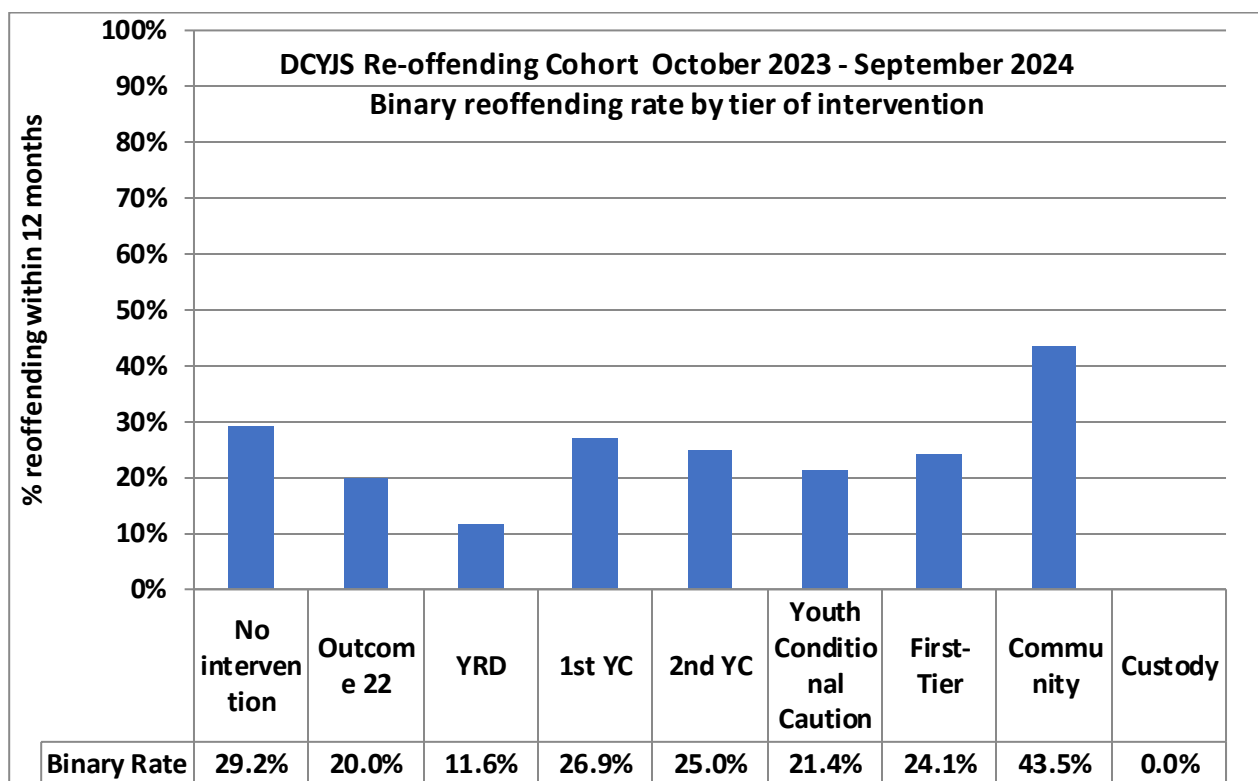


There has been a reduction in the average number of offences per reoffender. DCYJS has remains below the regional, national and YJS Family averages for this measure.



Local data, stored on the DCYJS case management system, can also be scrutinised to show information about reoffending. Our latest analysis, in March 2026, looked at children on the DCYJS caseload between October 2023 and September 2024, giving us a more detailed understanding of reoffending by local children and showing outcomes for children who have had more recent contact with the justice system.

Analysis of reoffending by disposal type, on the following charts, shows that informal, diversion options have the lowest rate of reoffending (nb 'Outcome 22' is a police recording code, showing that no further action was taken but the child received an intervention to prevent future offending; 'YRD' refers to a Youth Restorative Disposal, the local name for a Community Resolution, which is also known as Outcome 8). It should be noted, however, that diversion options may be more likely for children with a lower risk of reoffending.



Local reoffending data in March 2026 also shows that:

- 10-14 year-olds are more likely to reoffend than other age groups. The rate of reoffending drops each year as children get older.
- Boys are more likely to reoffend than girls (26.9% of boys reoffended, compared to 7.5% of girls).

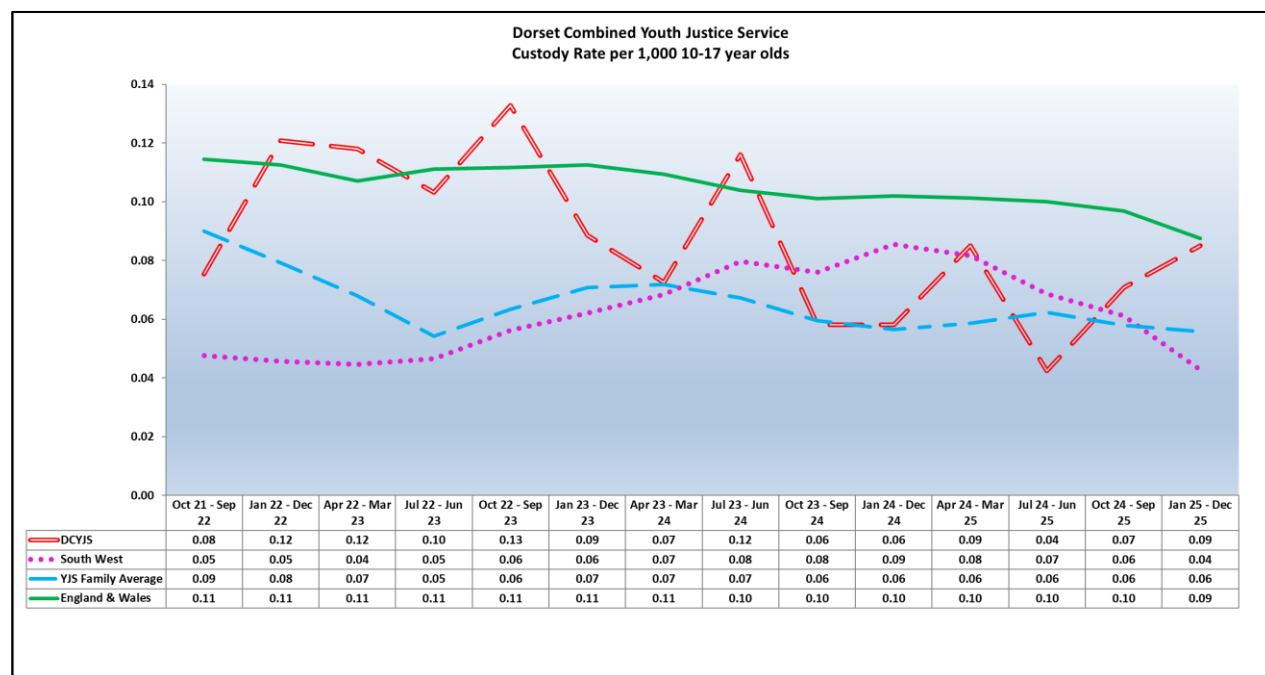
- Although fewer girls reoffend, the average number of further offences per reoffender is higher for girls (5.67 further offences) than for boys (2.89 further offences)
- Black and mixed heritage children show a lower reoffending rate and frequency than white children, but the numbers of black and mixed heritage children are low, meaning each child has a greater impact on the percentage rates.
- Children in the Dorset Council area had a higher reoffending rate and frequency than children in the BCP Council area.
- Children who were currently or previously in care were more likely to reoffend (44%) than children who had never been in care (19%).
- Children who committed criminal damage, non-dwelling burglary, robbery, or theft offences had higher rates of reoffending than children who committed other types of offence.
- Children who committed violence against the person offences had the lowest rates of reoffending amongst offence types that saw further offending
- 39% of reoffenders committed less serious further offences, 28% committed offences of the same seriousness and 33% committed more serious offences.

Analysis of local reoffending data helps the YJS to focus its work and to identify groups who may need additional attention.

Use of Custodial Sentences

DCYJS continues to see low numbers of children sentenced to custody.

The latest national data is copied below. The context of this data is a large reduction over recent years in the number of children in custody in England and Wales. This means that small changes in numbers can have a noticeable effect on the local and national rates.



The above chart shows the latest available national data. Our own YJS data shows that a total of 7 children and young people received custodial sentences during 2025/26 (5 from BCP Council, 2 from Dorset Council).

The trauma-informed approach to youth justice work encourages us to ask “what happened to you?” rather than “what’s wrong with you?”. In this context, it is interesting to look at some of the common experiences of these 7 children and young people, illustrated in the following table.

Characteristics of children sentenced to custody during 2025/26

Gender	Ethnicity	Age at sentence	Remand in custody pre-sentence	Age at 1 st justice disposal	Number of past justice disposals	Social care status pre-sentence	CE status	SLCN	SEND status	Perm Exclusion	CAMHS contact pre-sentence	Substance use	Local authority
M	White British	18	Y	15	5	CiC	Sig	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	Dorset
M	White British	17	N	14	8	CiC	Sig	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	Dorset
M	White British	17	Y	14	6	CP	Sig	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	BCP
M	White British	17	N	13	5	CiC	Sig	Y	SEN support	Y	N	Y	BCP
M	White British	15	N	11	10	CP	Sig	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	BCP
M	White British	18	Y	12	5	CiC	Sig	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	BCP
M	White Other	18	Y	14	1	CiC	Mod	Y	EHCP	Y	Y	Y	BCP

CE = Child Exploitation

SLCN = Speech, Language and Communication Needs

SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

CAMHS = Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

CiC – Child in Care

CP = Child Protection

EHCP = Education, Health and Care Plan

This table shows clearly that children receiving custodial sentences are boys who have experienced harm in their earlier lives, who have special educational needs and communication needs, leading to permanent exclusion from school, mental health difficulties, substance use, experiencing harm outside the home and recurring youth justice involvement from a young age. The combination of multiple disadvantages, alongside the absence of protective factors, increases the chances of children experiencing negative outcomes such as spending time in custody. This information also helps the YJS and its partners to direct their work and resources for children at earlier stages of YJS involvement, and perhaps before YJS involvement.

[Section 6.1](#) of this document provides further analysis of the over-representation of some groups of children in the local youth justice system, and actions being taken.

New Youth Justice Key Performance Indicators

The Youth Justice Board introduced a new set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be collected from April 2023. The following measures are reported:

- Accommodation – the percentage of children in suitable accommodation.
- Education, training and employment (ETE) – the percentage of children attending a suitable ETE arrangement.
- SEND – the percentage of children with SEND who are in suitable ETE with a current, formal learning plan in place.
- Mental healthcare and emotional wellbeing – the percentage of children identified as needing an intervention to improve their mental health or emotional wellbeing and the percentage being offered and attending interventions.
- Substance Use – the percentage of children identified as needing an intervention to address substance misuse and the percentage being offered and attending interventions.
- Out of Court Disposals – the percentage of out of court disposals that are completed or not completed.
- Management Board attendance – the attendance of senior representatives from partner agencies and if partners contribute data from their services to identify ethnic and racial disproportionality.

- Wider services – the percentage of YJS children who are currently on an Early Help plan, on a Child Protection Plan, classified as a Child in Need or a Child in Care.
- Serious Violence – the rates of children convicted for a serious violence offence on the YJS caseload.
- Victims – the percentage of victims who consent to be contacted by the YJS; of those, the percentage who are engaged with about restorative justice opportunities, asked their views prior to out of court disposal decision-making and planning for statutory court orders, provided with information about the progress of the child's case (when requested) and provided with information on appropriate support services (when requested).

The new KPIs have required significant additional work to adapt recording systems and to adjust recording practices. The consistency, accuracy and usefulness of this data remains a work in progress. The YJB stated in March 2025 that the data collected nationally in 2023/24 and 2024/25 is 'low quality and cannot be used for analysis, reporting, and decision-making'. The data from 2025/26 remains problematic in respect of accuracy, consistency and usefulness. It is hoped that usable data will eventually become available.

4.3 Risks and issues

Like other youth justice services, DCYJS operates in a context of system challenges and resource pressures.

Current issues and future risks being faced by DCYJS include the following:

Issue/risk facing DCYJS	Actions being taken in response
Resource pressures – YJ Grant frozen for 4 years to 2029, local authority contributions frozen, costs rising.	Seek staffing reductions when posts become vacant. Look for savings on non-staffing budgets. Seek additional income sources.
Adverse changes to YJB data recording requirements and removal of YJB 'YDS' data reports. Case management system changes which lead to reduced system agility and increased cost.	Use links with the YJB to promote better decision-making on data recording and reporting. Review system procurement. Implement local mitigations to protect against deficits caused by YJB and supplier decisions.
Flawed YJB instructions regarding the use of national assessment tools, conflicting guidance on risk and safety between the two tools, no ability to pull assessments through from one assessment tool to the other.	Decide local approach to selection of which assessment tool to use. Implement local guidance for consistency and defensibility of risk and safety assessments. Stick with same assessment tool for the child rather than swapping when justice disposal changes.
Children on bail/RUI during lengthy police investigations for complex offences, such as weapon offences and sexual offences.	Use Serious Violence Duty funding to add resources, to enable work with children during the investigation phase for weapon, violent or sexual offences. Use Bridges project to complete speech and language assessments alongside this work.
White Paper on Youth Justice Reforms leads to setbacks on the progress made in youth justice in recent years.	Support and contribute to advice to ministers from the Association of YOT Managers. Make early plans for implementation of reforms, working with local partners in criminal justice and children's services.

5 Plans for the year ahead

5.1 'Child First' practice

DCYJS applies 'Child First' practice principles to underpin its work. The Child First approach is embedded in the YJB national guidance documents 'Standards for Children in the Youth Justice System' and 'Case Management Guidance'. These documents direct the work of youth justice services.

The Child First approach is built on evidence demonstrating its effectiveness to prevent offending by children who are at risk of entering the justice system and to reduce offending by the small number of children who do enter the youth justice system. The research evidence is summarised in this document: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/subjects/social-policy-studies/research/child-first-justice/>.

DCYJS supports these principles and promotes them in its own work and in its interactions with local partners in children's services and the youth justice system.

The Child First approach has four tenets, listed below.

The ABCD of Child First practice	Examples of how DCYJS implements this in our work
As children: recognise how children are developmentally different from adults and require different support.	<i>DCYJS interactions with children are adapted to each child, based on the child's developmental stage and communication needs, using trauma formulations and Speech and Language assessments.</i>
Building pro-social identity: promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop a pro-social identity, focusing on positive child outcomes rather than just trying to manage offending.	<i>During the past year, the DCYJS Activities Coordinator has helped the service to expand the range of positive activities available for children in the YJS and to build links with community organisations. DCYJS provides the 'Discover You' project at Upton Country Park, aimed at building children's skills, confidence and employability. The DCYJS 'Repairing the Harm' team has increased the number of community projects, such as the Big Yellow Bus Garden Project in Shillingstone, for children to feel valued for making a positive contribution to their community. One child said "It was fun to build something I thought I wouldn't be able to build".</i>
Collaborating with children: involve children meaningfully to encourage their investment, engagement and social inclusion.	<i>During the past year, the team has been working on how to involve the child meaningfully in shaping the plan for our work with them. A new Girls Group was started in 2025, designed with the girls who attended the group. Children identified that the YJS rooms at the East Howe Community Centre needed an overhaul. YJS workers and children jointly designed and decorated the rooms to create a child-friendly space.</i>
Diverting from stigma: promote supportive diversion from the criminal justice system where possible, or minimising stigma within	<i>The 'Turnaround' programme has helped us to embed the use of Outcome 22 to divert children from formal justice outcomes.</i>

it, as we know that stigma causes further offending	<i>YJS Speech and Language assessments are written on Dorset HealthCare documentation, without reference to the YJS, to avoid stigmatising the child.</i> <i>YJS AQA awards for children are registered under 'Dorset Understand Achieve Succeed'.</i>
---	--

The YJS is holding whole service workshops in April 2026 to review our progress in implementing Child First practice and to agree our next steps.

Appraisals objectives for YJS practitioners and managers for 2026/27 will be structured around the four tenets of Child First practice, to help to further embed these principles in our day-to-day work.

One of this Plan's strategic priorities for 2026/27 is to enhance Child First practice in our YJS partnership.

Voice of the child

DCYJS works collaboratively with children to hear their voice during their contact with our service. Case records are addressed to the child and quote their words, to ensure the child's voice is prominent.

The team's Speech and Language Therapists offer assessments of each child's communication needs, to help YJS workers to the child's voice and to adapt their work. The Speech and Language Therapists also advise colleagues in the YJS about how to work with each child.

