

Youth Justice Services

Cheshire East, Cheshire West,
Halton and Warrington

Annual Refresh 2025 3-Year Strategic plan 2024-2027



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List of abbreviations

AYM	Association of Youth Offending Team Managers
CJB	Cheshire Criminal Justice Board
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CWCC	Cheshire West and Chester Council
FTE	First Time Entrant
GRT	Gypsy, Roma and Traveller
HMCTS	HM Courts and Tribunal service
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
ICB	Integrated Care Board
KPI	Key performance indicator
LGA	Local Government Association
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OCD	Out of Court Disposal
OPCC	Office of the Police Crime Commissioner
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence
PDAT	Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool
PNC	Police National Computer
SVS	Serious Violence Strategy
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SWAP	Safety Working Together Action Prevention
VCS	Voluntary Community Sector
VPA	Victim and Prisoners' Act
VRU	Violence Reduction Unit
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund
YFPP	Young Futures Prevention Partnership
YJAF	Youth Justice Application Framework
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJS	Youth Justice Services (Cheshire)

Foreword

In my first year as chair, I am delighted to present this comprehensive annual update to our 3-year Youth Justice Strategic Plan for the Cheshire sub-region.

It has been agreed by the YJS Partnership Board and provides an overview of the pan-Cheshire Youth Justice Service, sets out details of performance over the past year and outlines our priorities for 2025-2026. It describes how the partnership will meet our ambitions to deliver a high-quality service for children, families, and victims of youth crime. Our plan is both strategic and operational and describes a committed service that has continued to perform strongly, with a low volume of children entering the Criminal Justice System and we are also encouraged to see reoffending rates declining in 2024-2025. The use of youth custody is also at a record low in Cheshire, with a total of only eight children sentenced to custody in the last year. This reflects the strong relationships Cheshire Youth Justice Service has with the courts and high local confidence in effective alternatives to custody.

The service has operated extremely well against the backdrop of a significantly challenging back-office infrastructure change programme with Cheshire West and Chester Council now hosting on behalf of the multi-authority partnership. I'm extremely proud of the way the service and wider partners came together to deliver this change with minimal impact on services to children, families and victims, while continuing to achieve such impressively consistent performance. I know Tom and the team work hard to ensure Child First, Trauma Informed and Relational Practice are at the core of all their work and it is genuinely heartwarming to hear about and read examples in here of evidence-based values making such a positive difference for some of Cheshire's most vulnerable people.

The YJS Management Board is committed to delivering this plan and will oversee its progress through to approval and publication by all four local councils. We have welcomed some new Board members recently and came together in June for an extended development session. This was to ensure we all fully understand the role and expectation on Board members to embrace Child First principles and set the strategic direction for all things related to Youth Justice across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

I am strongly committed to this approach and will ensure the guiding principle of recognising the potential of all children is reflected across all the work we do.

Amanda Perraton
Chair of YJS Management Board

Executive summary

This is the 2025-2026 update of the 3-year (2024-2027) Youth Justice Plan for the Cheshire sub-region. While the foreword from our new Chair, the performance data and accompanying narrative and images have all been refreshed, the broad strategic direction of travel for the Youth Justice Partnership and Cheshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) remain unchanged.

It is evident from national research and two recently commissioned local needs analyses (1), that children entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS) experience multiple adversities and trauma. Early childhood exposure to violence, abuse, neglect, poverty, school exclusion and poor health among justice-involved children, are all disproportionate to the general 10-17 year population. This understanding has influenced the strategic direction of travel for YJS across Cheshire. The priorities and content of this plan align with those relating to children and young people from across the four Cheshire places and the public health approach to violence prevention, as articulated in the Serious Violence Strategy (SVS) for the county (2). There has been a significant decrease in the overall number of children entering the justice system over several years, and the historically low levels have been sustained across Cheshire despite the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis and other societal pressures. Many comparable regions have witnessed an upturn in child entrants to the justice system in the last couple of years, so we are proud to see the sustained impact of our pan-Cheshire youth diversion model. We have worked extensively with the police to ensure national developments, such as the new Child Gravity Matrix have been incorporated into a new out of court disposal (OOCd) protocol and a new joint decision-making process, which went live in April 2025.

We have a relatively new senior leadership team, however this is bringing fresh perspectives and the right balance of continuity and change as Cheshire builds on a solid regional and national reputation for strong performance. This is an exciting time for Cheshire to develop the partnership, while modernising the service and embracing the latest national and international evidence on Child First Youth Justice.

This plan outlines the “three pillars” vision for the service (Figure 1), which is rooted in the latest evidence and research on what works. In addition, the new leadership team has been implementing modest service re-design, intended to retain the economies of scale and equity of service at a sub-regional level, while aligning more effectively with local place-based services for children, victims and families.

Cheshire YJS has a very good regional and national reputation for delivering positive outcomes for children, victims and families. In common with all youth justice services across England and Wales, YJS continues to report against 10 key performance indicators (KPIs), in addition to the three main outcome measures First Time Entrants (FTE) to the justice system, reoffending and the use of custody.

For Cheshire YJS, 2024-2025 was a year of substantial infrastructure and organisational change. The previous shared service arrangements for youth justice delivery had evolved across the sub-region over two decades and had been through several iterations as Cheshire County Council, separated into two unitary authorities and youth justice teams merged incrementally. A comprehensive review of governance arrangements commented on the historical legacies of a service that had evolved over time, with a complex mix of cash and 'in-kind' contributions. These were highlighted as a risk to sustainability.

Consequently, a sub-regional review into the structure, financial arrangements and future sustainability of YJS as a pan-Cheshire partnership, recommended the service should be 'fully hosted' by one local authority. This proposal was agreed by all statutory partners and formerly approved by all four councils in the spring of 2024. The period between April 2024 and April 2025 involved significant infrastructure change, with multiple project workstreams (ICT, Finance, HR, Legal and Comms) all overseen by senior representatives of a pan-Cheshire 'Transitions Board' sitting in parallel to the main Youth Justice Partnership Board. Maintaining service continuity, while in transition to a hosted model was flagged as the principal risk for the partnership, but apart from relatively minor disruption related to ICT migration, the service has been very resilient and staff adapted where necessary, ensuring services to children, families and victims were largely unaffected.

Vision, mission and values

At the Service Development Day in July 2024, the whole service, including volunteers and some Board members, did an exercise to refresh the Vision, Values and Mission of the Service, ensuring they were aligned with national Child First principles and our three strategic pillars. These are shown below:-

Vision

‘To deliver high quality services that make a difference to everyone we work alongside. Helping our children and others be the best they can be and feel safe and valued in their communities’

Mission

Supporting children, young people, parents, carers and victims to make positive changes through working collaboratively;

- Promoting safer communities and reducing the likelihood of reoffending and harm caused – by tackling the root causes of children’s offending.
- Listening and responding to the voice of the victim and empowering them to become involved.
- Connecting with children, helping them to understand the impact of their behaviour and achieve improved outcomes.

In addition we committed to the following four **Values** Statements:

- ***Our children and victims are at the heart of all that we do, we work with optimism, empathy and tenacity;***
- ***We approach all we do with care, respect, understanding and empathy;***
- ***Connections matter: We build relationships through working creatively, consistently and with integrity;***
- ***We collaborate with and empower those we work alongside by listening and responding to what they have to say.***

We will continue to value diversity, challenge social inequality and listen to children and victims, while developing trusted relationships that take their views into account. We understand the wider causes of offending behaviour are often rooted in trauma and social inequality, so trauma-informed practice and systemic ideas are at the heart of how we work. We

continue to work in a restorative way and strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children. YJS continue to work with partners on diverting children away from the formal CJS and continue to seek to detain a minimal number of children in custody, believing they are best supported to make changes in their lives whilst in the community, for all but the most serious of offences.

The latest research and evidence is clear that services working with children, who cause harm to others, should adhere to Child First principles and be Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based in the way they are configured and delivered. Cheshire has taken these tenets and adopted them as our three pillars (Figure 1) to inform the Youth Justice strategy from point of arrest, right through to the resettlement of children following release from custody.

We know the majority of victims of children's offending are other children and the majority of children who perpetrate violence have themselves, experienced previous violent victimisation. So applying Child First practice is as much about reducing harm to victims as it is about improving the life chances of children who offend.