'Talking Mats' are one of the resources which the Speech and Language team provides for YJS colleagues. Below is an example of a Talking Mat for good sleep habits:



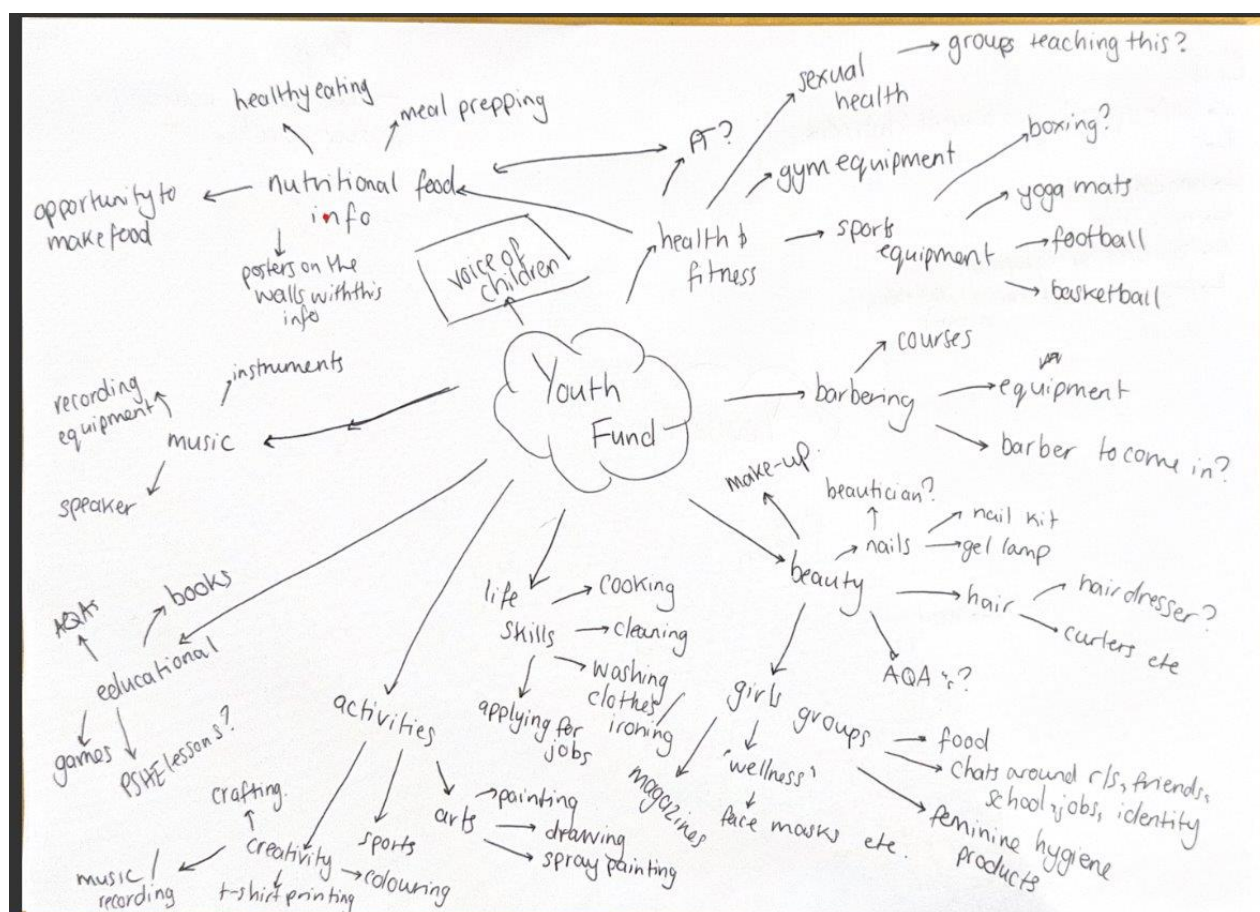
The following extracts from case records show how the use of Talking Mats can help to elicit information and reflections from children:

We discussed your sleep – you reported that you always have problems sleeping and often wake up before your alarm. You completed a good sleeping habits talking mat – sorting the options between 'I do this', 'I don't do this', 'sometimes/not sure' and 'I can try'. A photo of this completed talking mat is saved in your file. You were quite willing to put a few things in the I can try section – such as physical activity and avoiding blue light in the evening. It seemed that you would be happy to give these things a try to help your sleep. We gave you a sleep hygiene tips handout which you took home with you.

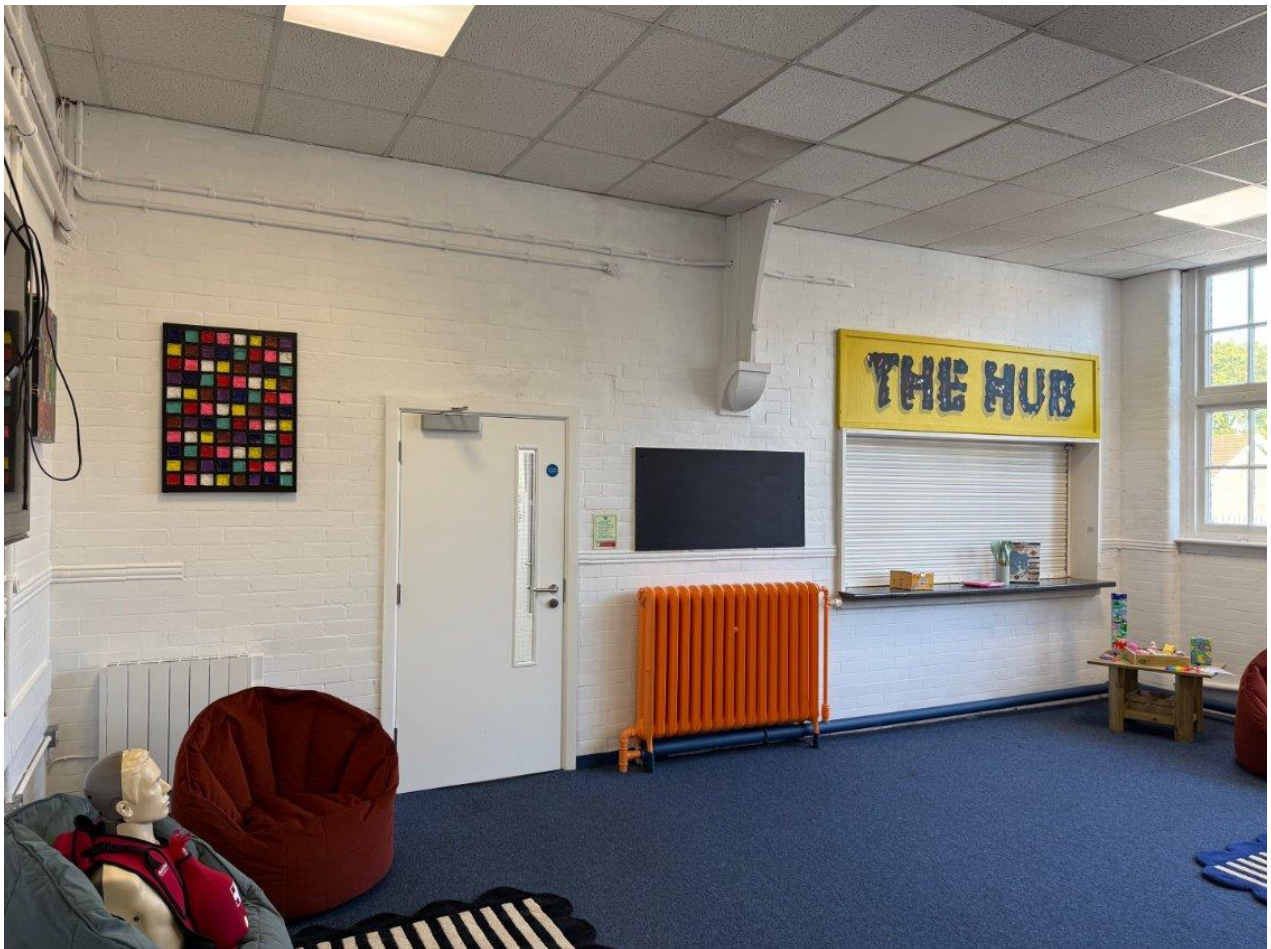
I'd brought out a Talking Mat about communication, and I showed you the different cards and asked if you would give it a go. You didn't want to hold the cards yourself and said for me to read them out which I did. Many of the cards you said you found easy i.e. Talking to family, Remembering things and Talking to a teacher. You said you were able to ask questions at Innovate if you didn't understand something. The things you said were more difficult were: Telling someone how I feel, understanding how other people are feeling, and paying attention for longer periods of time.

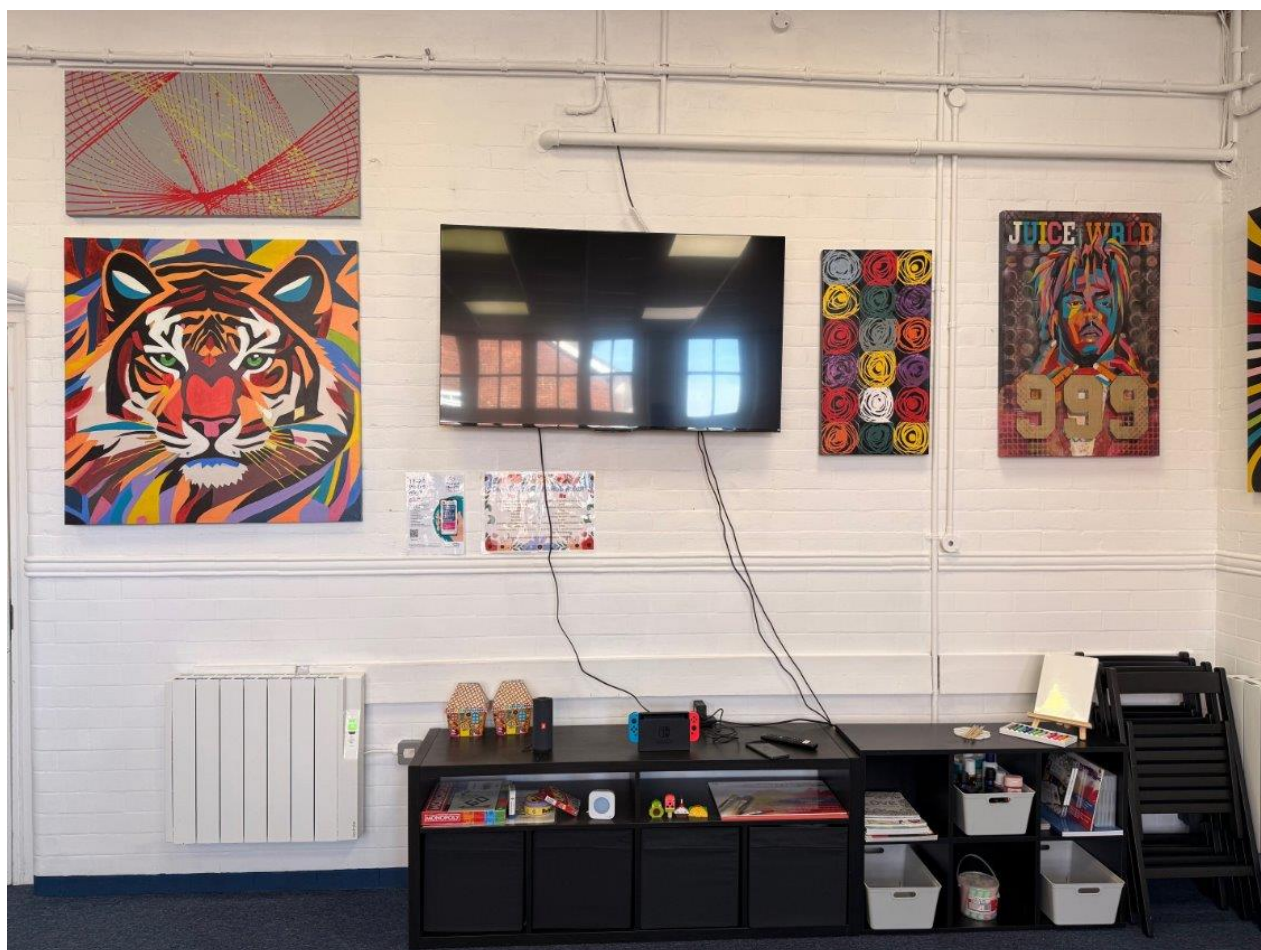
Over the past year, the YJS has also been developing its collaboration with children to design our projects and spaces. These developments will be continued in 2026/27.

Two team members set up a new Girls Group, starting with a joint session with the girls to plan the group. This image captures the ideas generated by the girls, which formed the basis of the group's sessions:



Children working with the YJS also helped us to transform one of our bases into a welcoming space for children, illustrated in these 'before and after' pictures:





As well as hearing the child's voice in the team's day to day practice, YJS workers also gather the views of children and other service users about their experience of the service's work.

Spontaneous comments from service users about their experience of our service are recorded and analysed, using a data report from our case management system.

Examples of recent comments from service users include:

YJ involvement is obviously not something we envisaged. When X was first arrested and referred to his worker, L, we were in a very bad place. He was out all the time, using Ketamine regularly, and it was all getting rapidly worse. He was becoming very unwell. To start with, the benefits of L's involvement were probably limited because of X's addiction: it was stronger than anything else. However, despite this L quickly built a very good rapport with X from her very first visit. She is approachable, easy to understand, and is excellent at presenting information in a way that is simplified but not at all patronising. X knew he had to see her, and he understood the process well thanks to her explanations. Things ramped up when our house was raided by police at 5am one day and X was taken into custody. L was at the end of the phone at 7:30am to explain things to me and calm me down! This was the day X stopped taking drugs - the day in custody was much-needed and perhaps even life-saving, such was his Ketamine use. So L's involvement was thankfully extended. She was there for X, but her involvement benefited me too. I think her major strength is communication, being approachable (informal clothes, demeanour and language) but with a steely focus on the facts and the legal process. A fine balance! She is compassionate, kind, fair, straight-talking and genuinely wants the best for the kids she works with. Ongoing, if we enter hard times again, L is the first person I would call for some advice. I hope I won't need to.

Today I made a second planter. I enjoyed making things with wood again and completed it thoroughly and with care. I enjoyed talking with A about things and working physically with my hands.

Another YJS have thanked us for a plan that was "out of the box" and gave something different for them to focus on. They liked how it clearly matched with the child's strengths and likes, and the plan had been tailored to using these strengths for things like reparation but also building on positive activities.

Built a flower box for the school. I learned how to use a drill and had a lot of fun. Making me change my mind and I want do woodwork for the future.

Each year the YJS undertakes a case audit on a priority area of YJS work. In 2025 the audit focused on our work with children in care. As part of the audit, we talked with some of the children in the audit sample.

When asked about joint work by YJS workers and social workers, one child commented that:

They work together and try to help me as best they can...I feel like they are good people, most of them, who care and want to help. Good people in a bad system".

A YJS nurse spoke with another child to gain his views. She recorded their conversation as follows:
I didn't ask you for a rating, but you decided to give one. You rated 3/5 but you weren't sure why. I asked what people supporting you should do differently to make this a 4 or a 5 to which you said, "don't push your luck, that's a good score".

5.2 Resources and Services

The funding contributions to the DCYJS partnership budget in 2026/27 are listed in Appendix Two. Local authority contributions remain frozen at the 2022/23 levels. The Ministry of Justice announced in February 2026 that Youth Justice Grant allocation and the Turnaround Grant allocation for DCYJS for the following 3 years, to March 2029, will remain frozen at the allocations for 2025/26.

93% of the DCYJS budget is allocated to staffing costs. Annual cost of living pay awards add to the staffing costs each year, without a corresponding increase in partner contributions.

All local authority staff in DCYJS are employed by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Other DCYJS staff are employed by Dorset Police, the Probation Service (Dorset) and Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust. A DCYJS Structure Chart is included in Appendix

One, showing the posts provided through our partnership resources. DCYJS has a strong multi-agency and multi-disciplinary identity, meeting the staffing requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).

Like all public services, DCYJS operates in a context of reducing resources. Ensuring value for money and making best use of resources is a high priority for the service. The combined service, working across Dorset's local authorities since 2015, has enabled the YJS to maintain high practice standards while managing real terms budget reductions over that period.

One of this Plan's strategic priorities for 2026/27 is to make best use of the resources available to our YJS partnership.

The Youth Justice Board Grant is paid subject to terms and conditions relating to its use. The Grant supports the front-line delivery of essential youth justice services for children. The Grant may only be used towards the achievement of the following outcomes:

- Reduce the number of children in the youth justice system;
- Reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system;
- Improve the safety and wellbeing of children in the youth justice system; and
- Improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system.

The conditions of the Grant also refer to the services that must be provided and the duty to comply with data reporting requirements.

The Youth Justice Grant contributes to the Partnership's resources for employing practitioners who work with children to prevent and reduce offending and to keep children and other members of the community safe from harm. Resources from the Youth Justice Grant are also used to provide restorative justice and reparative activities, to promote pro-social activities for children building on their strengths and to improve the education, training and employment opportunities of young people in the local youth justice system. The Youth Justice Grant contributes to the performance achievements described in section 4.2, reducing the number of children entering the justice system, reducing reoffending by those who do enter the justice system, and maintaining low numbers of children being sentenced to custody.

In addition to the service outcomes listed above, the Youth Justice Grant and other Partnership resources are used to achieve the strategic priorities set out later in this Plan. Progress against those priorities is reported to the DCYJS Partnership Board, with oversight also provided by the relevant scrutiny committees of the two local authorities.

5.3 YJS Partnership Board Development

HMI Probation's Joint Inspection of Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service was published in January 2023. The inspection included scrutiny of the Board's work. The inspection report rated the service's Governance and Leadership as 'Good'.

HMI Probation also met with members of the DCYJS Partnership Board in February 2025 as part of their thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals. Inspectors identified a strategic commitment to diverting children from the justice system wherever possible.

The YJS Partnership Board has an established cycle of performance review, strategic oversight and forward planning. During the past year, the Board has scrutinised topics including:

- Learning and actions from the thematic inspection of work with children on out of court resolutions
- Delays to investigations – impact on children and victims, support options for children on bail or released under investigation

- Developing YJS work with victims, including the wider partnership response to the needs of victims
- Integration of the Dorset Integrated Non-Custodial Service with the YJS health offer and other local health provision for children in contact with the justice system
- Child in Care over-representation and actions to address this
- New Focused Deterrence programme, with OPCC funding, to reduce the risk of weapon offences
- Education, Training and Employment offers and outcomes for YJS children.

The YJS Partnership Board's plans for 2026-27 include further oversight of the local offer for victims, and alignment of YJS service developments with reform programmes such as Families First Partnerships, SEND reforms, the national Youth Strategy, and local plans for CAMHS Transformation. The YJS Board will consider whether more work is needed to coordinate the different sub-groups and activities which support and oversee the operational work of the YJS Partnership. The YJS Board will also ensure its alignment with the new inspection criteria for Leadership and Governance in youth justice services.

5.4 Workforce Development

The YJS is committed to good practice, using staff supervision, peer support, team workshops and external training courses to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of our workers.

Informal feedback from HMI Probation, after their 2025 inspection of our work with children on Out of Court Disposals, noted that *"YJS staff are skilled, knowledgeable, and feel well supported. There is a strong capacity for reflection at all levels of the service."*

The DCYJS Workforce Development Policy identifies core training for different roles in the team. As well as refresher training in child safeguarding, extra-familial harm and information governance, team members are also trained in Motivational Interviewing, AIM3 Harmful Sexual Behaviour assessments, and Restorative Justice with complex and sensitive cases.

Team members will continue to attend training and development activities in these approaches in 2026/27.

A Motivational Interviewing Development Group was established in 2024, facilitated by an expert external trainer. This will continue in 2026/27.