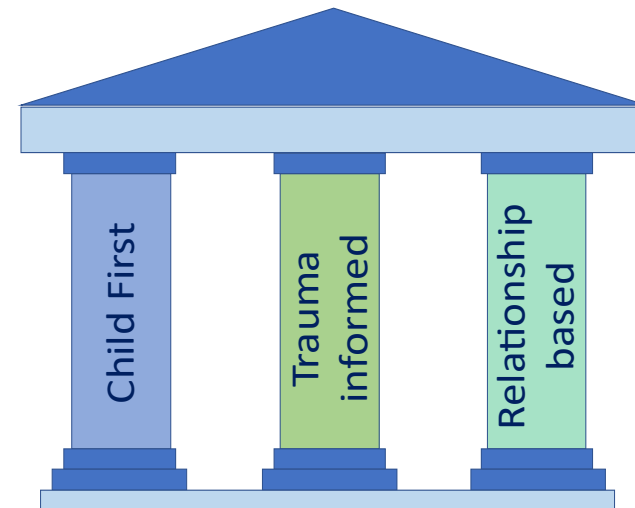


Figure 1. Cheshire YJS Three Pillars Strategic Vision

Regional and local context

The Cheshire footprint covered by YJS comprises the four unitary local authorities of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester (CWCC), Halton and Warrington (Figure 2). Each local authority area has a Children's Safeguarding and Community Safety Partnership and Cheshire is divided into three Probation delivery units (North, West and East) and has nine local policing units. The workforce of Cheshire YJS has staff employed by CWCC and seconded workers from Cheshire Constabulary, the Probation Service, three different NHS Trusts and two private providers. The service also has support in a variety of different roles from 40 volunteers. This provides a strong partnership base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families and victims. An organisational structure chart of staff is shown in Appendix A and ethnicity and gender of staff is shown in Appendix B.

Around 250,000 Cheshire residents are below the age of 18, with 101,077 aged 10-17. Across the four local authorities, there are over 1,000 cared for children. The large geographical area of 905 square miles does present some logistical challenges for the service, which has offices in Crewe, Winsford and Widnes.

Staff work on a hybrid basis with additional virtual working areas in Macclesfield, Warrington, Chester, Runcorn and Ellesmere Port. The children we work with tend to live in these larger, more urban locations.

Cheshire can be viewed as an affluent and rural county with pockets of urban deprivation. The volume of children in the justice system fluctuates between local authority areas but is broadly what would be expected based on population size relative to social deprivation.

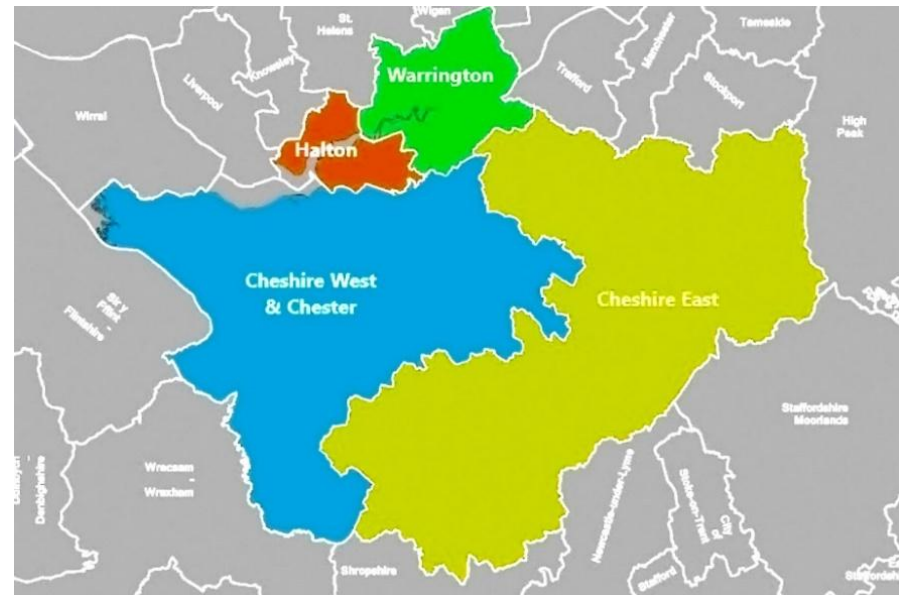


Figure 2. Cheshire and 15 neighbouring local authorities

Cheshire East and CWCC have the largest populations and Halton has the smallest population but higher levels of social deprivation. The UK Government indices of deprivation (2019) (3) show out of 317 local authorities, Halton is ranked highest of the four Cheshire authorities at 39, Warrington 175, CWCC 183 and Cheshire East, has the lowest at 228. Although highly diverse in terms of age, the county is not as diverse compared to other areas of England, with around 95% of residents identifying as 'White British'. The Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community also has a presence in some areas. Figure 2 shows Cheshire shares borders with 15 other local authority areas and has excellent road and rail links to the three closest cities of Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham. Although these provide improved economic and lifestyle experiences, they also enable organised criminal activity such as County Lines and other forms of child exploitation. Cheshire Constabulary's Operation Apollo continues to respond quickly to new lines and regularly closes these down. New supply lines crop up unless demand drops and this is something Cheshire and the National County Lines Coordination Centre engage with partners to try to drive forward. Over the past 12 months, the average number of lines in Cheshire remains at 38 (range: 20-51) but with a lower peak than the previous year, which went as high as 68.

The place-based graphic in Figure 3 show an overview of demographic data for context only.

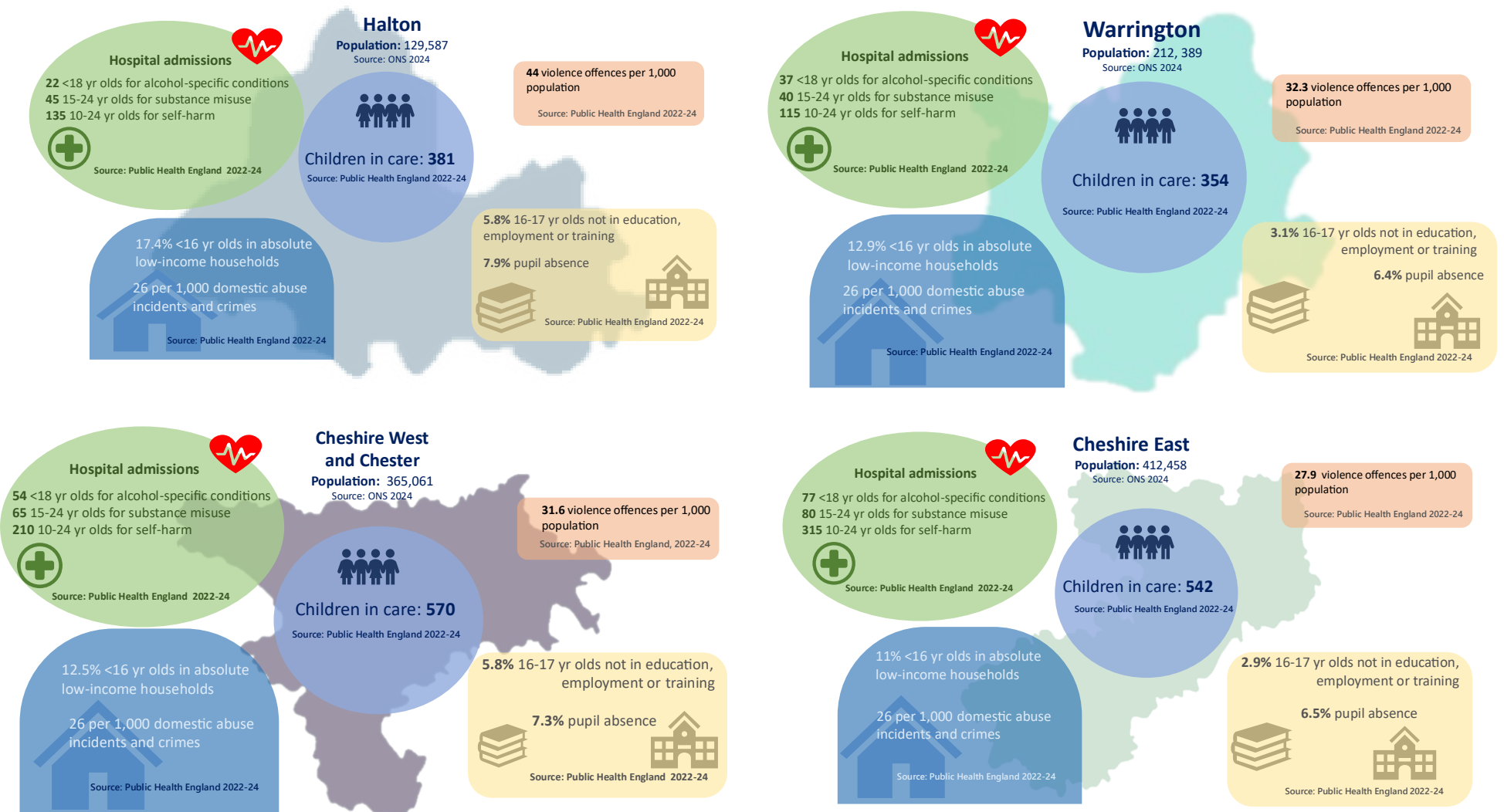
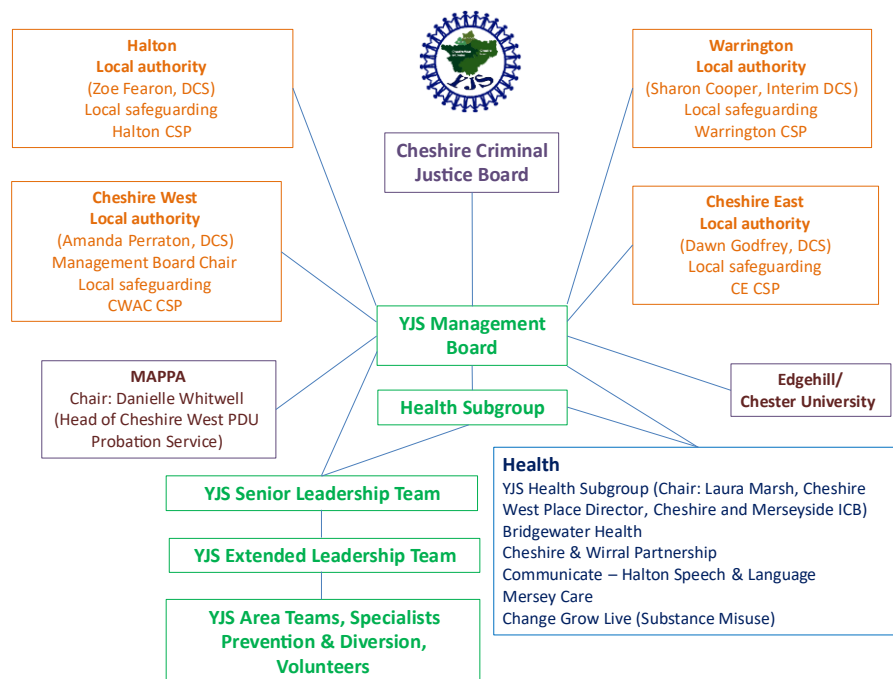


Figure 3. Place-based demographics for Halton, Warrington, Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East
(Data sources: NHS Fingerprint [4] and Office of National Statistics [5])



DCS Director of Children's Services. CSP Children's Safeguarding Partnership, PDU Probation Delivery Unit, ICB Integrated Care Board

Figure 4. Sub-regional Youth Justice System Strategic Partnership

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

A strength of Cheshire YJS is the strategic and professional links it has with colleagues at a sub-regional level in the public, private, academic, and voluntary sectors (Figure 4). The YJS Head of Service is a core member of both the pan-Cheshire Criminal Justice Board (CCJB) and Serious Violence Duty Partnership Board with senior youth justice management representation at CCJB sub-groups.

YJS is well placed to influence strategy and decisions at scale despite working in a complex governance landscape comprising four children's safeguarding partnerships, four community safety partnerships and a plethora of other place-based and sub-regional strategic groups, where Cheshire YJS has a duty (or need) to cooperate.

Cheshire YJS is also a core member of the four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships, the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), and the four Community Safety Partnerships.

These links have been enhanced by the adoption of a more youth justice-focussed role for the police officers, as recommended by the last HMIP inspection of Cheshire. After a policing review of Integrated Offender Management and the latest National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) guidance (6) on the role of seconded police officers, Cheshire Constabulary has increased the number of fully seconded and embedded officers in the service from three to four.

Cheshire does not have a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) so as a sub-region, it does lack some of the investment, infrastructure and collaborative commissioning at scale brought by a VRUs to urban metropolitan areas. Cheshire YJS is an example of how strong governance and leadership can oversee the delivery of an effective multi-agency / multi-disciplinary service across local authority boundaries. However, the move to a single local authority hosted model

reflected the need to simplify the operating environment, solve some of the organisational challenges and improve efficiency, enabling YJS as a whole to focus more time on delivering a quality service.

Online harm, neglect (including educational neglect), domestic abuse, sexual abuse and exploitation all feature disproportionately in the lives of justice-involved children and these are also priority thematic areas in Children's Safeguarding Partnerships across Cheshire. This plan specifically refers to the youth justice system but the strategic vision to improve outcomes for children, victims and communities across Cheshire is shared by the wider pan-Cheshire partnership. Timelines for approval at full council are complicated given the sub-regional arrangement. However, the four Directors of Children's Services are committed to taking this latest Youth Justice Plan (and annual updates) through their respective council governance channels.

Board membership and leadership

The Management Board Chair rotates every 2 years, across the four local authorities. CWCC's Executive Director of Children and Families is the current chair of the Board and also provides line management to the Head of Service. Chairing of the Youth Justice Partnership is due to pass to Warrington in April 2027 so with continuity in mind, Warrington's Director of Children Services has recently been appointed as Vice Chair.

Board membership is fully constituted with membership at a sufficiently senior level from all statutory partners, supplemented by other key members, including a leading academic advisor, an independent safeguarding advisor and a magistrate. An induction process is in place for new Board members and a new, over-arching legal partnership agreement between the four local authorities with CWCC as lead authority, hosting the YJS was agreed in April 2025. The partnership agreement outlines how local authority contributions to the service are made according to a percentage funding formula. This was calculated following a comprehensive zero-based review exercise into service demand and activity.

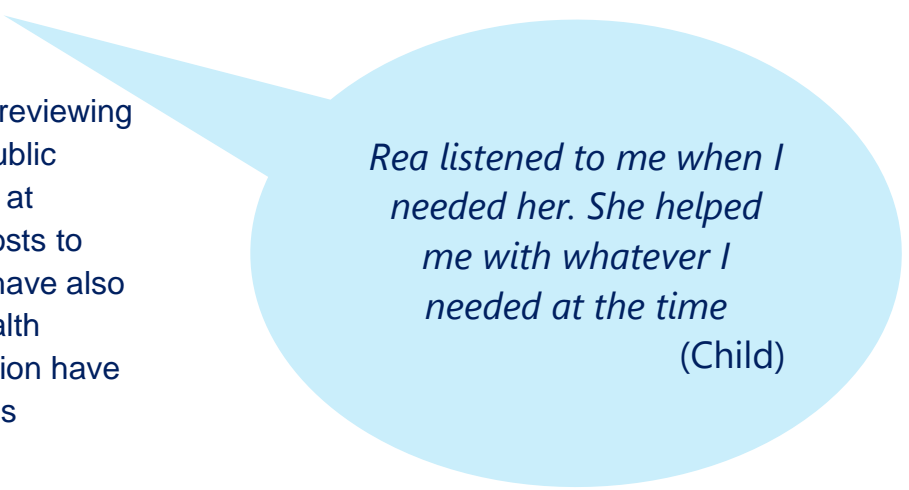
The Youth Justice Partnership (Board) will also utilise the children's committee of Cheshire and Mersey Integrated Care Board (ICB) to highlight service achievements and risks. Notwithstanding the financial pressures on the ICB, the Board has noted that cash contributions from health to YJS across Cheshire have not increased in line with inflation for several years, and a new funding formula to ensure equitable flow from Cheshire and Merseyside ICB to place has been

proposed. At the time of refresh in May 2025, this had been accepted by three of the four places across Cheshire but a final formula and total NHS cash contributions for 2025-2026 have yet to be signed off.

The YJS Management Health Sub-group was established as the only explicitly sub-group of the Board because of the complexity of Health commissioning and provider arrangements across the sub-region. The Chair of the Health Sub-Group acts as Management Board representative for health, while also ensuring connectivity to Place Directors and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB.

The sub-group commissioned the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University to undertake a comprehensive Health Needs Assessment (HNA) (1). Published in 2023, the HNA was based on in-depth analysis of 70% of the children Cheshire YJS worked with in 2022. This research remains one of the most comprehensive and statistically valid studies in the UK, into the presenting health needs (sometimes undiagnosed, and frequently unmet) of children in/on cusp of the justice system. The terms of reference of the Health Sub-group were reviewed in 2024 and with wider public health representation, the group is now informing the commissioning of services upstream of the justice system (at place level).