The team's work with children showing Harmful Sexual Behaviour is supported by a quarterly YJS HSB Practitioner's Group, which sometimes includes contributions from external speakers.

A quarterly YJS Weapons Offences Practitioner's Group is now well-established, enabling team members to hear about and share evidence-based interventions to reduce weapon-based offending.

In recent years the YJS has been embedding and developing its application of the Child First approach to youth justice work. Whole service workshops are scheduled in April 2026 to review our progress with Child First practice, and to agree our next steps.

Volunteers play an important role in the work of the YJS, especially as Referral Order community panel members. We appreciate their engagement during 2025/26 in training sessions and whole service meetings. Our volunteers are included in the YJS whole service Child First workshops.

DCYJS also supports individual career progression plans for team members, service resilience and succession planning. Plans for 2026/27 include:

- a Youth Justice Worker completing his social work qualification through the Social Work Apprenticeship with BCP Council and Solent University.
- A Practice Manager studying for the ILM Level 5 Certificate in Leadership and Management through the Association of YOT Managers
- A Youth Justice Worker studying for the Level 5 Youth Justice Practitioner Apprenticeship.
- A Business Support Manager starting a Level 3 apprenticeship in Data and Insights for Business Decisions
- A Youth Justice Officer working towards her Practice Educator qualification
- Two Youth Justice Officers working towards the Placement Supervisor qualification.

DCYJS also hosts student placements for students studying for social work qualifications and for trainee Speech and Language Therapists.

5.5 Knife Possession Guidance

The government published new guidance on Child Knife Possession Offences in February 2026, for implementation from April 2026 ([child knife possession offences](#)). The new guidance brings in some changes for responding to children who are found in possession of a knife, including:

- In almost every case, the child must either receive a Youth Conditional Caution or be taken to court
- In very exceptional cases, which the National Police Chiefs Council will only apply for 10-15 year-olds, a Deferred Prosecution can be applied
- Police must notify the YJS within 1 working day of a child being found with a knife
- When the police investigation is complete, with evidence to support prosecution, the YJS must assess the child and set out an intervention plan within 4 weeks
- Interventions with children for knife crime offences must fit with the evidence base compiled by the Youth Endowment Fund
- A new multi-agency scrutiny panel should oversee the local application of the guidance for Child Knife Possession Offences.

Dorset Police and DCYJS worked together during March 2026 to agree an implementation plan for the new guidance. The implementation plan sets out: how Police will introduce the option of Deferred Prosecution in Dorset; how Deferred Prosecutions will be managed between Dorset Police and DCYJS; a process for Dorset Police to notify DCYJS of children being found in possession of a knife, using the seconded YJS police officers; the decision-making process to select the appropriate disposal for a child found in possession of a knife; the selection of appropriate interventions; arrangements for scrutiny and oversight, including the creation of a new knife crime scrutiny panel and its links to the YJS Partnership Board. The scrutiny panel will oversee adherence to the knife crime guidance, including any instances when the guidance has not been followed

DCYJS submitted successful bids for Serious Violence Duty funding in the BCP Council and Dorset Council areas. These bids will enable DCYJS to make immediate contact with a child after they have been found in possession of a knife, without waiting for completion of the police investigation. The focus of YJS work during the investigation phase will be to complete an assessment of the child's strengths and needs, to develop a plan with the child to engage them in positive activities, to complete a speech and language assessment with the child, and to use YJS multi-disciplinary workers to help the child to access appropriate education and health provision.

DCYJS developed a structured response to knife crime in 2025/26, forming the basis for its work under the new knife crime guidance. Our response to knife crime includes:

- Guidance for YJS workers on assessing and managing knife crime risks
- DCYJS weapon-offences group for practitioners to find out about and share evidence of effective practice
- Focused Deterrence work with children assessed as posing the highest risk of harm to others through weapon offences (more information in section 6.7)

- First Aid sessions with YJS nurses
- Restorative Justice activities including the option of a meeting with a representative of the local knife crime charity, Changes Are Made
- Repairing the harm activities at local hospitals.

5.6 Evidence-based practice, innovation and evaluation

Evidence shows that the best predictor for positive change is a pro-social relationship with a trusted adult. The primary focus for effective practice in DCYJS is therefore the quality of workers' relationships with children, alongside positive relationships within the team and with other professionals. The emphasis on relational practice also reflects feedback from children on the DCYJS caseload about what is most important to them in their experience of the service.

YJS practice developments during the past year include establishing a Girls Group, expanding the range and accessibility of positive activities for children, and offering First Aid sessions run by YJS nurses for children who have committed weapon offences. More information about these initiatives is provided in section 6.

The YJS now provides two innovative Speech and Language projects.

Early identification of speech and language needs for children at risk of school exclusion

Around 90% of children in the youth justice system have speech, language and communication needs. Most of these children have experienced permanent or fixed-term exclusions from school. The communication needs of these children have only been identified when they have contact with the YJS and they receive a structured speech and language assessment.

The DCYJS Partnership Board allocated funding for a three-year project, known as 'Re-Engage', to identify and support the speech, language and communication needs of children at risk of school exclusion.

The Re-Engage project works with schools to focus on children in Key Stage 3 who are at risk of permanent exclusion and whose behaviour indicates a risk of future offending. The aim is to identify the child's communication needs at an earlier stage, to prevent school exclusion and future offending.

The project is staffed by a Speech and Language Therapist and a Speech and Language Associate Practitioner. Their roles are to assess the communication needs of children who are at risk of school exclusion and to support schools to respond to the child's specific needs. Training sessions are also offered to schools as part of their staff development.

The Re-Engage project was cited by HMI Probation as an example of good practice in the Effective Practice Guide which was published as part of the thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals: *"This proactive, school-based model aimed to prevent children from entering the YJS altogether"*.

By the start of April 2026, the project had received 152 referrals from 27 schools across BCP and Dorset. Speech and Language assessments had been completed for 90 children, uncovering significant levels of previously unidentified communication needs.

Language Profiles of 90 children with completed reports:

Developmental Language Disorder & Language disorder – 26

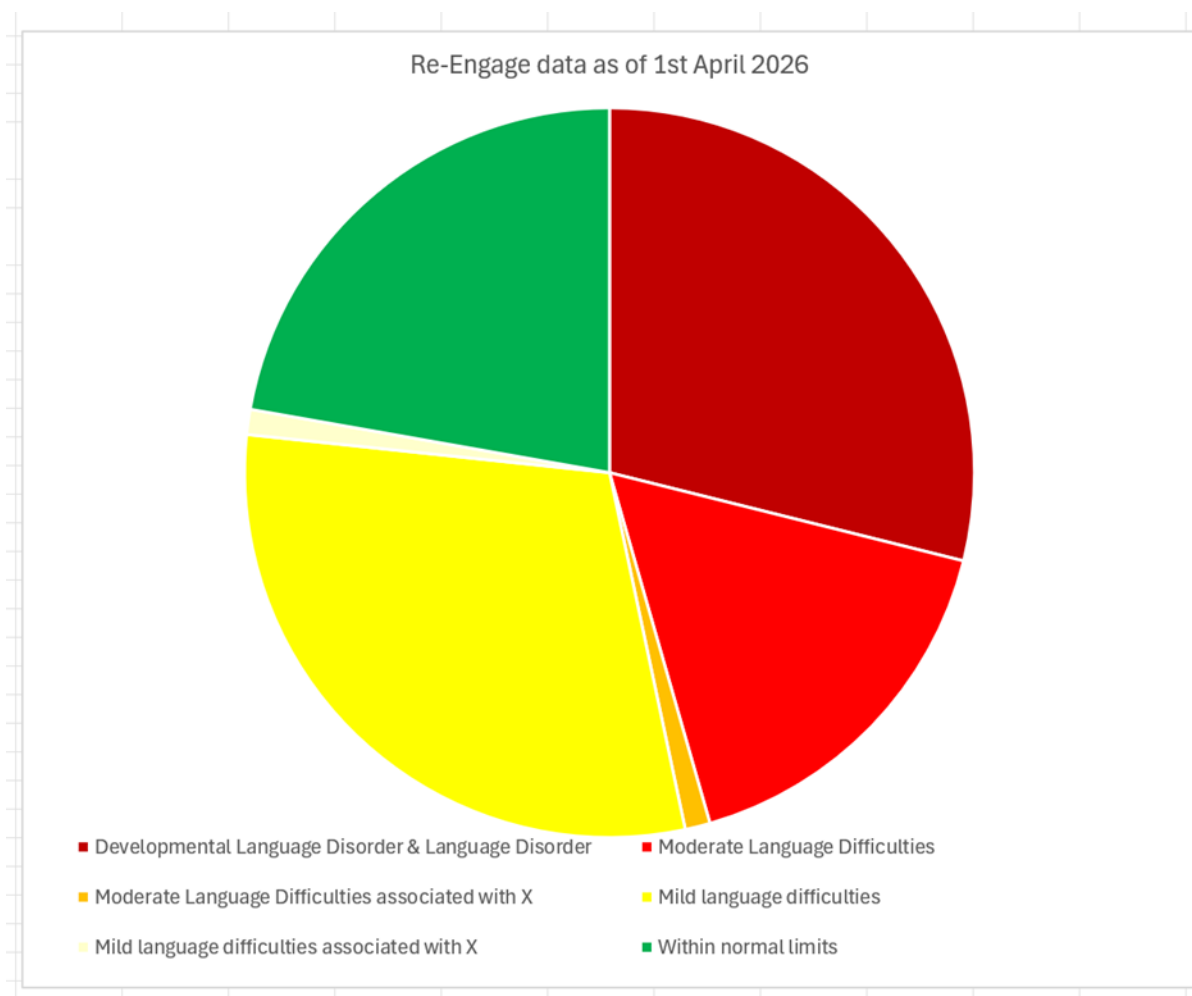
Moderate Language difficulties – 15

Moderate Language difficulties associated with another diagnosis - 1

Mild language difficulties – 27

Mild language difficulties associated with another diagnosis - 1

Within normal limits – 20.



The Re-Engage team also provide training and coaching to schools and to other services, such as the Child in Care health team, to raise awareness and confidence in responding to children's communication needs.

Expanding speech and language support in the justice system

NHS England has partnered with DCYJS for a 'Proof of Concept' project to spread speech and language expertise beyond the Youth Justice Service. The 'Bridges' project commenced in late 2025, with the flow of work developing from March 2026. The Bridges team consists of two part-time Speech and Language Therapists and a Speech and Language Associate Practitioner

The project will provide speech and language assessments for children who are under investigation for serious offences, before they reach the YJS. The project will also work with children who have been referred to the Dorset Police Safer Schools and Communities Team by local schools, and with children who have been identified as being at risk of 'extra-familial harm' and possible offending. A support offer is also being developed for children who are victims of offences committed by the children who are working with the YJS.

The Bridges project is also working with the Probation Service in Dorset to support their work with young adults aged 18-25. As well as the offer of speech and language assessments for individual young adults, the Bridges team can assist in making the service more communication-friendly. Examples of this work would include the creation of Easy Read versions of post-custody licence conditions, to help young adults to understand what they can and cannot do while subject to post-custody supervision.

Evaluation of this project is an integral part of the project design with NHS England.

5.7 Standards for work with children in the youth justice system

All Youth Justice Services are required to comply with the Youth Justice Board's 'Standards for work with children in the youth justice system' (2019). The Youth Justice Board has previously overseen a programme of self-assessments to monitor compliance. Responsibility for oversight of YJS compliance may transfer to the Ministry of Justice during 2026/27, as part of the overhaul of the role of the YJB.

The last YJB self-assessment exercise took place in 2023, when all services were directed to audit their work under 'Standard 2: Work in Court'. The YJB provided an audit tool, comprising 22 questions. The DCYJS self-assessment rated our work in court as Good, with most of the audit questions being rated Good or Outstanding. The quality of YJS court work reflects the strong partnership between DCYJS and our local youth courts. The chair of the Dorset Magistrates Youth Panel sits on the DCYJS Partnership Board, enabling other partners to hear the views of magistrates.

The YJB did not require Youth Justice Services to complete a National Standards audit in 2024/25 or 2025/26. The YJB has indicated that there will also be no requirement for a National Standards audit in 2026/27.

5.8 Response to inspections, reviews and audits.

Inspection reports, learning reviews and case audits all contribute to our service planning.

The most recent full inspection of our service was published in January 2023, rating the service as 'Good'. The inspectors made 6 recommendations, which were followed up through an action plan, overseen by the YJS Partnership Board. Actions have been completed for all of the recommendations.

Dorset Police and DCYJS were jointly inspected in February 2025 as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals. This thematic inspection was conducted by HMI Probation and HMI Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services. The report was published in October 2025, alongside an Effective Practice Guide.

The two inspectorates identified examples of good practice by Dorset Police and by DCYJS, including the strength of the partnership between our two services. The inspection report noted that our joint decision-making model "*provided a more consistent, fair, and effective approach to decision-making*" than the examples which they saw in other Police forces.

The Effective Practice Guide for the OOC inspection also cited good practice in our Speech and Language work and in our Restorative Justice activities and our engagement with victims.

The thematic inspection report made 18 recommendations, for the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Youth Justice Board, the National Police Chief's Council, Chief Constables, Youth Justice Partnership Boards and Youth Justice Services. The DCYJS Head of Service is a member of the national steering group which oversees the implementation of these recommendations.

There were no new Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in the past year involving DCYJS.

The YJS initiated two local learning reviews during 2025 in respect of young adults who entered custody shortly after turning 18. Actions taken from these reviews included the provision of guidance notes to colleagues in Children's Social Care about the care status and entitlements of children who are remanded to secure accommodation, and the YJS health team has strengthened its links with custody healthcare providers.

YJS learning from local CSPRs and multi-agency learning reviews is included in the team's development plans, and is reported annually to the YJS Partnership Board.

DCYJS undertakes thematic case audits, linked to the service's priorities. The focus in 2025 was on our local multi-agency work with Children in Care. National and local evidence shows that Children in Care are over-represented in the justice system and are likely to progress further into the justice system.

DCYJS coordinated a multi-agency audit of work with 16 Children in Care (8 from each local authority) who started youth justice interventions between September 2024 and March 2025. One of the themes emerging from the audits was that there were notable examples of good practice and good joint working between YJS workers and social workers, as well as health and education professionals, but this good practice was not embedded consistently across the whole audit. An action plan has been devised which includes steps to make good multi-agency working more consistent and less dependent on individual practitioners and managers.

Audit plans for 2026/27 include a case audit to apply the new casework inspection criteria, an updated review of work with Children in Care, and completion of the 'Section 11' audits for the Safeguarding Children Partnerships in each local authority.

6 Local and National Priorities for 2026/27

This section of the Plan reviews issues of local and national priority for youth justice which contribute to our service priorities for 2026/27.

6.1 Over-representation

National data shows that some groups of children, such as those with diverse ethnic heritage, children in care and children with Special Educational Needs are over-represented in the youth justice system. DCYJS monitors caseload information for children from minority and disadvantaged groups to identify over-representation and actions that may be needed. It is also recognised that some children experience multiple disadvantages, exemplified by the common characteristics of boys receiving a custodial sentence, as shown in section 4.2.

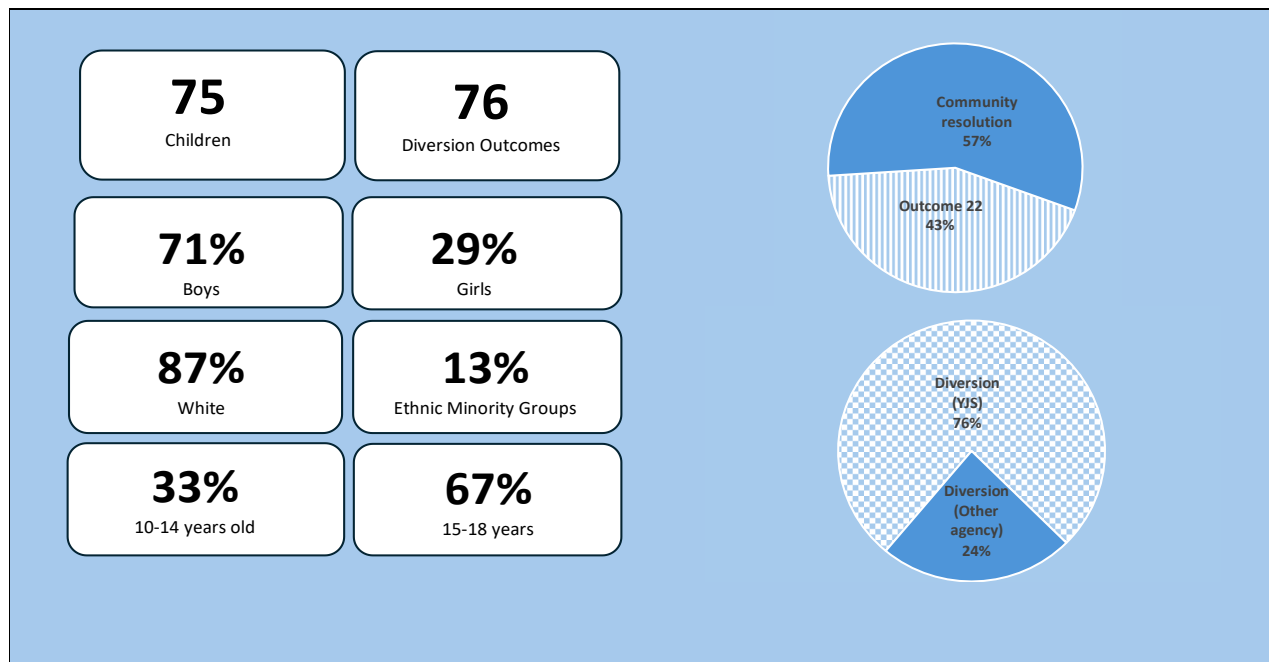
Ethnic Disparity

Data from the January 2026 School Census shows that 17.8% of 10-17 year-olds at schools in the BCP Council area identify as not having a white ethnicity. The equivalent figure for schools in the Dorset Council area is 6.3%. This data helps us compare the rate of children on our caseload from different ethnicities with proportions in the local population.

The following charts provide information about the children in the youth justice system in each local authority, separating them by children who were diverted and children who were cautioned or sentenced.