The workplan for the Health Sub-group in 2025-2026 includes reviewing financial contributions to YJS from ICBs in each place and a public health consultant is working on a cost avoidance paper, aimed at demonstrating health investment in YJS avoids downstream costs to NHS, Local Government and the CJS. The Health Sub-group have also noted a rise in ketamine use by children and its associated health problems. In response, public health teams across the sub-region have been delivering a series of training and public health awareness campaigns.



*Rea listened to me when I
needed her. She helped
me with whatever I
needed at the time*
(Child)

Given the multi-authority constitution, elected members are not on the Youth Justice Management Board, but to raise awareness of youth justice, the service held a bespoke open day for elected members in 2024. This was an opportunity for elected members to learn more about the Child First, trauma-informed and relational way our staff, from different professional disciplines, work together across authorities to support children, caregivers and victims. The event was very positively received by elected members, and YJS staff also welcomed the opportunity to share real examples of how they make a positive difference to the lives of some of the county's most vulnerable people.

This 3-year strategic plan (and subsequent annual updates) will progress through formal local channels for scrutiny, oversight and formal sign off by all four councils in accordance with the legislative requirement after it has been approved by the sub-regional management board. This process remains in place even now CWCC are hosting the service because each authority retains the statutory requirement for provision, scrutiny and oversight of youth justice delivery in their area.

Under a new senior leadership team in 2024-2025, YJS has undertaken some re-design to mirror the area delivery units of policing and probation and to align more effectively with place-based services for children, families and victims (see **Section 10.3 Service Development**).

1. Update on 2024-2025

1.1 Progress on priorities in previous plan

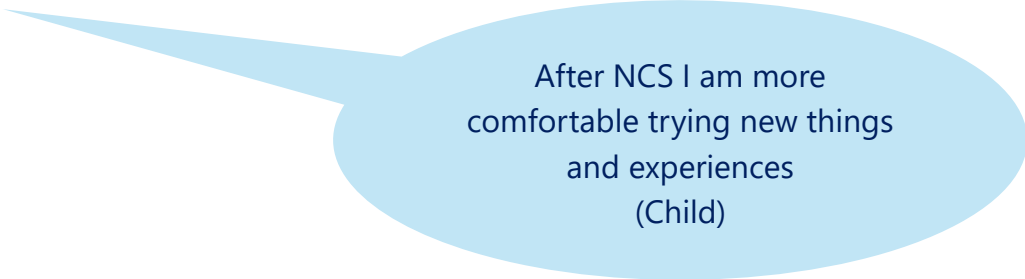
Priority 2024-2025	Progress, what have the outcomes/outputs been?
We will 'ramp-up' participation in creative ways right across the service and facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote prosocial identity and desistance from crime. This will include co-production or co-design of plans, developing projects to support children to desist from crime and reduce harm to victims and communities.	<p>Cheshire YJS' newly created Service Development Hub has been driving participation and application of the Lundy Model (7) of strengthening voice and influence across the service. The organisational re-design and formation of area-based teams is enabling the service to be more outward looking, fostering and nurturing new partnerships with local voluntary community sector (VCS) groups. The YJS Participation Plan has been updated and rebranded as the Participation and Community Development Plan in recognition of the need to connect (or 're-connect') children within their local community. YJS now have designated 'Participation Champions' in each Area Team and managers are influencing local participation strategies. Children supported by the service are now increasingly collaborating on projects with local VCS groups and this will very much continue as a strategic and operational priority, in line with our Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relational principles.</p> <p>The 'My-Plan' document, co-designed with a child, has now been rolled out and is used consistently by professionals and in early 2025, a group of justice-involved children also co-designed an update of the YJS induction booklet. Guides for practitioners on Child First participatory practice have been developed and are being promoted in each area, by our Participation Champions and there have been several excellent examples of co-produced activities (see Section 4). These are designed to help children develop a prosocial identity, sense of achievement and re-integrate them into their local community. The Child First evidence-base is regularly promoted through the monthly 'Power in Participation' feature in the YJS newsletter (YJ News) and our senior practitioners are role-modelling the application of Child First into daily practice. In 2024-2025, Cheshire YJS have introduced the concept of an annual 'impact report' providing evidence of community engagement, voice and influence and social prescribing and have shared this with partners via the Management Board.</p> <p>Embedding Child First practice will remain a priority for the life of this 3-year strategic plan.</p>
We will develop a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring we are data driven and make full use of the	The new framework was designed and developed as an iterative process throughout 2024 and is now presented in PowerPoint format to the Board each quarter. Several data reporting anomalies came to light and YJS are still working with the software provider (CACI Ltd) and liaising with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) data teams and sector colleagues to refine data sets. As a sub-regional partnership, spanning four local authorities, performance reporting is more complex and

<p>management information system to drive practice development.</p>	<p>nuanced than in most Youth Justice Partnerships because data is sent automatically to the YJB via connectivity and the YJB collate and publish it as a pan-Cheshire figure.</p> <p>Disaggregating data to place level necessitates differentiated recording and coding, which is still under development. Notwithstanding this and some significant staffing gaps throughout 2024, the service now has a new Performance Officer and Business and Performance Manager in post who will work closely with senior management and external partners to explore using Microsoft's Power BI to refine reporting in 2025-2026.</p>
<p>We will refine our internal governance processes to ensure management and back-office functions help facilitate the delivery of high-quality services, including enhanced training monitoring and a training needs assessment to inform the staff training plan.</p>	<p>A major organisational review began in 2024-2025 and will continue into 2025-2026. The transition to CWCC as lead authority has taken priority during the last 6 months of 2024-2025 and the absence of a Business and Performance Manager and other vacancies in Business Support have resulted in the review of business support functions not being finalised. Many internal governance functions have been refined to ensure they align with the service's three pillars and new ways of working: including the shift from High Risk Reviews to Safety Panels and the new triaging process and area-based OOC panels.</p> <p>A staff survey and training needs assessment to inform workforce development was undertaken in 2024 and the service will be commissioning specialist training in a number of areas, based on the findings and priority need. We will also be utilising expertise and experience within the service to deliver more training in-house (see Workforce Development in Section 7).</p>
<p>We will benchmark the YJS support offer to victims against the Victims Code of Practice, new Victims' legislation and HMIPs new inspection criteria (refining the role of Restorative Justice workers in YJS if required) identifying and progressing areas for development</p>	<p>A benchmarking exercise was undertaken and presented at the Management Board in December 2024. In common with most Youth Justice Services, there are some gaps, operationally and strategically, in relation to the responsibilities now enshrined in the Victim and Prisoners' Act (VPA) (8). Some of these are systemic and require updating of information/date exchange between Police and YJS and additional YJS personnel being vetted to access the Police NICHE database.</p> <p>The Board have agreed with a proposal from the service to recruit someone with lived experience who can champion the voice and rights of victims and YJS will be exploring options including replicating the 'lay advisor's role on Strategic MAPPA Boards.</p> <p>The service designed a new victim audit tool, based on the key criteria for supporting victims as outlined in the new HMIP Inspection Framework and undertook an audit of victim casework in early 2025. The audit revealed some areas for improvement and these have been collated and captured within the Youth Justice Service Development Plan for 2025-2026. Cheshire YJS were asked to share this new <u>Victim Audit tool</u> (9) on the national YJS resource hub, as it was considered to be the first of its kind following the VPA.</p>