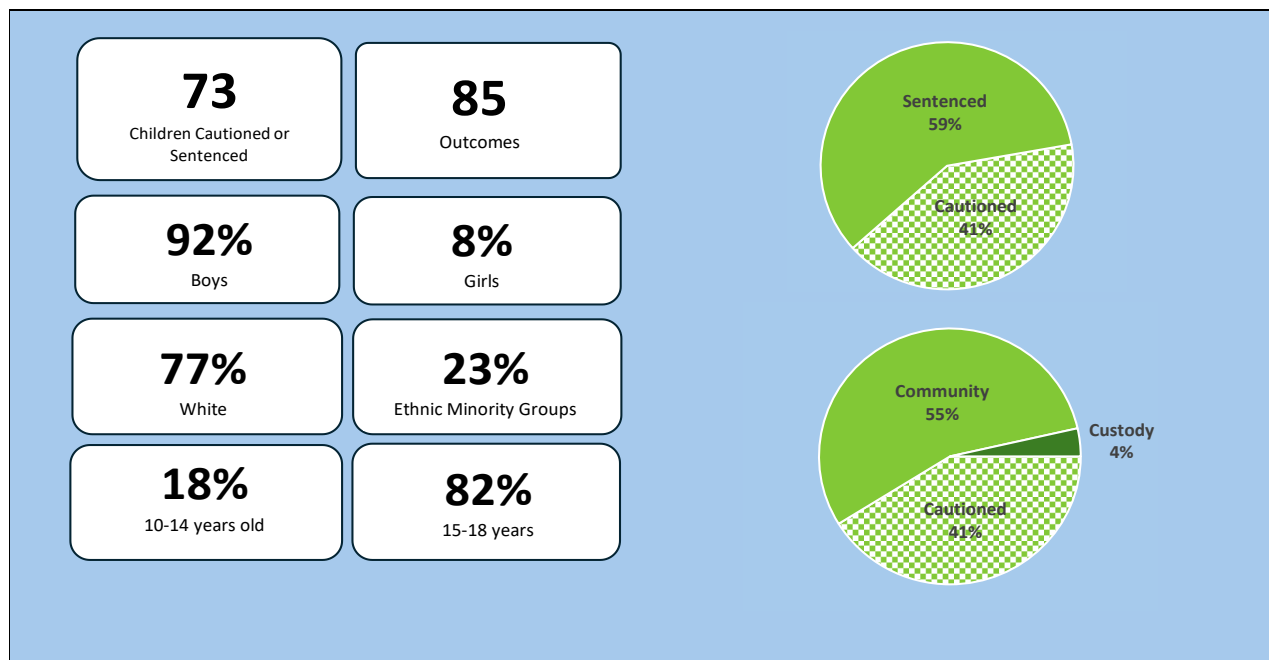
BCP Council children who were diverted from the justice system in 2025/26

BCP Outcomes (Diversions) from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



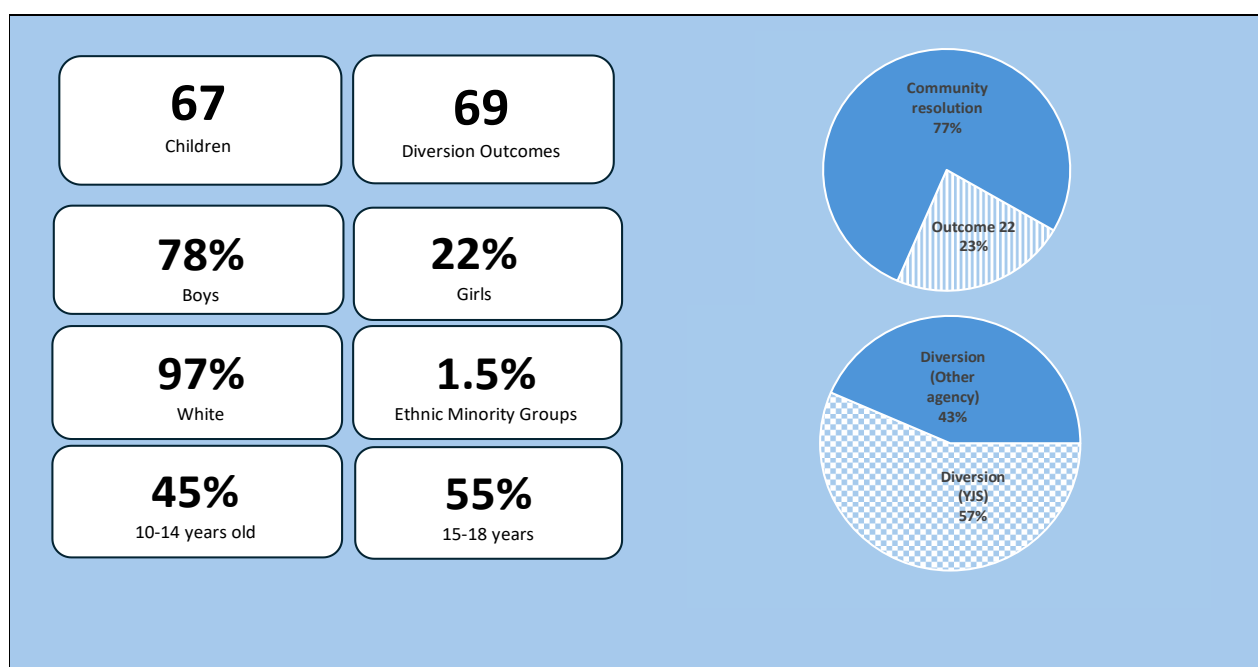
BCP Council children who were cautioned or sentenced in 2025/26

BCP Outcomes (Cautions and Convictions) from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



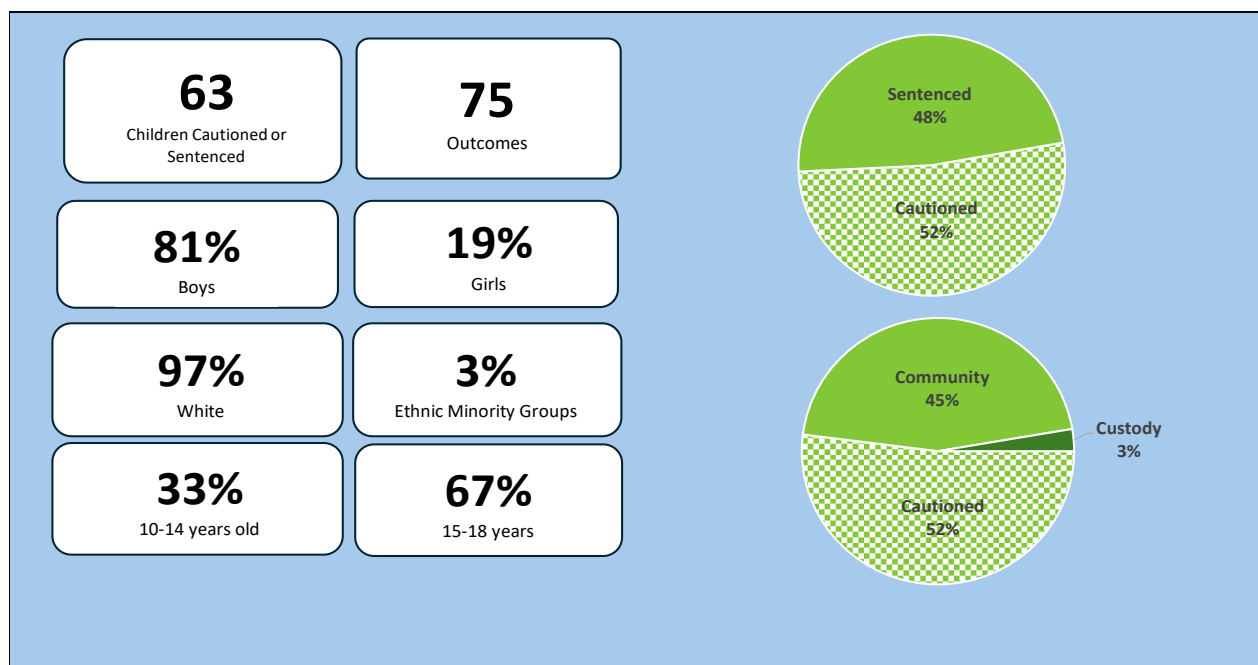
Dorset Council children who were diverted from the justice system in 2025/26

Dorset Outcomes (Diversion) from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



Dorset Council children who were cautioned or sentenced in 2025/26

Dorset Outcomes (Cautions and Convictions) from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026



Comparison of these charts shows that:

- There is a notably higher proportion of girls among the children diverted from the justice system compared to the proportion of girls in the groups who were cautioned or sentenced.
- The proportion of children with non-white ethnicity is lower among the children who were diverted than among the children who were cautioned or sentenced, with a more significant difference in the BCP Council area.

- Children who do not identify as white are not over-represented in Dorset, or among children in BCP who are diverted, but they are over-represented among children sentenced or cautioned in BCP.
- In both local authorities, there is a higher proportion of younger children among those who were diverted.
- There is a higher proportion of younger children in contact with the YJS in Dorset than in BCP.

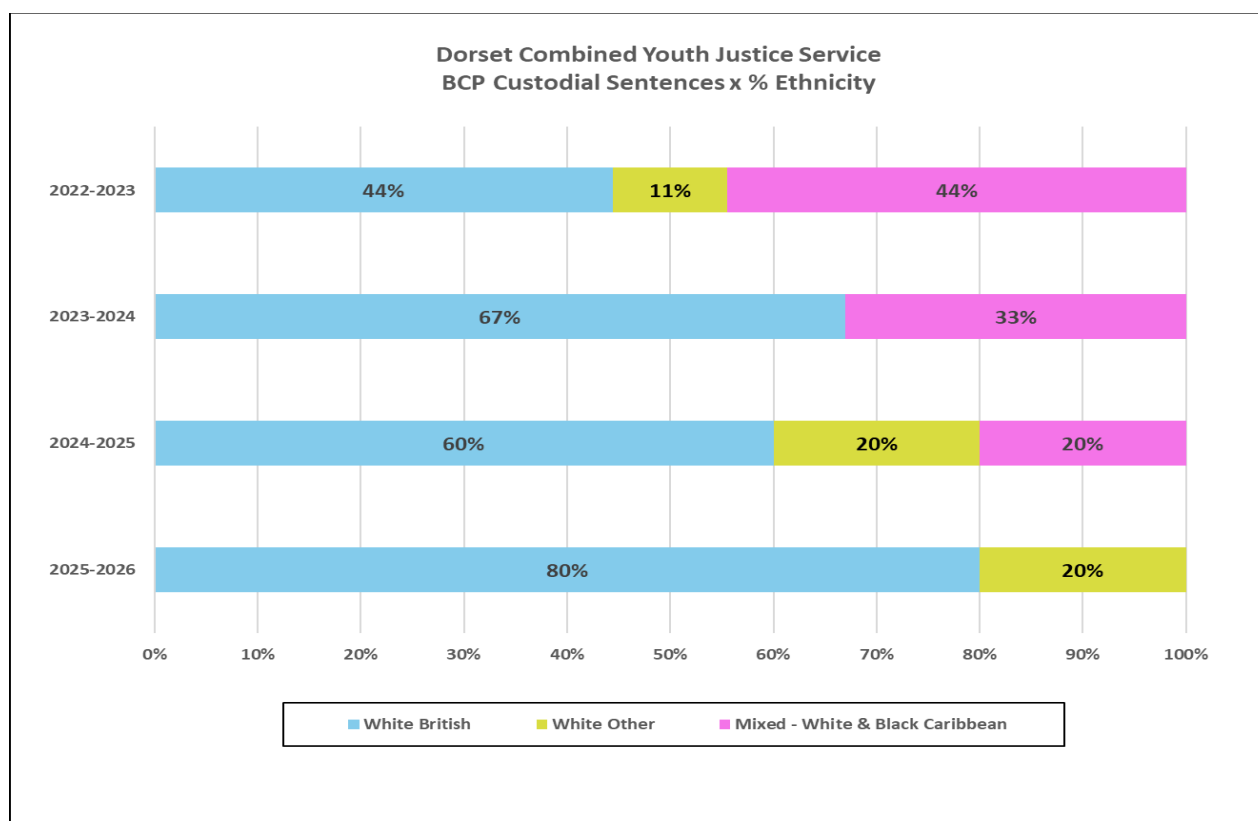
Information about the ethnicity, gender and age of First-Time Entrants is presented and analysed earlier in this document, in section 4.2.

As well as monitoring possible over-representation among First-Time Entrants, we also track how far children 'progress' into the youth justice system.

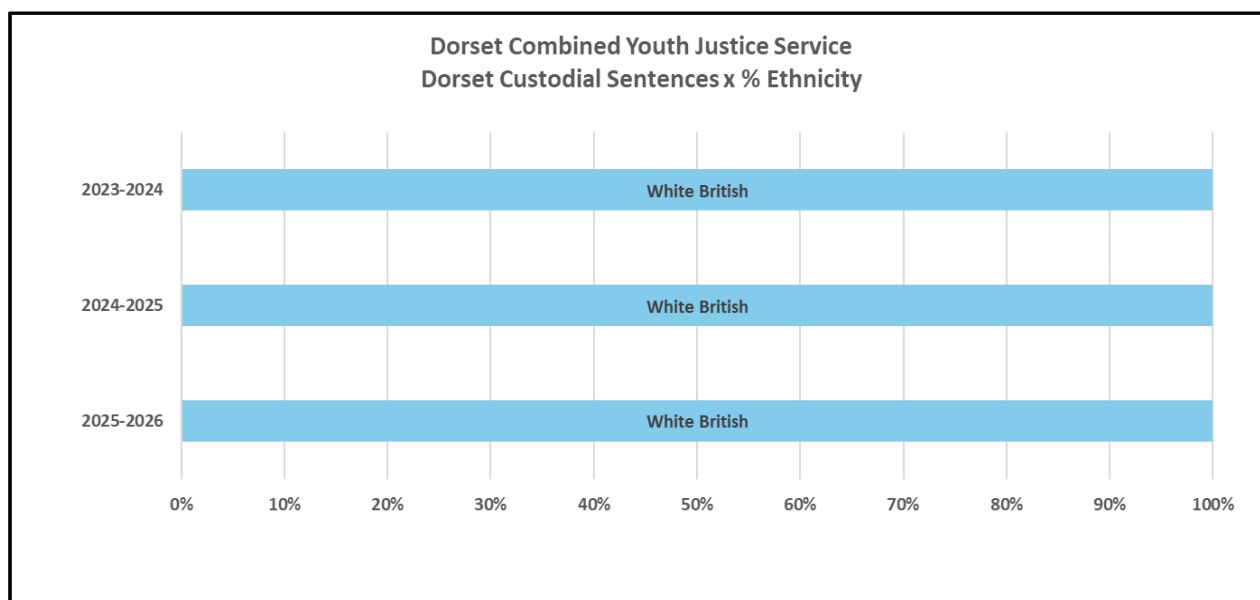
The charts showing the numbers of children cautioned or sentenced in 2025/26 indicate that children from ethnic minority groups in the BCP Council area are over-represented amongst those receiving a caution or court order. The reasons for this over-representation, and the response to it, are likely to spread beyond the justice system, noting that DCYJS and Dorset Police also work with Dorset Council children, where children from ethnic minority groups are not over-represented.

Ethnicity of children sentenced to custody

At a national level there are enduring concerns about the over-representation of Black and mixed heritage boys amongst children in custody. Low numbers of local children being sentenced to custody make it hard to analyse data based on percentages. The following charts show custodial sentences by ethnicity in each local authority in recent years.



There has been a welcome reduction in recent years in the over-representation of black and mixed heritage children in BCP receiving custodial sentences. No children from these ethnic groups in BCP received custodial sentences in 2025/26.



In the past three years, a total of 6 Dorset children have been sentenced to custody (8 custodial sentences). All of them define their ethnicity as White British.

In summary, there is a nuanced and varied picture locally for over-representation by ethnicity. Overall, looking at the service as a whole, local children from global majority ethnicities are not more likely to be criminalised and are not over-represented. There are some subtleties to the data though, such as how children from different groups progress through the justice system, and differences between BCP Council and Dorset Council, which require further attention.

Gender

We also monitor the gender breakdown of our caseload and the distribution by gender at different stages of the youth justice system. There is a higher proportion of girls among children who are diverted from a formal outcome, with lower proportions of girls amongst those who receive a community or custodial sentence.

At a national and local level there is evidence that boys are significantly over-represented among children in custody. This is also the case locally, where no girls have been remanded or sentenced to custody in the past 9 years.

The proportion of girls on the DCYJS caseload fluctuates but usually stays within a range of about 15%-20% of the total caseload, consistent with national rates. Girls accounted for 15% of our First Time Entrants in 2025/26, down from 17% in both 2024/25 and 2023/24.

It is recognised that girls can have different needs and experiences from boys, requiring differentiated responses from YJS workers. Worker allocation decisions are taken carefully to be sensitive to each girl's needs.

YJS workers set up a new Girls Group in 2025. The aim was to create a safe space for girls, to support them to build confidence, positive self-identity and behaviours. The group also enabled them to think about what they look for in healthy relationships, in the context of concerns about Violence Against Women and Girls.

One of the girls who attended the Girls Group provided this feedback:

- *It was fun*
- *You get to build bonds with people*
- *You get to enjoy yourself*
- *You feel free*

- *You don't have to go there glammed up – no one will judge you*
- *We get to make meals.*

Children in Care

Local data shows that Children in Care are over-represented in our youth justice system. Numbers fluctuated a little during 2025/26, but the proportion of Children in Care on the YJS caseload was usually around 20%.

Analysis commissioned by the YJS Partnership Board for its meeting in October 2024 identified some common features of Children in Care in the youth justice system, leading to a multi-agency audit in 2025 of joint work with 16 Children in Care who started youth justice interventions between September 2024 and March 2025.

The multi-agency audit identified examples of good practice involving YJS workers, social workers, Virtual School staff, YJS nurses and Speech and Language Therapists, and the Child in Care health team. This good practice was not consistent in the work with all the children in the audit sample. Actions have been agreed to make the quality of work more consistent, including:

- Complete a written agreement between the YJS worker and the social worker for joint working arrangements at the start of YJS work with a Child in Care
- YJS and social work plans for each child to specify the work being done by other professionals
- Review joint working between the YJS and the Virtual Schools
- Maintain close links between YJS nurses and Child in Care nurses
- Include the Virtual School in consent process for sharing YJS speech and language assessments
- YJS transitions work to adult services to include the social worker/PA for care experienced young people
- Complete a follow-up review in autumn 2026 to check on progress.