<p>In partnership with Cheshire Constabulary, we will review the current joint decision-making arrangements for the use of out of court disposals for our children. We will ensure they incorporate the Child Gravity Matrix and children are diverted to the appropriate service according to their level of risk and need.</p>	<p>In 2024, a new joint protocol for youth OOCs was developed in collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary. The Centre for Justice Innovation acted as a 'critical friend' to the partnership by assisting with ensuring the new protocol is supported by the latest evidence and guidance from the sector. The protocol ensures the revised Child Gravity Matrix and latest YJB and NPCC guidance is incorporated. The new triaging process and area-based joint OOC decision making panels were then designed in collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary and went live in April 2025. The panels are chaired by YJS Area Team Managers but with a Police Inspector and/or Police Sergeant also in attendance. The panels have ensured a greater level of defensibility and shared decision making around OOCs. YJS professionals attend panel to present their assessment (using the new YJB Prevention and Diversion Tool) and in line with the new VPA, the victim's voice is sought and considered. These new panels will be refined throughout 2025-2026 and if necessary, adapted in light of Government announcements <i>vis a vis</i> 'Youth Futures Prevention Partnerships' (YFPPs), which for Cheshire are not expected to come on line until April 2027.</p>
<p>We will collaborate with partners to deliver against Priority 1 (Prevention) of Cheshire's 2024-2029 Serious Violence Strategy (2) (SVS) by ensuring funding is targeted appropriately to support children at risk of involvement in serious violence.</p>	<p>The YJS Head of Service continues to be an active member of CCJB and also sits on the Serious Violence Leaders Group that oversees commissioning and the operationalisation of the Serious Violence Duty. Developments in 2024-2025 include a new partnership for Cheshire with the organisation Street Games. YJS have been active and influential in connecting Street Games (who have been awarded Youth Endowment funding [YEF]) into Warrington, where the gap analysis and Serious Youth Violence (SYV) data indicates the need for targeted youth provision is greatest. YJS works closely with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and have also ensured justice-involved children are accessing OPCC-funded provision across the county to provide children at risk of crime, with positive activities, interactions and roles for identity development (Fresh AIR in Child First language). The OPCC's Safety Working together Action Prevention (SWAP) funding comes from depriving organised crime of their assets (Proceeds of Crime Act) and in addition to sporting activities, YJS have developed partnerships with VCS organisations including Culture Warrington, which are providing art and music-based opportunities for children in or on the cusp of the justice system.</p>

Some other notable achievements in 2024-2025 include:-

- Cheshire YJS has been rated consistently within Quadrant 2 (Satisfactory performance) by the YJB's Performance and Oversight Board because of solid and sustained performance across key metrics;
- Our social prescribing model has been cited by the Local Government Association (LGA) (10), YJB and NHS England as innovative practice for supporting children and young people in or on the cusp of the justice system (and has been nominated for a prestigious Children and Young People Now 2025 Award);
- Cheshire Constabulary have refurbished all three custody suites in Cheshire and have adopted trauma-informed and Child First principles through the inclusion of cells designed explicitly with children and neurodiversity in mind;
- YJS ensured justice-involved children participated in the annual 'Big Conversation' with the OPCC and senior police officers, providing their voice and influence on policing priorities across the county;
- The role of volunteering in YJS has expanded with several volunteers being part of our mentoring programme (in line with YEF evidence). Mentors support our children to access other services, to build confidence, learn new skills, and gain employment. One mentor supported a child into employment after helping him with his CV and working on his confidence to approach a local employer directly, who gave him a trial leading to permanent employment;
- Justice-involved children have participated in grass roots VCS community projects, funded by the OPCCs SWAP fund. Examples include the community leaders sports programme at Warrington Youth Zone and DJ workshop delivered by Culture Warrington;
- Justice-involved children participated in the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme in Warrington.



After NCS I am more comfortable trying new things and experiences
(Child)

2. Performance over the previous year

In 2024, Cheshire YJS developed a new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework so the Management Board, partners and staff can all see areas of strengths and challenge across a wide range of outcomes. We will be data driven, making full use of the management information system to target improvement activity in the areas where it is most needed.

Performance against nationally-measured targets continues to be strong. Since rolling out the Divert scheme in 2017 across all Cheshire local authorities, we have seen fewer children entering the CJS.

Total volume and rates per 100,000 are significantly below regional and national averages and Section 11.4 contains a longer-term trend of FTE data, disaggregated by local authority. Figure 5 shows initial sharp reductions in FTE, with the low base level being sustained again in 2024.

(NB the lowest level of FTE, in 2021 was due to the impact of covid/lockdowns).

Jason, working with him has been fantastic. Jason made everything clear and put it in ways I understand
(Child)

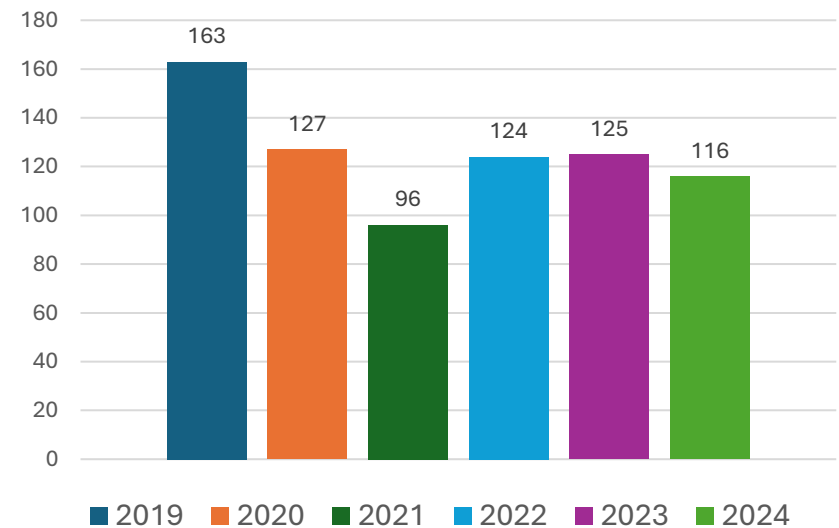


Figure 5. FTEs to the CJS in Cheshire (Jan-Dec 2024)
(Data source: YJAF)

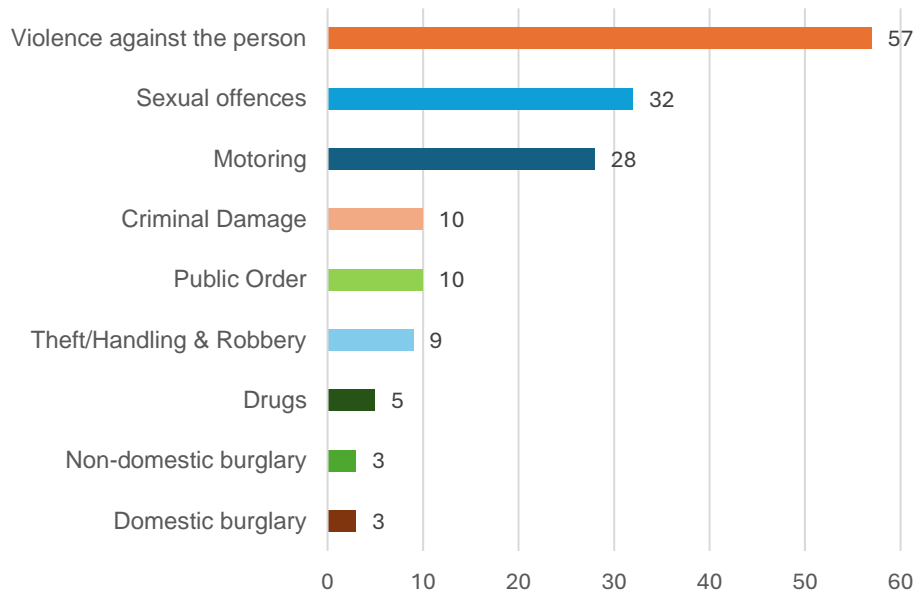


Figure 6. FTE main offence type in 2024-2025
(Data source: YJS local data)

Figure 6 shows violence and sexually harmful behaviour representing the bulk of those committed by children entering the CJS for the first time. This is what we would expect and is compatible with Child First youth justice principles and an effective youth diversion scheme that ensures children are dealt with according to risk and need.

Motoring offences resulting in caution or charge increased slightly in 2024-2025. YJS have developed a partnership with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service who can deliver an intervention called 'Drive Survive' on our behalf.

Figure 7 shows Cheshire continues to be below the regional and national average for the proportion of sentenced children receiving custody and although the proportion did increase slightly in the 12 months running up to March 2025, it has been trending downwards since 2021.

Cheshire has consistently low numbers of children remanded and sentenced to custody (see Sections 11.9 and 11.10 for place-based detail). Fewer than five children across the whole of Cheshire have been sentenced to custody in any quarterly period going right back to Q2 of 2019.

It is rare for there to be more than 10 children from the four places in Cheshire combined, serving custodial sentences at any one time. While reoffending rates of those children in the system are slightly higher than regional averages, this is attributable to the fact children sentenced by the courts tend to be those with whom we have already exhausted all diversionary options. They are the children who are often more entrenched in criminality and exploitation, so require more intensive intervention and support.

We are also seeing consistently reliable results for those children subjected to OOCs, in terms of successful completions and reoffending rates, with fewer than one in ten children diverted away from formal sanctions going on to reoffend.