SEND

DCYJS caseload information shows that children in the local youth justice system are likely to have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. In March 2026, 22.5% of school-age children on the caseload had an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 19.7% had the status of 'SEN Support'. This means that 42.2% of school-age children were identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, compared to about 21.6% in the local populations for their age group (see section 2, 'Local Context' data).

It should be noted that the YJS was still collecting SEND information for some of these children, and there are others who are likely to have unidentified needs, meaning that the figure of 42% is probably an under-estimate of the level of SEND. These concerns fit with evidence collected by the DCYJS Speech and Language Therapists, showing high levels of communication needs amongst children in our local youth justice system and indicating the need for YJS workers to adapt their work to the needs of each child.

The YJS has worked with our two local authorities to establish a reliable process for each child's EHCP to be shared with the YJS, to enable the YJS to apply the advice in the EHCP when working with the child.

6.2 Prevention

The rate of children entering the justice system is influenced by the effectiveness of local prevention and diversion activities. 'Prevention' refers to work with children who have been identified as being at risk of going on to commit offences in future if they do not receive additional

help. 'Diversion' describes the response to children who have committed an offence but who can be diverted from the justice system.

DCYJS does not directly undertake prevention work, focusing its activities on children who have committed a criminal offence. As described in section 5.5, however, the YJS is currently providing a three-year prevention project, known as Re-Engage, to identify the speech, language and communication needs of children in Key Stage 3 who are at risk of permanent exclusion from mainstream school.

Each of our local authorities provides early help services, working with other local organisations like schools, the Dorset Police Safer Schools and Communities Team and the voluntary sector.

In the Dorset Council area oversight of prevention activities sits with the Strategic Alliance for Children and Young People, supported by more detailed work at locality level. The DCYJS Head of Service is a member of the Strategic Alliance and team members participate in locality meetings to identify and respond to children at risk. 'The Harbour' is a Dorset Council multi-disciplinary service which works with children who need additional support to prevent negative outcomes such as being taken into care or entering the justice system. DCYJS and The Harbour have close links, including joint work with children who have entered the justice system.

In the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council area, preventative work occurs within the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Early Help. Both services use local data to determine the needs in the area and to then provide preventative services to meet those needs. Governance for the Community Safety work sits with the Community Safety Partnership Executive Board. The Board's role includes scrutiny of the work undertaken. It can also agree to commission further services. The YJS Head of Service sits on the CSP Executive board. Targeted early help services are overseen by the Early Help Partnership Board (a multi-agency partnership which also incorporates Family Hubs). The Board agrees what services may be needed and which to provide/ commission. Services are provided based on the *Continuum of need*, with clear pathways in relation to how to access the support and services. Performance monitoring for the Early Help Partnership Board includes data on the rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system.

6.3 Diversion

As mentioned above, DCYJS and Dorset Police were inspected in February 2025 as part of the joint national thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals. The inspectors noted, in their informal inspection feedback, that *"There is a clear focus and shared commitment across the partnership both strategically and operationally to divert children from the criminal justice system wherever this is possible."*

Diversion work is undertaken locally on a partnership basis. Dorset Police, DCYJS and local authority Early Help services meet weekly as an Out of Court Disposal Panel to decide the appropriate youth justice outcome for children who have committed criminal offences. The panel looks for opportunities to divert children from a formal justice outcome when possible. This fits with the local priority to reduce First Time Entrants, described above in section 4.2.

Diversion activities usually involve additional support for the child and, when appropriate, some form of restorative response in respect of the criminal offence. The Dorset Police Safer Schools and Communities Team, DCYJS, Early Help Services, and Children's Social Care Services each provide support at the diversion stage. The appropriate service for each child is decided on the basis of the child's needs, risks and existing relationships with professionals.

During 2025/26 a total of 142 children received diversion options for a criminal offence, rather than a formal justice outcome. 95 of them received interventions from the Youth Justice Service. 48 received interventions from other services, principally the police Safer Schools and Communities Team.

Since 2022/23 the Ministry of Justice has funded the 'Turnaround' programme, aimed at 'children on the cusp of the youth justice system'. Locally we used this programme to divert children from the justice system and to reduce our rate of First Time Entrants. With the benefit of Turnaround funding, our partnership has established the use of 'Outcome 22', a Police recording code which indicates no further police action, provided that the YJS offers support to the child.

Turnaround funding is now used to employ an additional Youth Justice Worker, an additional Restorative Justice Practitioner and a half-time Speech and Language Therapist. Each child on the Turnaround programme is allocated to a Youth Justice Worker who works with the child and their family to agree a support plan to help them avoid further offending. The Restorative Justice Practitioner contacts the victim to identify their needs and to promote Restorative Justice options. The Turnaround Speech and Language Therapist assesses the child's communication needs and provides advice for the child, their family and professionals about the child's individual needs and how best to respond to them.

The local Turnaround programme is overseen by the Youth Justice Service Partnership Board. The Ministry of Justice sets targets for the number of children successfully completing Turnaround interventions each year. DCYJS exceeded its completions target in 2025/26.

Funding for the Turnaround programme has now been confirmed until 2028/29, albeit frozen at a reduced level compared to the original allocation.

6.4 Education, Training and Employment

Children in the youth justice system are less likely to stay in mainstream schools, to achieve good educational outcomes and to access education, employment or training after Year 11.

In March 2026, 22.5% of school-age children on the caseload had an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 19.7% had the status of 'SEN Support'. There are also likely to be other children whose additional needs have not been identified or who would have been categorised as needing SEN Support if they were on roll at a mainstream school.

Most children in contact with the justice system have communication needs which have not previously been identified (see sections 5.5 and 6.4 for more details on YJS Speech and Language work). The YJS shares information about a child's Speech and Language needs with schools, PRUs, mentors, tutors and other education professionals. This helps to ensure that the child's individual needs are understood and met, supporting their engagement in education.

In recent years DCYJS has worked with local authority colleagues to improve the accuracy of the recording and reporting of school exclusions experienced by children on the caseload. In March 2026, 13 out of 71 school-age children on the caseload had been permanently excluded from school in the past 2.5 academic years, and 31 of the 71 children had experienced at least one fixed-term exclusion during that period.

Improving education provision and outcomes for children in the youth justice system is a service priority.

Each local authority's Director of Education is a member of the DCYJS Partnership Board. The headteachers of the BCP Council Virtual School and College and the Dorset Council Virtual School are also members of the DCYJS Partnership Board.

DCYJS employs two Education Officers, one focusing on school-age children and one supporting the post-16 age group. They provide advice to DCYJS case managers and work directly with young people to understand their needs and to support their attendance and engagement. They also work with schools and local authorities to increase the suitability of provision, maintaining strong links with colleagues in the local authority Virtual Schools, the SEND teams and Inclusion services.

When a child is remanded or sentenced to custody, the appropriate YJS Education Officer is allocated to ensure that the child's education needs are understood and met during and after the period in custody. It is a requirement of the SEND Code of Practice, for children in custody with an EHCP, that an up to date EHCP is shared with the custody education provider to enable the child's specific educational needs to be met. The YJS Education Officers liaise with custody education providers and local authority colleagues to ensure that all relevant information is shared.

Each local authority has a multi-agency group which monitors and acts on inclusion in education for the school-age children causing most concern in respect of their access to education. The DCYJS Education Officer attends these groups and represents the needs of children who are open to the YJS.

DCYJS occasionally works with children who are receiving Elective Home Education. The YJS Education Officer follows up each case where a child receives Elective Home Education to review the adequacy and safety of the arrangement and to offer more support if needed.

In March 2026, 34.5% of YJS children in the post-16 age group were recorded as being not in employment, education or training (NEET). This reflects the limited opportunities for YJS young people, who can lack the necessary attainment levels to access the available provision.

The YJS runs the Discover You project at Upton Country Park to improve young people's self-esteem, practical skills and employability, to increase their chances of accessing employment and training.

31 young people attended the project between September 2025 and March 2026. Some of the positive outcomes for these young people included:

- Support towards Maths and English Functional Skills – one young person has completed his English Level 2 qualification. A number of other young people will be sitting their exams before the end of the academic year
- Other Support towards qualifications - CSCS Practice and completing exams – 7 young people have completed their Level 1 Health and Safety in the Construction Environment Award. They are now preparing for the second stage – the CITB Health, Safety and Environment Test, which they will complete in the coming weeks. Upon passing both, they will be eligible to obtain the Labourers Green Card, opening the door to employment and apprenticeship opportunities within the construction sector.
- AQA Certificated Learning –most young people complete around 5-10 awards, depending on how long they attend and what they engage in. Awards include Team Building, Employment and Training, Practical Tasks, Communication Skills, Health and Safety and Gardening.
- ETE and Careers – Careers Information Advice and Guidance – Career Action Planning, CV work, Applications for College and Jobs, Interview Skills.
- Work Experience options around Upton Country Park within the Welcome Centre and Café, opportunities also available for young people to help at open events.
- Conservation Volunteering Activities – Working with the Ranger Team onsite to complete practical activities around the site like planting trees, taking out hedgerows, coppicing, painting, creating woodland items, filling potholes, putting up a stag beetle loggery (different things available at different times of the year).
- Team Building – different opportunities like den building and orienteering available.
- Life skills – budgeting/managing money, dealing with bills, communication skills.
- Raising money for local charities by making items to sell at Upton Country Park, e.g. Halloween items, Christmas items, nature-themed items and outdoor objects such as planters, bird boxes, bug hotels, bird feeders.
- Developing an Allotment Area – young people have helped to create an allotment space, designing and constructing a wooden greenhouse and raised bedding/planters to support growth of plants, fruit and vegetables. Young people are enjoying being able to learn and develop further through tasks like planting a variety of seeds and building knowledge around looking after them and seeing them grow. Some vegetables that were grown last summer were donated to a project that supports families in need.

- Development into mentoring opportunities for young people who continue to volunteer at Upton Country Park after attending the Discover You project. One young person is now part of the Upton Country Park Volunteer Team.
- Practical tasks for Upton Country Park – Since January 2026 the project has been tasked with working on a refurbishment of a dedicated picnic area at Upton Country Park, creating an improved, welcoming space for families and visitors to enjoy. This is planned to be completed ahead of the summer season. Young people are enjoying the process of starting the task from planning stages, to working out a schedule, through to looking at materials needed and costings, to then actually building, creating and finishing items.
- Support has also been given to a small number of young people that were school age for a period of time, to help engage them in learning and practical tasks whilst more permanent education was being arranged. This helped build structure and routine and get them ready for their new education provision.

The Discover You Project successfully applied for funding from the BCP Youth Fund in summer 2025 to help meet the cost of exams/qualification, new tools and equipment and gardening materials.

Young people who attended Discover You in 2025/26 shared these views on the project:

Being able to use the project has allowed me to gain qualifications to help me progress.

Everyone sees the mistakes, but here they see the potential.

Out here no one is judging you, it is just you, the work and what you create and build.

Before this I had never built anything, now I know I can and I am proud of that achievement.

The project gives me structure and is helping me to build/develop and that is what I need.

Getting my CSCS card means I have options.

6.5 Health and Communication Needs of Children in the youth justice system

Evidence shows that children who have contact with the justice system are likely to have significant health needs, including difficulties with mental health, physical health and substance use. DCYJS has a strong health team, reflecting the commitment of NHS Dorset and Dorset HealthCare to meeting the health needs of children in the youth justice system. The DCYJS health team comprises 2.8 full-time equivalent CAMHS nurses, a 0.8 Clinical Psychologist and 1.4 Speech and Language Therapists.

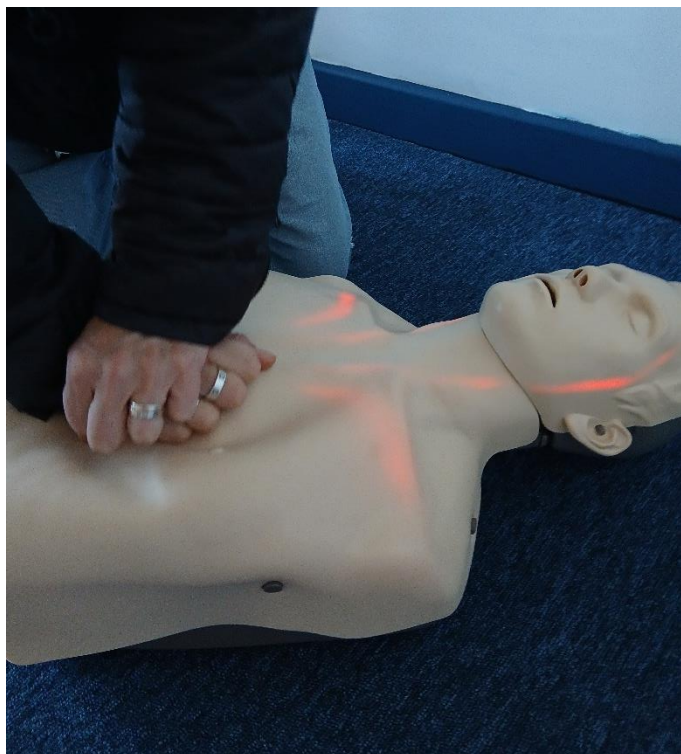
Health professionals in the YJS work directly with children and provide consultation and advice to YJS colleagues and other professionals. The YJS nurses meet regularly with colleagues in the Child in Care health team and the Dorset Integrated Non-Custodial Service (previously called the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Service) to ensure the integration of healthcare support for children in the youth justice system.

The specialist skills and knowledge of the YJS nurses and psychologist underpin the DCYJS commitment to trauma-informed practice through the Trauma Recovery Model. Children who will be under YJS supervision for more than 6 months are considered for the Enhanced Case Management (ECM) multi-agency formulation model, led by the YJS Psychologist.

During 2025/26, the YJS nurses launched First Aid sessions for children who have committed weapon offences, as part of the YJS response to knife crime. The sessions focus on urgent action which the child can take in the event of witnessing a weapon injury or other health emergency. As well as providing important information to children, these sessions also enable reflection about the

impact of weapon injuries. The child's contact with the nurse can also give them confidence to meet again with the nurse for support with their own emotional or physical health needs.

The First Aid sessions include an activity on resuscitation, using a model which lights up when enough pressure is applied, as illustrated in this picture:



A YJS nurse is allocated to all children who are remanded or sentenced to custody. The aim is to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of health care for the child as they move into custody, during the custodial period and as part of their post-release planning. The YJS nurses liaise with the healthcare provider in the custodial establishment to resolve issues such as continuity of access to prescribed medication for children in custody. The YJS health team has strengthened links with custody healthcare providers in Feltham, Oakhill and Parc over the past year.

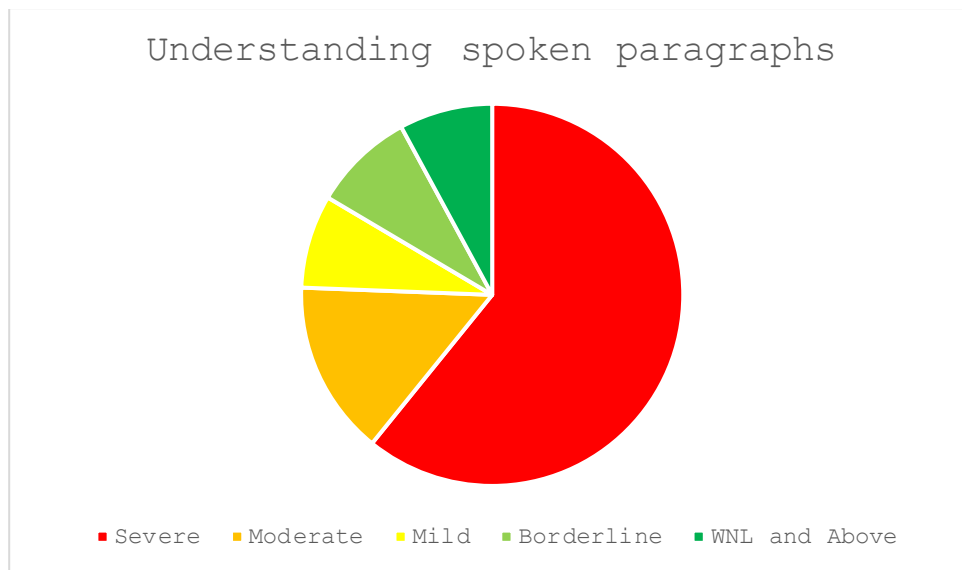
Speech and Language Therapists have been based in the YJS since 2018. Data has been reported in previous Youth Justice Plans to show that around 90% of children in contact with the justice system locally have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

YJS Speech and Language Therapists contributed to an MSc Dissertation in 2025 by a Masters student at Health Sciences University on 'Missed diagnosis of Developmental Language Disorder in youth offenders'. One of the comments in the dissertation noted that *"The children we work with...are really accurately able to tell us exactly what they find hard with communication but nobody's asked them that question before in a way that they can access"*.

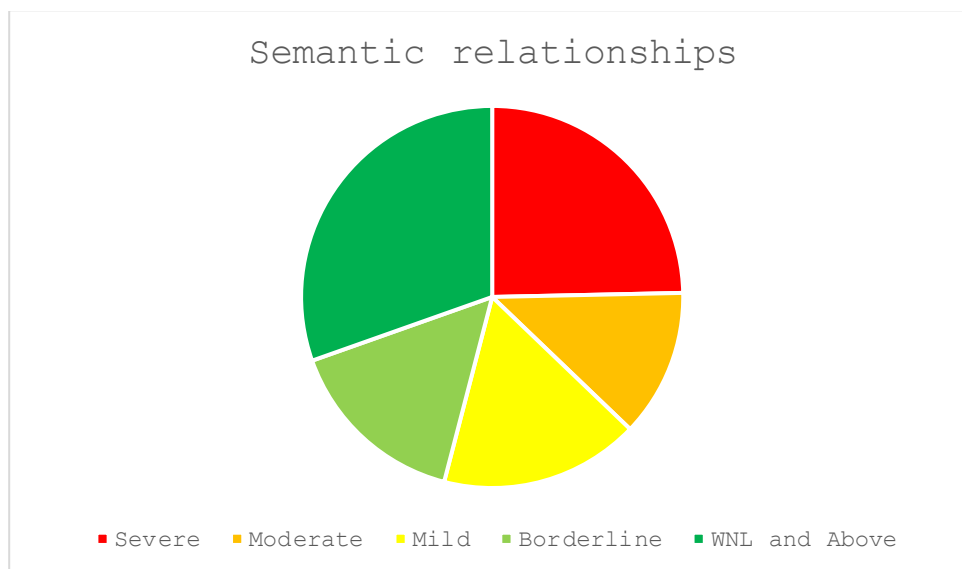
The YJS Speech and Language Therapists use the formal language assessment 'Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – v5' (CELF) as part of their assessments, alongside assessment of Language for Behaviour and Emotions. Each assessment involves several sub-tests, to investigate different aspects of communication.

The YJS Speech and Language team collates and analyses the results of all assessments of children known to the YJS in recent years. This data shows specific patterns of need among children in the youth justice system. Almost all the children struggle to understand spoken language. This has important implications for the way that professionals should interact with these children, moving away from talking-based contacts to using visual resources such as Talking Mats.

A total of 296 assessments had been completed by the end of March 2026, providing a robust sample size. The following charts show the aggregated results for each sub-test in the CELF assessment (NB 'WNL' = Within Normal Limits).

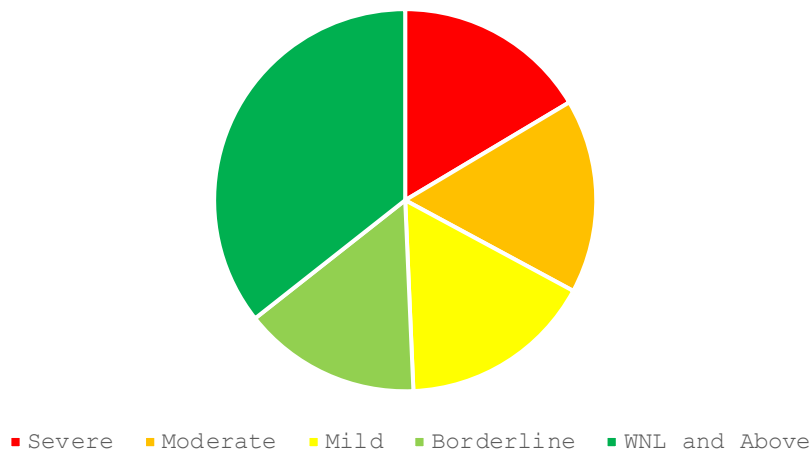


Only 8% of children were rated within normal limits for this test. 61% of children were rated to have severe needs in this area. Children with low scores are likely to have difficulty understanding inputs in lessons or meetings with professionals, understanding and remembering longer explanations/instructions, following stories in conversation, understanding when there is a lot of information, such as in court or in Referral Order panel meetings.



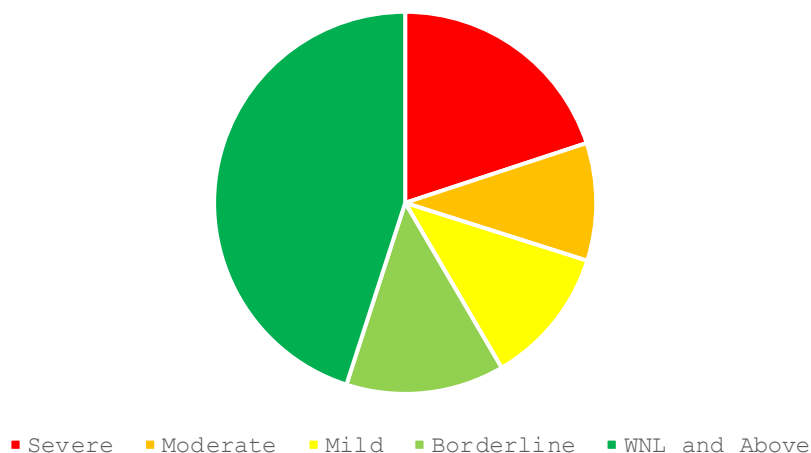
70% of children have some level of difficulty understanding sentences that express a relationship. Children with low scores in this subtest are likely to have difficulty with understanding information about where, when and what order things are in (all of which can be needed when being interviewed about a suspected offence). Children will also find it hard to understand passive sentences ('the bag was found by the police' instead of 'the police found the bag').

Recalling sentences



64% of the children had some level of difficulty in recalling sentences. Children with low scores in this subtest are likely to have difficulty with sentence structure; vocabulary; recalling spoken information accurately.

Formulated Sentences



55% of children were not rated within normal limits for this sub-test. Children with low scores in this subtest are likely to have difficulty with communicating thoughts and opinions clearly; explaining more complicated things; keeping up in conversation/ responding quickly.

It is worth noting that these tests are carried out in a safe environment by a skilled practitioner. A child's communication abilities will deteriorate in more stressful situations such as police interviews or court hearings.

The receptive language skills of children in the justice system tend not to be as strong as their expressive language skills. This may partly explain why these children's communication needs are not identified until they enter the justice system and they receive a structured assessment from a YJS Speech and Language Therapist.

After completing a Speech and Language assessment for a child in the YJS, the Speech and Language Therapist writes up a one-page 'Communications Passport' for the child, along with a full written assessment report. The Communications Passport is shared with Dorset Police, to help them communicate effectively with the child in the event that they have further contact with the

child. The child is asked to consent for their full assessment report to be shared with other professionals such as social workers and education providers.

6.6 Restorative Justice and Victims

Alongside the 'Child First' approach, Restorative Justice is a core principle underpinning the work of DCYJS.

Whenever DCYJS works with a child whose offence harmed a victim, the DCYJS Restorative Justice Practitioners contact the victim to find out about the impact of the offence, to explain the opportunities for Restorative Justice activities, and to ask about any vulnerabilities for which the victim might need support. This work helps us to meet our obligations under the Victims Code.

Delays in the youth justice system, which are more common in cases that go to court, make it harder to engage victims in activity to repair the harm they have experienced. Contacting the victim many months after the offence requires tact and sensitivity, emphasising the victim's choice in whether or how much they engage with our service.

HMI Probation cited DCYJS work with victims in the Effective Practice Guide which they published in October 2025 alongside their thematic inspection report on work with children who received OoCDs. The inspectors commented that '*In DCYJS, a structured and victim-centred approach to restorative justice was embedded within the delivery of OoCDs*'.

Restorative Justice can take different forms, and it is not always possible to bring the child and their victim together for a restorative meeting. When such meetings do take place, they can be beneficial for both the victim and the child. The following example from 2025 illustrates the benefits of Restorative Justice meetings and the flexibility that can be required to achieve a successful meeting:

We completed an RJ Conference with one of the Heathland Mitigation Rangers for BCP with a young person who had committed Arson, albeit it seemed accidental.

We held a session with a presentation delivered by the Ranger, where we looked at the effects of fire on the heathland and the future impact it can have on the whole ecosystem of that area. This was held in a classroom environment, and we then followed it up with a visit to the scene of the incident. Whilst walking around Talbot Heath we held an RJ conference between them.

The young person said that he found the session informative, and he had learnt more about the heathlands near him. The Ranger felt that everything went well and he would like the opportunity to work with us again in the future.

During the past year, YJS work with victims has expanded to identify and respond to the victim's needs. Examples include support to take part in positive activities and the provision of speech and language assessments for child victims. One of our Restorative Justice Practitioners provided this example of support for a child who has been the victim of an offence:

I worked with a young victim who had been assaulted, which knocked her self-confidence and affected her wellbeing. Through our conversations I discovered she loved horses and had attended a Horse Therapy session in the past which she found beneficial for her mental health, which she had struggled with. I spoke with the YJS Activities Coordinator and we were able to source and fund 3 Horse Therapy sessions which gave her the boost she needed. Her parents, having seen the difference in her, have agreed to continue the sessions privately. Her mum was very grateful for all that we had done for her and her daughter.

YJS victim work in 2026/27 will continue to strengthen our offer to child victims and will develop our use of data to provide insights and direction for our victim work.

Another aspect of the team's Restorative Justice work is undertaking 'repairing the harm' activities with children, to help them make amends for their offence.

The YJS has now established regular 'repairing the harm' catch-up meetings which were recognised by HMI Probation in their OOCOD inspection Effective Practice Guide:

"A key strength of the DCYJS model was the 'repairing harm meeting', held in every case. This brought together the case manager (who gave the child's views), the reparation coordinator; and the restorative justice practitioner (who gave the victim's views), to co-design meaningful interventions linked to the harm caused by the offence. Activities were risk-assessed and tailored; for example, knife-related offences may involve hospital-based sessions. Where direct reparation was not requested, community impact work was undertaken, such as fundraising for emergency services charities."

YJS priorities for the past year included a focus on strengthening links between our communities and children working with the YJS. There are currently 12 community projects where we undertake repairing the harm activities. This feedback from a community centre in BCP shows the mutual benefits of these projects:

"Angie brings a young person to the Centre every so often to help with litter / leaf clearing in the garden and car park at the Community Centre. They sometimes also do some gardening, weeding, & have helped clear the patio of weeds. This partnership works well for us, they always do a fantastic job for which we are very grateful, and we often get to have a little chat and catch up with Angie & the young person, allowing us to thank them for their hard work and show our appreciation."

The wooden planters, decorations, boxes etc that the young people make are sold at our annual craft fair & follow on orders have been made. We were very grateful to receive a donation to the Community Centre following the sale."

These sessions also benefit the children, as shown in this comment:

"I've worked with drills and screws to make something that may benefit the Community. I enjoyed the sessions as I've learnt some new skills."

From January to December 2025 the YJS reparation team successfully held stalls in the community, to sell items made by children, raising a total of over £2,000. The money is donated to charities and community organisations, chosen by victims, as a further way to repair the harm caused by children's offences, and to raise the profile of the good work being completed by children working with the YJS. Donations this year include £300 to the Blue Light Foundation, for offences of Assault Emergency Worker, and £250 to a local charity tackling knife crime, Changes Are Made.



Stall at County Hall in Dorchester

6.7 Serious Violence and Extra-Familial Harm

Tackling extra-familial harm and reducing serious violence are priorities for strategic partnerships in both our local authority areas (as described in section 2 of this Plan).

DCYJS uses the 'Trauma Recovery Model' in its work. One of the benefits of this approach is to understand and respond to the issues which may underlie a child's exploitation or their use of violent behaviour. As described in section 6.5, the YJS Psychologist leads multi-agency formulations under the 'Enhanced Case Management' approach for children showing the highest levels of trauma and concerns for the safety of them and others.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2021 introduced a Serious Violence Duty for specified authorities, including youth justice services, to work together to share data and knowledge, allowing them to target their interventions to prevent serious violence. The specified authorities in Dorset and BCP agreed to use our two Community Safety Partnerships to lead this work. DCYJS contributes to the Serious Violence Needs Assessment in each local authority, and to the subsequent action planning.

The Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner's 'Head of Violence Reduction and Prevention' is a member of the YJS Partnership Board and works actively with YJS managers and practitioners to ensure that the YJS is integrated into local initiatives to reduce and prevent violence.

In August 2025 the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) started funding 'Focused Deterrence' work in the YJS. This approach is summarised by the Youth Endowment Fund as being 'a strategy that combines communicating the consequences of violence with support for developing positive routes away from it'. The Youth Endowment Fund rates Focused Deterrence as having High impact for preventing violence: [Focused deterrence | YEF Toolkit](#).

The additional funding from the OPCC has been used to enhance the YJS response to children with weapon offences who are assessed as posing a high risk of serious harm to others. Work with these children now includes engagement in positive activities on additional YJS sessions, Restorative Justice inputs and First Aid sessions on the consequences of weapon injuries. This approach is provided in partnership with Dorset Police, who provide pro-active policing to these children.

Serious Violence Duty funding has been secured for 2026/27 to enable the YJS to work pro-actively with children who have been found in possession of a knife, while the investigation is ongoing, rather than waiting for the investigation to be completed before commencing YJS involvement. The Police will notify the YJS within one day of the child being found with a knife and the YJS will make immediate contact with the child.

Extra-familial harm occurs across the pan-Dorset area, with DCYJS seeing instances of exploitation and National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals for children in both local authorities. DCYJS plays an active role in the partnership arrangements in both local authority areas to address child exploitation, participating in strategic and tactical groups as well as other multi-agency initiatives such as the 'Missing, Exploited, Trafficked' (MET) Panel in BCP Council and the Dorset Council Extra-Familial Risk of Harm (EFRH) panels.

Although it is rare for children to become radicalised or involved in violent extremism, the harms from such behaviours are significant for individuals and for the community. The YJS Head of Service is a standing member of the 'Channel Panel' in each local authority. The YJS also engages actively as a member of the local Prevent Partnership. The new YJS Speech and Language project, 'Bridges', is working with the National Security Division of the Probation Service to identify and meet the communication needs of young adults with Terrorism Act offences.

6.8 Policing and Detention of children in police custody

DCYJS and Dorset Police work together closely on issues affecting children in the justice system. As well as the seconded police officers in the YJS, there is active police representation on the DCYJS Partnership Board. At an operational level there is daily contact between YJS Team Managers and the Sergeant in the police Youth Justice team.

Dorset Police has developed a Child Centred Policing Delivery Plan, adhering to the 9 areas of focus in the 2024 national Children and Young People's Strategy. Dorset Police hold a monthly internal meeting, chaired by a Superintendent, to focus on their work with children and young people. A benchmarking exercise against the 9 areas of focus will take place in 2026.

A 'Voice of the Child Scrutiny Panel' oversees the operational implementation of the strategy. The YJS Head of Service is a member of this panel, along with police leads from across the force.

Dorset Police is committed to reducing the numbers of children who are detained in police custody, as part of its Child-Centred Policing Strategy. A multi-agency 'Child Custody Detentions' group, led by the DCYJS Head of Service, monitors and addresses the use of police custody for children. The aim of the group is to reduce the number of children being arrested and, when an arrest is appropriate, to reduce the time the child stays in custody.

Data on child arrests is also reported to the YJS Partnership Board. The following table shows the child arrests in Bournemouth, Weymouth and Poole during 2025/26, with the corresponding information below for 2024/25.

2025/26	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Auth Detention	42	38	34	39	21	21	14	26	24	31	26	37
Det Not Auth	5	3	3	3	9	2	1	1	1	2	2	1
10-13 Y/O	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	2	0
Overnight	20	14	21	14	7	5	2	4	11	15	15	19
Strip searches / Clothing Changes	4 / 3	1 / 0	3 / 0	3 / 3	0 / 1	0 / 3	0 / 0	0 / 5	0 / 4	3 / 1	5 / 1	3 / 1
Remand/warrant	2 / 1	2 / 0	5 / 0	1 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 1	0 / 0	1 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 1	1 / 1	1
C114 requested	2	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1

2024/25	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Auth Detention	21	27	19	29	35	25	39	24	17	13	29	28
Det Not Auth	4	2	1	1	6	2	4	2	1	3	4	1
10-13 Y/O	0	0	0	1	2	3	1	2	0	0	2	1
Overnight	9	8	6	10	11	7	22	11	7	5	15	17
Strip searches / Clothing Changes	3 / 0	1 / 0	3 / 1	4 / 5	4 / 3	2 / 3	2 / 0	3 / 3	1 / 2	0 / 1	5 / 0	2 / 1
Remand/warrant	0 / 4	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	2 / 2	1 / 4	0 / 1	0 / 2	0 / 0	0 / 0	5 / 0	0 / 1
C114 requested	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	5	0

The number of child arrests in Dorset has declined in the past 4 years, from a total of 501 arrests in 2021/22 to a total of 329 arrests in 2025/26.

These figures show the success of Dorset Police's active work to reduce the numbers of children being arrested locally. Custody managers have strengthened the challenge on whether the detention is justified, evidenced by the monthly figures showing the number of 'Detentions not Authorised'. This means a child has been brought to the custody suite but the custody sergeant has refused to authorise the detention.

Dorset Police have changed their approach to custody arrivals during the evening to reduce the numbers that are detained overnight. The numbers of children detained overnight has dropped from 242 in 201/22 to 147 in 2025/26.

The Child Custody Detentions group previously identified a number of factors which can prolong a child's detention in police custody, including the availability of Appropriate Adults (AAs) and the

time of day when the child arrives in the custody suite. The timeliness of Appropriate Adult attendance has improved overall since 2021, when the service was commissioned externally from 'The Appropriate Adult Service' (TAAS). In recent months there have been some delays in the provision of Appropriate Adults by TAAS, linked to staffing shortages and absences. Contract monitoring processes have been used to address these issues, with assurance from TAAS that additional recruitment and reduced staff absences have addressed this issue.

When the police remand a child, ie charge them with an offence and refuse to grant the child bail, there is a legal requirement (under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) to transfer the child to local authority accommodation until their appearance at the next available court. A child arrested on a warrant or for breaching bail must remain in police custody.

The Child Custody Detentions group reviews every instance of a child being remanded, to check that the procedures and decision-making were correctly applied. The table above shows that there were only 13 instances of a child being remanded in 2025/26 across all local custody suites. There were 8 instances of a child being remanded in 2024/25.

6.9 Transitions to Probation

The seconded Probation Officer post in DCYJS was vacant from September 2024 until September 2025. The Probation Officer plays an important role in supporting transitions for young people who are moving from the YJS to Probation. Improvements to local transition arrangements in recent years include:

- New process for Probation to request YJS information for young adults committing new offences who were previously known to the YJS.
- Extending the transition process for young people transferring from YJS to Probation, with additional joint meetings.
- Training sessions delivered by YJS Speech and Language Therapists to Probation staff to help them respond to the communication needs of young adults.
- YJS attendance at MAPPA Level 2 or 3 meetings for new cases aged 18-21 when the YJS previously supervised the young person.