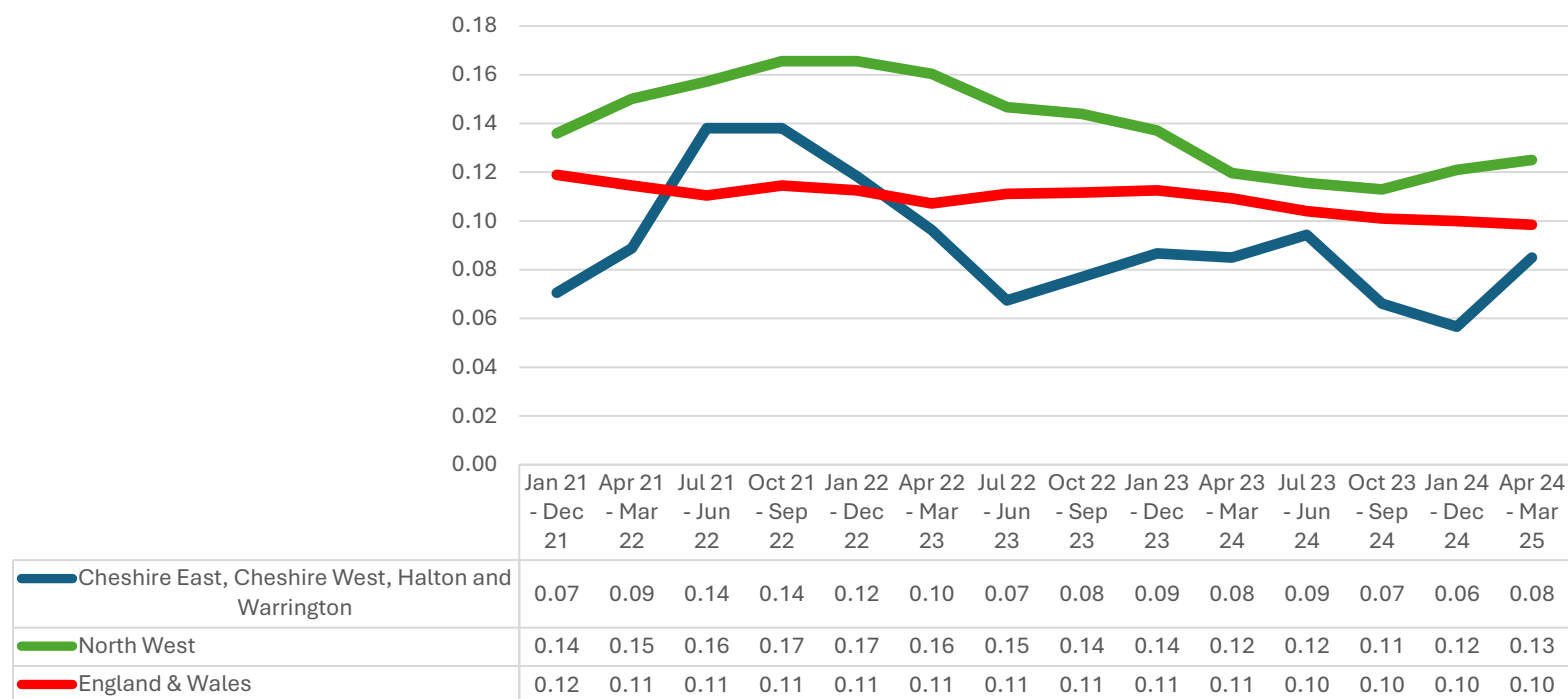
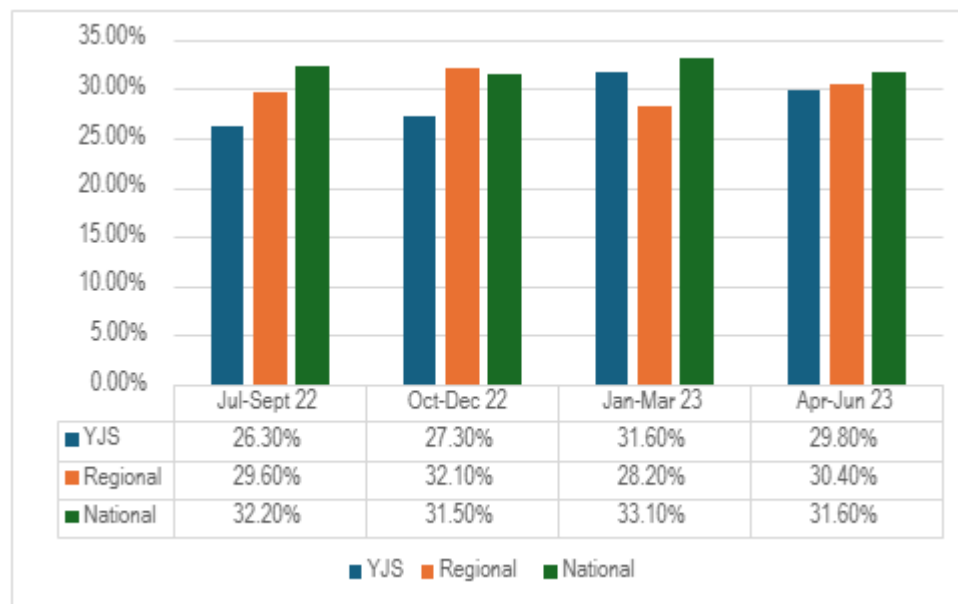


Figure 7. Custody Rate per 1,000 for Cheshire 10-17-year-olds with regional and national comparisons
(Data source: YJAF)

As a service, we are committed to focusing our efforts on reducing reoffending by our children. However, as we continue to prevent children entering the system and, running parallel, have relatively few children in custody, we recognise reoffending rates are understandably our area of greatest challenge. Figure 8 provides the latest published reoffending data, taken from the Police National Computer (PNC).



My son has learnt to control himself and his anger more. I have a more focused vision for his future and career

(Parent)

Figure 8. Binary reoffending data for YJS compared with regional and national rates July 2022-June 2023
(Data source: YJAF via PNC)

Figure 8 shows Cheshire rates are similar or slightly lower than regional and national rates. Whilst this serves to give us a national picture, it is important to recognise PNC data has limitations. For example, reoffending data is published 2 years behind the current quarter. In addition, the data also includes:-

- reoffending of adults we no longer work with or have never been known to Cheshire YJS;
- reoffending of children from outside areas who offended in Cheshire but have never been open to Cheshire YJS.

Given the limitations in the national data, Cheshire YJS will create a local reoffending cohort from a sample of children and begin tracking any reoffending from this cohort with effect from April 2025.

Desistance from crime for children who experience significant adversity and trauma is not a linear journey. It requires long-term, trusted, relational support from professionals to try and help children achieve a shift toward a more positive self-identity. This is why the vision for the service is underpinned by the three key pillars of Child First, Trauma-Informed and Relational-Based Practice (Figure 1).

Working with girls

National statistics provided by the YJB indicate the number of girls in the youth justice system has tended to be a fraction of the total caseload at around 15%. However, Table 1 shows a review of Cheshire data and since 2023-2024, we have seen a 35% overall increase in the number of girls in the cohort. This is a significant increase in the proportion of girls relative to boys.

Table 1. Number (and percentage of overall cohort) of girls open to Cheshire YJS in 2023-2024 and 2024-2025

		2023-24 (%)	2024-25 (%)
Q1	April-June	22 (17)	26 (19)
Q2	July-September	17 (14)	40 (28)
Q3	October-December	21 (16)	35 (26)
Q4	January-March	27 (21)	35 (22)
Total number		87	136

(Data source: YJS local data)

*It's hard ...navigating friendships,
being online, school. It's non-stop.
Also feel judged by what you wear.
Doesn't feel a safe world now
(YJS Girl's Focus Group)*

We are aware this is a national trend, noted by other youth justice services but we wanted to explore it in more detail and identify areas for development within the service and across the wider partnership.

Several actions were undertaken to shape and influence our future focus:

- A survey was completed with the girls open to YJS so their experiences could be heard directly and we asked how we can best support them in or on the cusp of the justice system;
- In January 2025, Dr Gilly Sharpe (Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Sheffield University) delivered a whole service presentation on her research findings on girls and young women in the CJS;
- Cheshire YJS is now also on the YJB national forum for work with girls so is learning from and sharing good practice.