The remit of the new 'Bridges' Speech and Language project includes support for the Probation Service's work with young adults on Probation. The Bridges team provided training to the Dorset Probation Service in March 2026. Plans for 2026/27 include the offer of speech and language assessments for 18-25 year-olds on Probation and support for Probation colleagues to develop communication-friendly practice. This is likely to include producing Easy Read versions of documents such as post-release licence conditions.

6.10 Remands

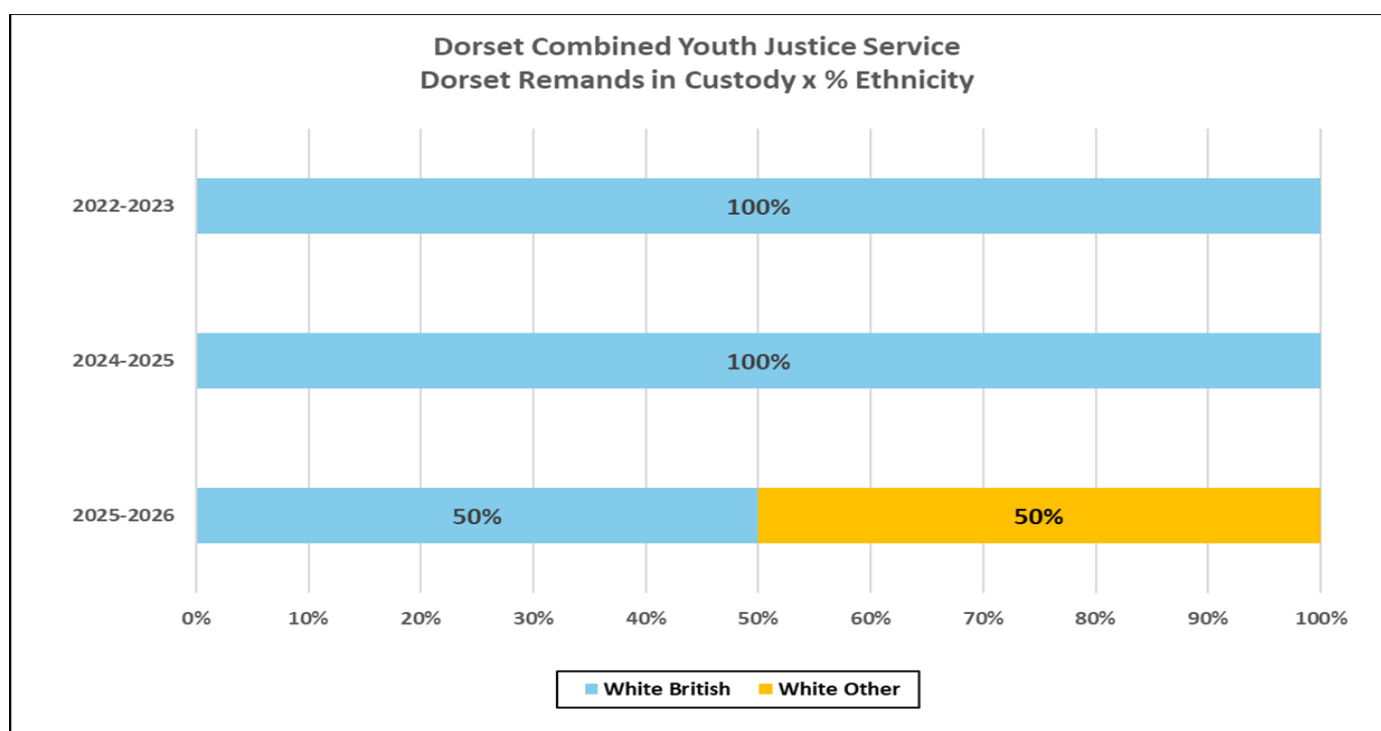
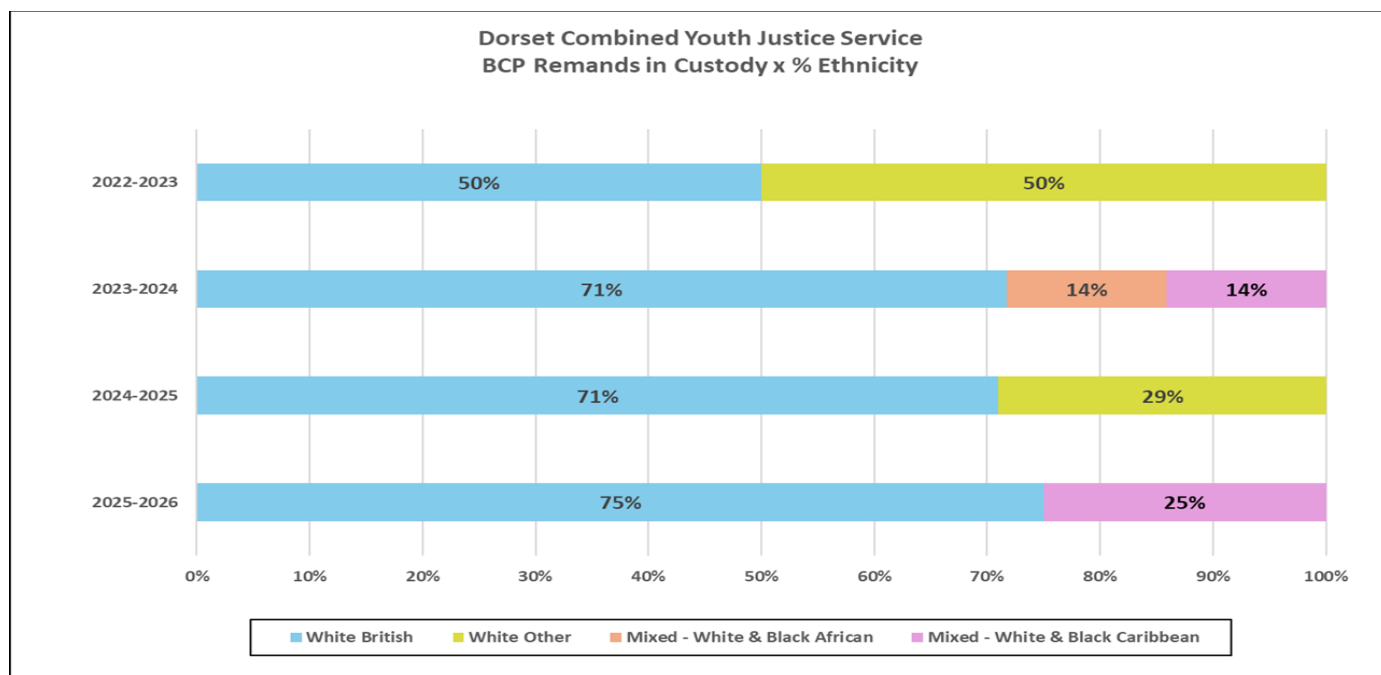
Six children were remanded in custody during 2025/26, compared to seven children in each of the two previous years. Four of the six children were from BCP Council, two were from Dorset Council.

All six children were male.

Children who are remanded in custody gain 'child in care' status if they are not already a child in care. Two of the six children were already a child in care before being remanded into custody.

One of the children was aged 15 when he was remanded into custody; the other five were all aged 17.

Four of the children defined their ethnicity as White British, one defined his ethnicity as White Other and one defined his ethnicity as Mixed – White and Black Caribbean. The following charts show the ethnicity of children remanded in custody in recent years.



Low numbers of children remanded into custody means that each child has a significant impact on the percentage figures.

One of the children was remanded in custody in 2025 after a successful appeal against his previous conviction and custodial sentence, pending a re-trial. After nearly 6 months on remand, and a few days before the scheduled re-trial, the CPS decided to offer no evidence and the child was acquitted.

Two of the children who were remanded in custody did not go on to receive a custodial sentence, including the child mentioned in the previous paragraph whose re-trial did not go ahead.

Each remand in custody is reviewed in team meetings to consider if alternative options could have been taken. In most cases the remand decision reflects the seriousness of the alleged offence, and may also reflect patterns of offending and previous non-compliance with court orders and bail conditions.

The Ministry of Justice invited bids in March 2026 for regional remand partnerships. Local authorities in the south-west region decided not to submit a bid. There is still scope, though, to strengthen local partnerships across criminal justice agencies and children's services to ensure that remands to custody are avoided whenever possible.

6.11 Custodial Sentences and Resettlement

Seven local children received custodial sentences during 2025/26 (compared to six in each of the two previous years). Information about custodial sentences and analysis of the young people is included in section 4.2 of this document. Information about the support for the health needs and education needs of children in custody is included in sections 6.4 and 6.5.

In recent years very few children have been released from custody before their 18th birthday. Of the seven children sentenced to custody in 2025/26, five of them will turn 18 before being released. The Probation Service takes over case responsibility if a young person turns 18 while serving a custodial sentence.

Finding suitable accommodation for children leaving custody can be challenging. DCYJS contributes to local authority care planning processes, promoting the early identification of the child's release address. The DCYJS Manager reports to the DCYJS Partnership Board on the timeliness of accommodation being confirmed for children being released from custodial sentences. This measure is also included in the new youth justice Key Performance Indicators. The release address for children leaving custody is sometimes not confirmed until the last few days before release. The final release address may be in another local authority area. As well as causing the child a lot of anxiety and distress, late confirmation of release address and local authority area makes it difficult to plan the child's resettlement, affecting access to education, health care and constructive activities.

With low numbers going into custody, and most of them becoming adults before they are released, the approach to resettlement for each child is planned individually.

6.12 Working with Families

DCYJS parenting staff provide support to the parents and carers of children on the YJS caseload. Support can be provided under a Parenting Order but in practice it is always achievable on a voluntary basis. Most contact is provided on a one to one basis, focusing on communications, relationships, setting boundaries and applying consequences. The workers remain alert to risk and safeguarding issues, attending multi-agency meetings, and supporting parents in their interactions with other services.

When appropriate, separate parenting workers can be allocated to a child's father and mother, in order to enable engagement with both parents.

Plans for 2026/27 include re-launching the YJS Living With Parents workshops to strengthen relationships and to reduce conflict between the parent and child; developing other ways to facilitate joint work with children and parents, with support from other YJS workers; and establishing an internal process to review all new child allocations for possible parenting referrals.

6.13 National Youth Justice Reforms 2026

The Ministry of Justice is engaged in an active programme of youth justice reform during 2026. Announcements have been made, or are expected, for the following areas:

- Knife Crime Guidance
- A Modern Youth Justice System
- Regional Remand Partnerships
- Preventing the drivers of youth custody
- Youth Justice White Paper (expected in May 2026).

National and local reform programmes in the wider YJS partnership include:

- Families First Partnerships
- SEND reforms
- Youth Strategy
- Violence Against Women and Girls strategy
- CAMHS Transformation (local reform programme).

DCYJS planning for 2026/27 will include taking action to align and develop our work in line with these diverse reform programmes.

6.14 DCYJS Priorities and Plans for 2026/27

This document shows the range and scope of YJS activities. The YJS will continue to seek improvements in all areas of its work. During 2026/27 the following strategic priorities will receive additional focus:

- Respond to national and local reforms in youth justice and children's services
- Enhance Child First Practice
- Develop YJS and Partnership work with victims
- Reduce the Over-Representation of some groups of children in the justice system
- Make best use of available resources.

The following table shows the priorities and plans for DCYJS in 2026/27. This is a dynamic plan which will continue to be updated, recognising that other priorities will arise during the year.

DCYJS Partnership Priority or Risk	Area for Development	Partners and Staff Providing Support	Benefits
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Implement Knife Crime Guidance from April 2026	Dorset Police DCYJS managers and practitioners Local authority children's services	Reduction in knife crime
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Start working with children while they are under investigation for weapon offences	DCYJS managers and practitioners Dorset Police	Earlier intervention leads to reduced weapon offending and other offending
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Advise on, seek to influence and prepare for national Youth Justice reforms	DCYJS Head of Service DCYJS Board	Workable and beneficial reforms are put in place
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Align YJS, and needs of YJS children/victims, with local implementation of Families First	DCYJS Head of Service BCP Council and Dorset Council	Effective joint work to meet the care and education needs of children in the YJS

	Partnerships and SEND reforms	Children's Services senior leaders	
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Ensure YJS mental health team is well-located to work effectively after local CAMHS Transformation	DCYJS Head of Service Dorset HealthCare Trust	Effective joint work to meet the health needs of children in the YJS
Respond to national and local reform programmes	Explore options for partnership work locally to reduce remands to custody	YJS Head of Service Dorset Police CPS HM Courts BCP and Dorset Children's Services	Fewer children are remanded into custody
Enhance Child First Practice	Whole YJS workshops to review Child First practice and agree further improvements	DCYJS managers, staff and volunteers	Enhancement of Child First practice to achieve better outcomes for children
Enhance Child First Practice (Diverting from stigma)	Continue to work with Dorset Police to develop alternative non-court options for motoring offences	Dorset Police DCYJS HoS, DCYJS Team Managers	Avoid first-time entrants for motoring offences such as speeding
Enhance Child First Practice (Diverting from stigma)	Monitor the lower age of First-Time Entrants in the Dorset Council area and identify remedial actions	DCYJS managers Dorset Police Dorset Council	Preventing or delaying entry to the justice system
Enhance Child First Practice (Building pro-social identity)	Continue to expand range and access to positive activities for children, including nature-based projects	DCYJS Activities Coordinator	Children build pro-social identity and build links with their community
Enhance Child First Practice (Collaborating with Children)	Develop new ways to engage children in contributing to service design	DCYJS managers DCYJS Activities Coordinator	Build children's positive identity, improve YJS service delivery
Child First Practice (Building pro-social identity)	Build team members' knowledge and confidence to work with children on the impact of their online experiences and identity	DCYJS practitioners and managers	Children's online activity supports positive identity and reduces harm arising from online activity.
Reducing over-representation	Investigate and agree actions in response to black or mixed heritage children being over-represented in the BCP Council area	DCYJS practitioners and managers BCP Children's Services	Reduce the over-representation of black or mixed heritage children from BCP in the justice system
Reducing over-representation	Further analysis of children receiving custodial sentences, to enhance YJS and partner offer to children entering the justice system under age 15 with multiple needs	DCYJS managers Local authority Children's Social Care and Education Services	Fewer of these children progress through the justice system and reach custody

Reducing over-representation	Complete the actions arising from the audit of work with Children in Care and review progress	DCYJS managers and practitioners Local authority children's services and Virtual Schools Child in Care health team	Reduction in the numbers of children in care entering the justice system or reoffending
Develop YJS and partnership work with victims	Continue work to identify and respond to victim vulnerabilities, especially child victims	DCYJS managers and RJ practitioners YJS partnership services	Children who have been the victims of crime receive support to address their vulnerabilities
Develop YJS and partnership work with victims	Improve YJS victim data recording and reporting to support service improvement	DCYJS Managers, Performance and Information Manager, RJ practitioners	More accurate and comprehensive data for YJS victim work helps to identify areas needing more resource or improvement
Make best use of available resources	Agree plans to balance budget through increase income and/or reduced costs	DCYJS Head of Service DCYJS Board BCP Children's Services Management Accountant	YJS delivers high-quality work while coping with budget reductions
Make best use of available resources	Streamline data recording processes to reduce duplication. Improve data reporting to show areas for targeting limited resources, such as children with multiple forms of disadvantage/need.	DCYJS managers DCYJS Business Support Officers and practitioners	YJS gathers and uses accurate data to help direct the use of limited service resources

7 Sign off, submission and approval

This Youth Justice Plan has been approved by the YJS Partnership Board in April 2026.

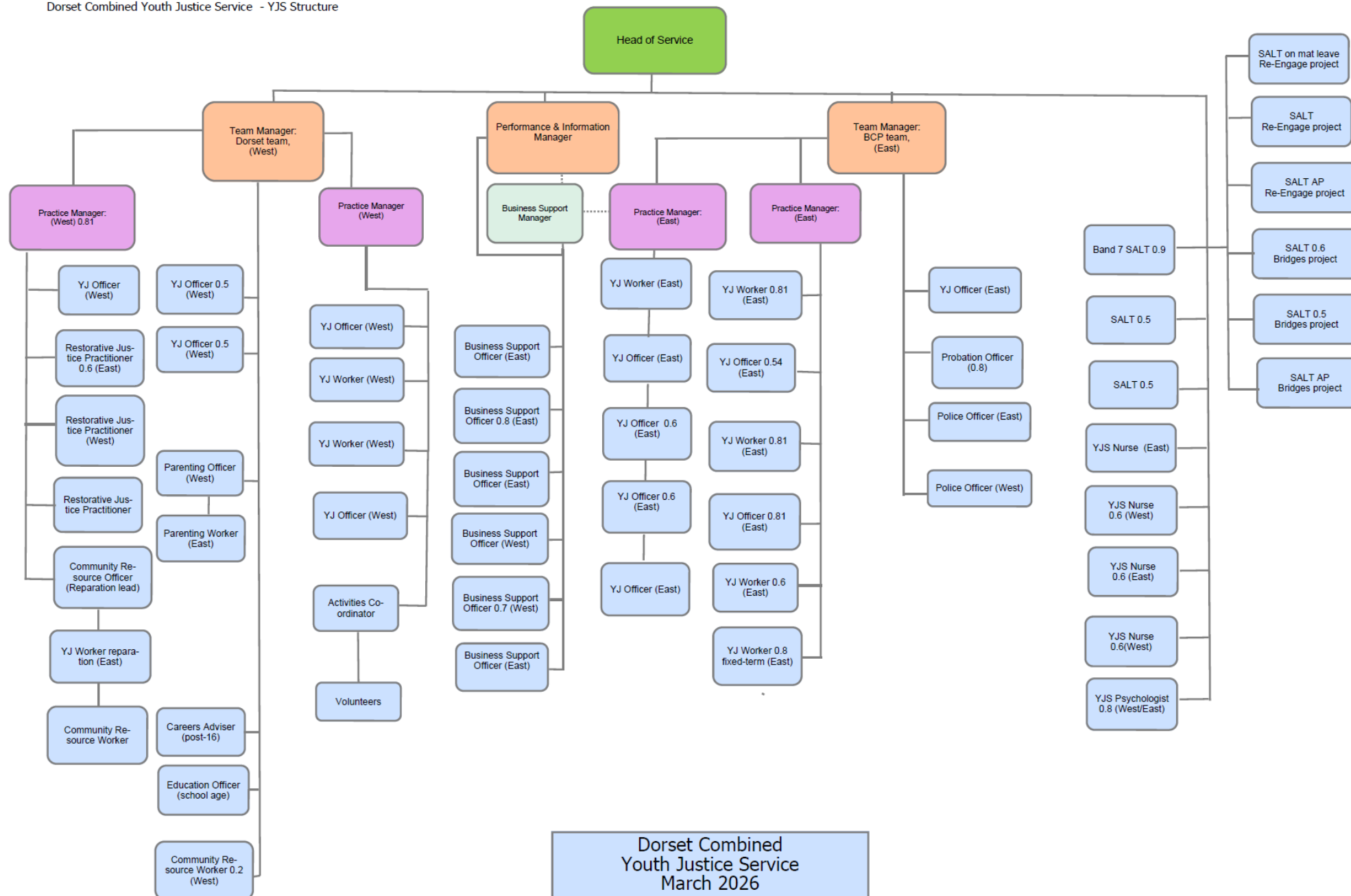
In accordance with 'Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000', Youth Justice Plans must be approved by the full council of the local authority. This Youth Justice Plan is subject to the scrutiny and approval processes of our two local authorities. It will be considered for approval by the full council of Dorset Council in July 2026 and by the full council of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council in July 2026.