Key findings of our review:

- 54% of the offences committed by girls are broadly categorised as violent/harm against a person and research indicates girls can be treated more harshly for certain types of offences, particularly those involving violence.
- Predominantly, girls open to YJS are aged 15-17 years; this is in line with research findings, i.e. girls are likely to offend between the ages of 13 to 16. Early intervention from universal services and targeted services is key to supporting girls with some of the challenges they may be facing, to help reduce them entering the CJS.
- Snapshots indicate for all children in Cheshire, the percentage split across OOC and post court is approximately 70/30%. However, when focussing on girls, this is more evenly split i.e. OOC 22 (54%), compared to court-imposed orders 19 (46%) for girls.

The European Guidelines on Child Friendly Justice recognise girls as a minority whose needs are overlooked. This led to the committee recommending, they are paid special attention through gender sensitive provision (11). As a service, we have explored provision for girls in each of the local authority areas, so girls can have a safe space to attend and receive support and build networks.

In 2025-2026, we will use the evidence found in our Girls' Survey, Dr Gilly Sharpe's Presentation (Girls and Young Women in the Criminal Justice System) and other research to inform the way we work with girls as a service. We will ensure Assessments and Pre-Sentence Reports capture the context of the girl's behaviour (trauma, abuse, exploitation) and ensure girls receive the most proportionate outcome and are not over criminalised. We will also develop our understanding of how gender impacts on identity and ensure interventions are evidence-based and gender-responsive.

Figure 9 shows the Token of Gratitude Certificate awarded to the group who gave their time and voice to help improve how we work with girls.



Figure 9. YJS Token of Gratitude Certificate

2.1 National Standards Audit

Submission of a National Standards (NS) audit is a condition of the YJB national grant and the most recent NS audit was undertaken in October 2023, against NS2: Work in Courts. Cheshire YJS received positive feedback from the YJB Regional Oversight Manager on the quality of both the audit process and its findings.

This NS audit was a comprehensive quality assurance audit of the services delivered before, during and after children's appearances before the three magistrate courts and one crown court in Cheshire. Section A looked at Strategy, Section B on Reports and Section C on Process. Sections B and C involved a deep dive practice audit involving 20 cases.

There were nine areas in Section A 'Strategic performance' with four rated **Outstanding** and five rated as **Good**. Cheshire YJS enjoys a strong partnership with HM Court and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), Magistrates, the Police and Crown Prosecution Service. The Head of Service is a member of CCJB and meets quarterly with youth bench magistrates who sit in Cheshire's three youth courts. A former chair of the Cheshire youth bench and a representative from HMCTS are also members of the Management Board.

For sections B (Reports) and C (Process), the audit revealed the overall quality of work was **Good** or **Outstanding**. One criterion required improvement and this related to the adequate referencing of the impact of the child's offence on their victim, by authors of pre-sentence reports. Improvement action has been addressed through local changes to case management and recording guidance, emphasis on managerial oversight and explicitly evidencing the possible impact on victims (even where victim personal statements are unavailable).

3. Risks and issues

The main risk to service delivery and the achievement of positive outcomes for children, victims and families, relates to the complexity of the pan-Cheshire shared service arrangements. To a large extent, this risk has now been mitigated through the move to a fully hosted model with CWCC acting as lead authority, albeit the risk and challenge of operating a lean service spanning four local authorities is an inherent one. Cheshire YJS operates in a sub-regional (pan-Cheshire context) so sits somewhere between place and the larger Cheshire and Merseyside ICB footprint. This can be a difficult space to navigate, particularly from a stakeholder management perspective because the commissioning and NHS provider footprints do not align with the local authority, police and YJS footprint, and there is high turnover of senior leaders at both place and regional level. The vast majority of Youth Justice Services are integrated into single local

authority structures with much simpler Governance models – albeit their costs are higher because they have to absorb all management, ICT and back-office costs at place level.

National policy initiatives relevant to the youth justice sector sometimes falsely assume that youth justice is integrated within children services at place, so Cheshire YJS frequently has to adapt or compromise to implement national programmes. This was the case with the Troubled Families and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) Turnaround programme and will also be the case with YFPPs, which the Government expects to be established at place level. The Head of YJS is well networked across all four Cheshire places and the internal service redesign undertaken in 2024-2025 was undertaken with the direction of travel toward place-based YFPPs and Families First in mind.

The other main risk to effective youth justice delivery relates to the precarious financial position all funding partners face. Two of the local authorities in Cheshire have experienced Best Value inspections in the last 12 months and Cheshire and Merseyside ICB is in 'turnaround' and making significant spending cuts. With the YJB as the largest single financial contributor to this partnership, also under statutory review, with decisions on multi-year settlements for all departments yet to be made, resourcing remains the biggest single risk to service continuity. Cheshire YJS also has an ageing workforce; there have been several retirements in the last year and a number of experienced staff in front line, managerial and back-office roles are likely to retire within the next few years. Cheshire YJS have recruited younger staff – particularly in front-line practice – and are beginning to explore apprenticeship opportunities with the CWCC organisational development team for workforce planning.

4. Building on our strengths: Plan for 2024-2025

4.1 Child First

In Cheshire, we are committed to Child First principles. As mentioned earlier, these principles, along with Trauma-Informed and Relationship-Based Practice will inform all practice and development activity. YJS will continue to apply the principle of “*Would this be good enough for my child?*” and prioritise the best interests of children, recognise their needs, capacities, rights, and potential.

As well as being child-focused, our work will be developmentally-informed, acknowledge structural barriers and done with children, rather than done to them. YJS has adopted the Lundy Model (7) (Figure 10) as our frame of reference in developing participation across all aspects of service delivery in 2024-2027. The wider partnership are starting to adopt Child First principles in 2024-2025 with all four local authority Children's Services now referencing and training staff on the Lundy Model.

In 2024, Cheshire Constabulary refurbished their three custody suites to become less intimidating for children and in recognition of the fact many children entering police custody are neurodivergent and experience sensory difficulties. Dimmed lighting and foam footballs have been introduced into cells along with chalkboards and edible chalk allowing children to safely express themselves while detained (Figure 11).

YJS has made great strides in this direction of travel in recent years but recognise there is more to do, particularly in relation to meaningful and active participation of children in the justice system.

This is why **participation** remains a strategic, operational and practice priority flowing from this Strategic plan.