Chair of YJS Board - name	Paul Dempsey
Signature	
Date	

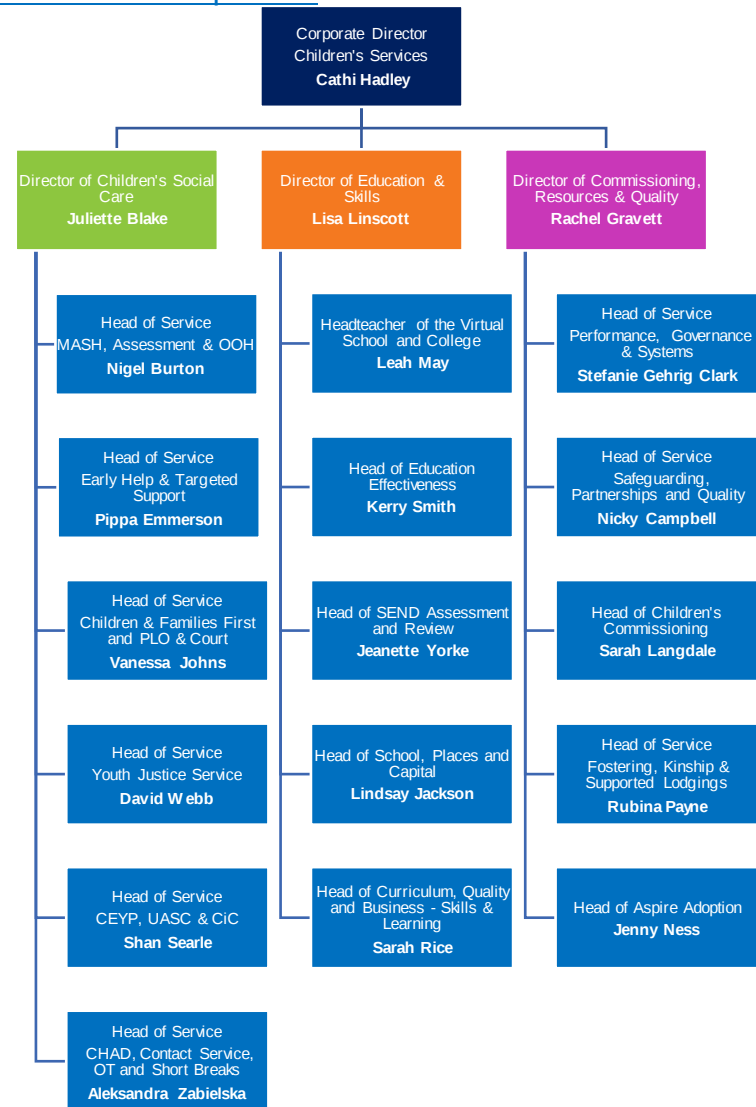
8 Appendix 1 – Service Structure Chart

The following structure charts show the staffing structure of Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service and where the service sits in the two local authorities.

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service - YJS Structure



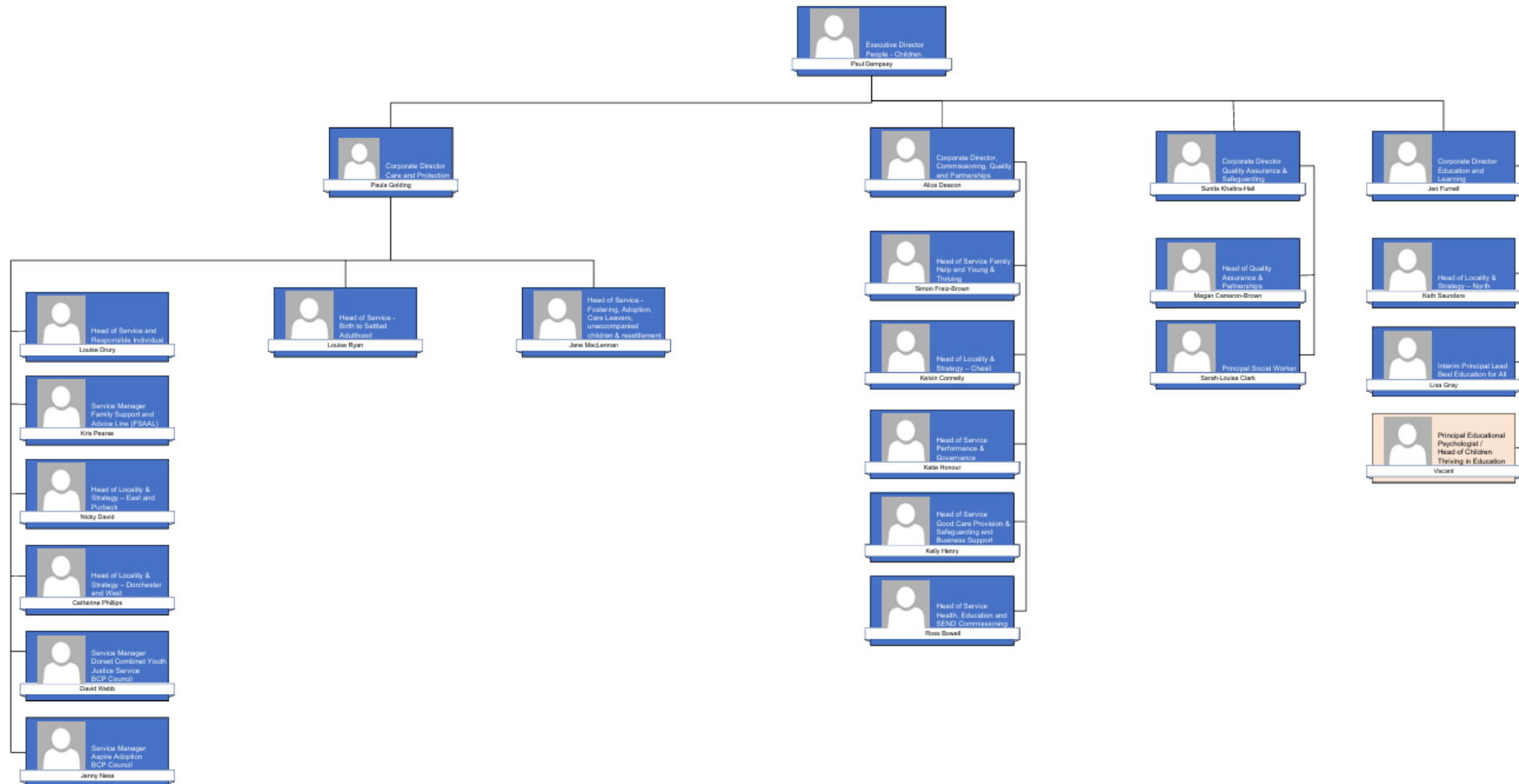
BCP Council Children's Services Extended Leadership Team



Dorset Council Children's Services Extended Leadership Team



Children's Services Extended Leadership Team



DCYJS Staff and Volunteers:

The following table shows the gender, ethnicity and disability status of DCYJS staff members and volunteers:

DCYJS Staff 25 March 2026			
Ethnicity	F	M	Grand Total
White	47	9	56
White Irish		1	1
White Other	1		1
Mixed	2		2
Prefer not to say	2	1	3
Grand Total	52	11	63

Five staff members in DCYJS are recorded as having a disability.

Insert volunteers info

9 Appendix 2 – Budget Contributions 2026/27

Partner Agency	25/26 Revenue (excluding recharges)	Staff
Dorset Council	£536,164	
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	£628,622	
Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner	£84,794	2.0 Police Officers
The Probation Service (Dorset)	£5,000	0.8 Probation Officer 0.3 Probation Service Officer
NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group	£22,487	2.8 FTE Nurses, 0.8 Psychologist, 1.4 Speech and Language Therapists
Youth Justice Grant	£767,922	
Turnaround Grant	£123,184	
Total	£2,179,302	

10 Appendix 3 – Local Authority Demographic Information



Population	Age 10-17
Number of Children ¹	34,575
Male ¹	51%
Female ¹	49%
Pupils eligible for Free School Meals ²	22.3%
Pupils with SEN Support ²	14.7%
Pupils with an EHC Plan ²	7.1%
Pupils from Non-white Minority Ethnic groups ³	6.3%
25.7% children living in Poverty after housing costs ⁴	

Safeguarding	Age 10-17
Number of Children in Need ⁵	582
Male ⁵	53%
Female ⁵	47%
Number of Children with a Child Protection Plan ⁷	286
Number of Children in Care ⁶	341
Male ⁶	60%
Female ⁶	40%
Number of children and young people at risk of exploitation ⁷	
Significant	19
Moderate	46
Emerging/Reducing	43

1. Dorset mid-year 2024 population estimates (published September 2025).

2. October 2025 School Census (includes all pupils at a Dorset School aged 10-17: ages as at 31 August 2025).

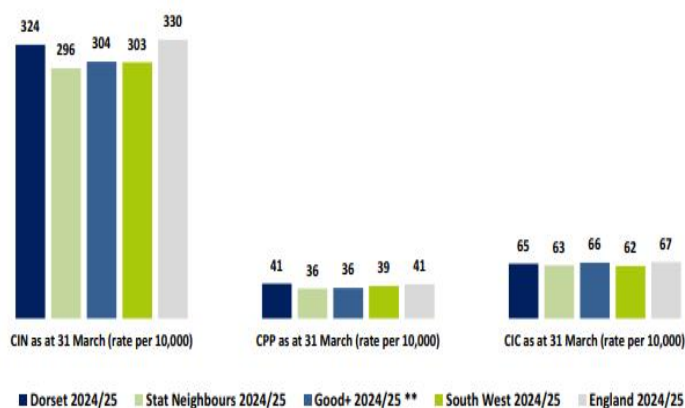
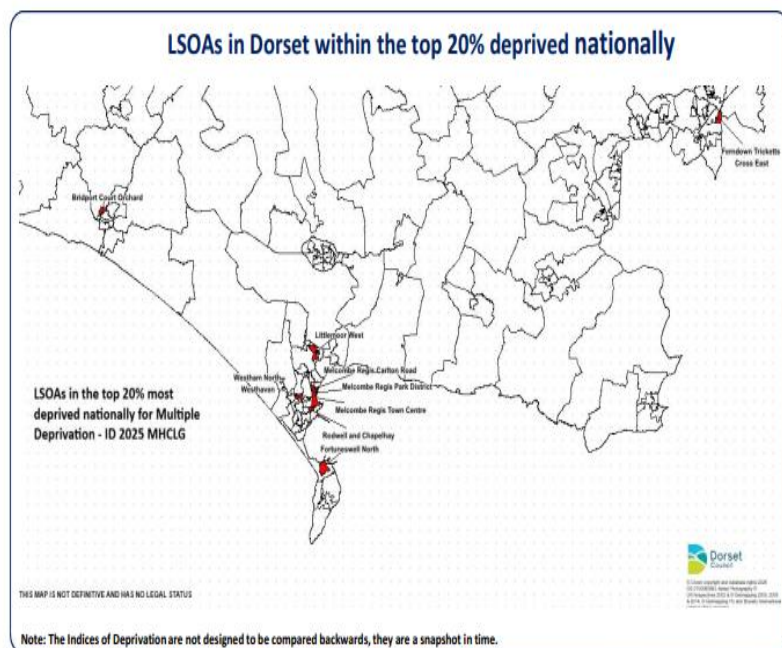
3. January 2025 School Census (all non-white pupils at a Dorset School, excluding 'Refused' and 'Information not yet obtained').

4. Based on the DWP/HMRC statistics 'Children in low income families: local area statistics' (March 2024).

5. From MOSAIC, as at 28 February 2026. Excluding CP and CIC. Recorded by Sex, not Gender

6. From MOSAIC, as at 28 February 2026. Recorded by Sex, not Gender

7. From MOSAIC as at 28 February 2026. Includes CCE, CSE, Modern Slavery, Peer to Peer Abuse, Radicalisation and Youth Violence



** Good+ Local Authorities are: Derbyshire, Essex, Kent, North Yorkshire, Shropshire, Somerset and Worcestershire

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole



Population¹: Age 10-17

Number of Children ¹	35,978
Male ¹	51.3%
Female ¹	48.7%

Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals ²	21.6%
Pupils with SEN Support ³	15.9%
Pupils with an EHC Plan ⁴	5.7%

Pupils from Non-white Minority Ethnic groups⁵ 17.8%

27% children living in poverty after housing costs⁶

Safeguarding Age 10-17

Number of Children in Need ⁵	385
Male ⁵	53.2%
Female ⁵	46.8%

Number of Children with a Child Protection Plan⁷ 179

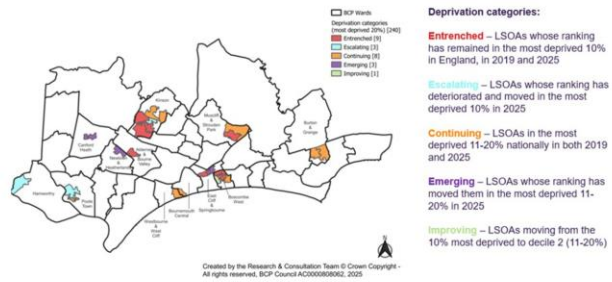
Number of Children in Care ⁸	388
Male ⁸	54.9%
Female ⁸	44.8%
Indeterminate ⁸	0.3%

Number of children and young people at risk of exploitation⁸

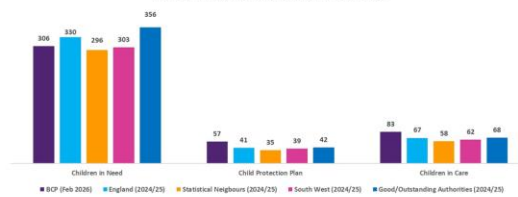
High Risk ⁸	43
Medium Risk ⁸	54
Low Risk ⁸	118

1. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole population estimates (published July 2025)
2. January 2025 School Census (includes all pupils at a BCP School aged 10-17 as at 31st August 2025)
3. January 2025 School Census (all non-white pupils at a BCP School, excluding 'Refused' and 'Information not yet obtained')
4. Local child poverty indicators 2022/23. From DWP 'Children in low income families: local area statistics' (March 2024).
5. From MCS6AC, as at 28 February 2025. Excluding CP, CIP, P, Open to Assessment. Gender figures exclude Unknown.
6. From MCS6AC, as at 28 February 2025. Gender figures exclude Unknown.
7. From MCS6AC, as at 28 February 2025.
8. From MCS6AC, as at 28 February 2025.

Which BCP areas are most deprived – IMD 2025



Need comparison (rate per 10,000 0-17 year olds)



11 Common youth justice terms – national glossary

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience. Events in the child's life that can have negative, long-lasting impact on the child's health and life outcomes
AIM 3	Assessment, Intervention and Moving on; an assessment tool and framework for children who have instigated harmful sexual behaviour
ASB	Anti-social behaviour
AssetPlus	Assessment tool to be used for children who have been involved in offending behaviour
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
CCE	Child Criminal exploitation, where a child is coerced, through threats of violence, or induced to take part in criminal activity
Children	We define a child as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and civil legislation in England and Wales. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.
Child First	A system wide approach to working with children in the youth justice system.
Child in Care	Child in Care; where a child is looked after by the local authority
CME	Child Missing Education
Constructive resettlement	The principle of encouraging and supporting a child's positive identity development from pro-offending to pro-social after release from custody
Contextual safeguarding	An approach to safeguarding children which considers the wider community and peer influences on a child's safety
Community resolution	An informal disposal, administered by the police, for low level offending where there has been an admission of guilt
EHCP	Education Health and Care plan; a plan outlining the education, health and social care needs of a child with additional needs
ETE	Education, training or employment
EHE	Electively home educated; children who are formally recorded as being educated at home and do not attend school
EOTAS	Education other than at school; children who receive their education away from a mainstream school setting

FTE	First-Time Entrant. A child who receives a statutory criminal justice outcome for the first time (youth caution, youth conditional caution, or court disposal)
HMIP	Her Majesty Inspectorate of Probation. An independent arms-length body who inspect Youth Justice services and probation services
HSB	Harmful sexual behaviour, developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour by children, which is harmful to another child or adult, or themselves
JAC	Junior Attendance Centre
MAPPA	Multi agency public protection arrangements
MFH	Missing from Home
NRM	National Referral Mechanism. The national framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery in order to gain help to support and protect them
OOCR	Out-of-court resolution. All recorded disposals where a crime is recorded, an outcome delivered but the matter is not sent to court
Outcome 22/21	An informal disposal, available where the child does not admit the offence, but they undertake intervention to build strengths to minimise the possibility of further offending
Over-represented children	Appearing in higher numbers than the local or national average
RHI	Return home Interviews. These are interviews completed after a child has been reported missing
SLCN	Speech, Language and communication needs
STC	Secure training centre
SCH	Secure children's home
Young adult	We define a young adult as someone who is 18 or over. For example, when a young adult is transferring to the adult probation service.
YJS	Youth Justice Service. This is now the preferred title for services working with children in the youth justice system. This reflects the move to a child first approach
YOI	Young offender institution