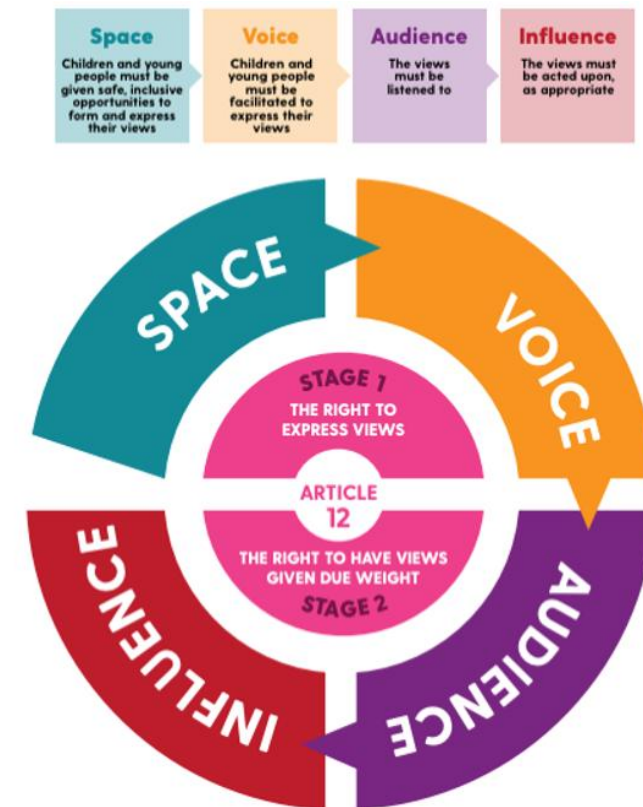


Figure 10. The Lundy Model of Child Participation

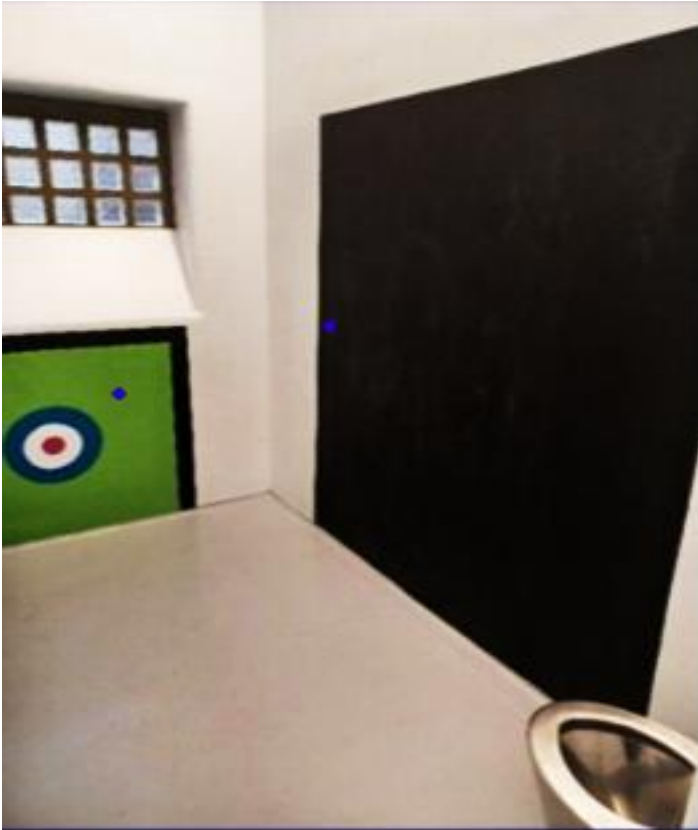


Figure 11. Refurbished police custody cell

The new Service Development Hub is the “engine room” to drive forward participation across all areas of YJS. This will not be easy as children sentenced by the courts often feel they have no power and no voice and they have usually experienced significant trauma and adversity. Offending for many children is in part symptomatic of their own childhood abuse or neglect. YJS held a Service Development Day in July 2024, with **participation** as the theme and the leading children’s and social justice charity, Peer Power co-facilitated the day. Through the lived experience of their ‘peer leaders’, Peer Power have helped YJS harness the power and potential of children and young people to be the catalyst for scaling up some of the co-produced (Child First) activity started in 2023-2024 and developed further in 2024-2025.

An example of this involves a child placed in Cheshire under the care of another local authority. A is southeast Asian and Muslim and he participated in a voice and influence project in Warrington and provided feedback on his very personal challenge of moving from an ethnically diverse city to a predominantly white town.

A enthusiastically invited his YJS worker to join him in celebrating his religious festival and sharing food in a lovely, cultural learning exchange. A will be helping YJS to help other children from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds – a textbook example of giving children a voice, influence and then activities and interactions to promote prosocial identity.

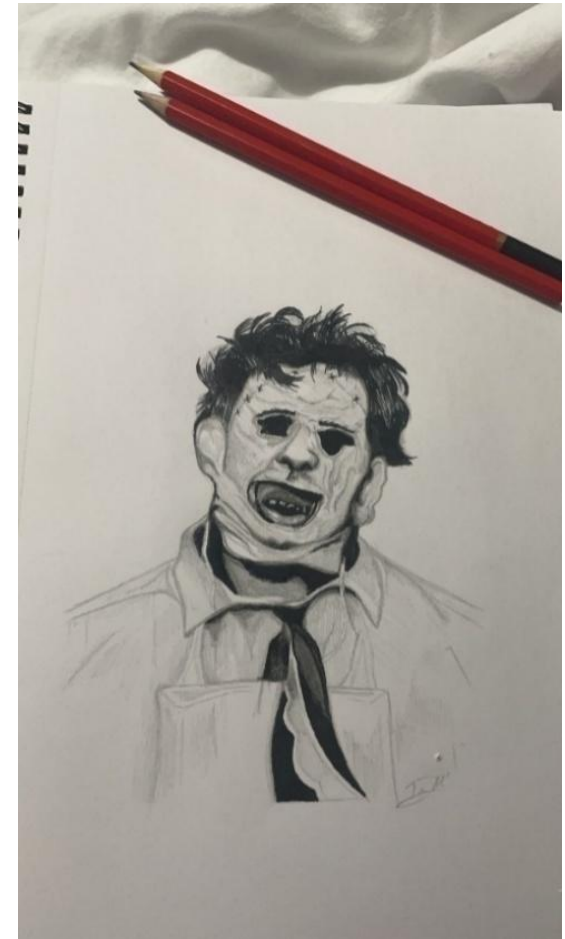


Figure 12. Mural next to site of Crewe Youth Zone

Several justice-involved children from the Crewe area worked with other children and a professional artist to create the mural in Figure 12 on the side of a building next to where a new 'Youth Zone' is being built in the town.

In 2025-2026, YJS will also be working with an arts studio in Halton and Culture Warrington to give justice-involved children similar opportunities to positively (and publicly) express themselves through art.

Each year, YJS encourage and support any children with an interest in art to submit their work to the annual Koestler awards.



**Figure 13 “Leatherface”
Koestler Awards submission**

Figure 13 shows the latest submission and the artist received a highly commended certificate through Koestler’s fast feedback programme.



Figure 14. Cr8 music project in Macclesfield

Music is used therapeutically as a tool to engage children who have experienced trauma and encourage them to express themselves while learning new skills. YJS have partnered with a couple of music-based social enterprises to co-produce projects where justice-involved children work alongside musicians to learn new instruments, write lyrics, try DJ mixing and laying tracks on computer.

One child, supported by YJS on the Cr8 project (Figure 14), has developed a real talent on the drums and after a long period out of education has reintegrated back into school. Another child with a real talent for lyric writing, recorded tracks in a studio and released them on Apple music (an excerpt is shown on the right). These are powerful examples of giving children **Activities, Interactions and Roles** to help them develop positive self-identity, as opposed to an offending identity.

H has really enjoyed the music session he attended this week...which is a massive breakthrough for him to communicate with us. He has isolated himself in the family home, which has impacted on his emotional and mental health due to his traumatic upbringing with his father. His case manager and I have been trying to tap into his interests as a way of encouraging socialisation and supporting his mum too.

(Social Worker)

“Be Successful in this life without regret
Stop tryna act bad for a cell
From a young age I been that kid in a court
Trust me didnt lead me nowhere
But I bet you these People tryna act bad for a cell
get chills when they hear a siren pass”

5. Resources and services

The YJS operates as a complex shared service arrangement, with pooled funding from four local authorities, statutory partners, Cheshire OPCC and the YJB core grant. Cheshire YJS will pool the YJB core grant with other funding to:

- Ensure we have a well-trained, supported and motivated team of staff, with the specialist skills to engage children, families and victims;
- Continue to contribute towards funding our Relationship-Based Practice model and further developing participatory work with children, families and victims;
- Continue to pool funding to develop social prescribing and other interventions with children to improve self-identity, health and wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of reoffending;
- Continue to develop diversionary and participatory interventions to divert children away from formal sanctions (supported by contributions from the OPCC);
- Ensure YJS can continue to provide robust, intensive supervision to children in the community to maintain public and judicial confidence and minimising the use of custody;
- Further develop our service offer to victims so we are in line with the Victim Code of Practice (12). YJS will hold a wellbeing day in the summer of 2025 for victims of youth crime across Cheshire. This will also be an opportunity for victims to contribute their views and ideas and we hope to recruit a Victims' Ambassador to be their voice on the Management Board.

6. Board development

The YJS Management Board will hold an extended Board Development session in June 2025. This is being independently facilitated by Child First Consultant, Michael O'Connor. There are a number of new Board members and this will be a timely opportunity to come together as a group of system leaders, from across the sub-regional partnership, to learn about the evidence base behind Child First Youth Justice. The Board will continue to meet quarterly and receive reports from YJS and partners to facilitate scrutiny and discussion around key service delivery and performance areas. The Board's key purposes are:

- To determine strategic direction of YJS, ensuring all statutory partners are fully engaged;
- To oversee and monitor the operational work of YJS;
- To ensure YJS is adequately resourced to carry out its statutory function of preventing offending by children and young people.

The leadership, composition and role of the Management Board are critical to the effective delivery of local youth justice services and Cheshire has senior representation from all statutory partners. The YJS Management Board also has long standing representation from HMCTS, the Magistracy, children's safeguarding, and academia.

As mentioned in section 5, we will be exploring the recruitment of a Victim Ambassador to champion the voice of victims and be a critical friend to the youth justice management team and our partners.

7. Workforce development

In line with our three pillars vision, we are committed to learning and development. It is vital all staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge, are effective in their roles and equipped to deliver high-quality services to everyone they work with.

We encourage staff to identify gaps in knowledge and suggest learning opportunities, across the team and within supervision. In the latter months of 2024, all staff were invited to give their view on our training offer by taking part in a Training Needs Analysis.

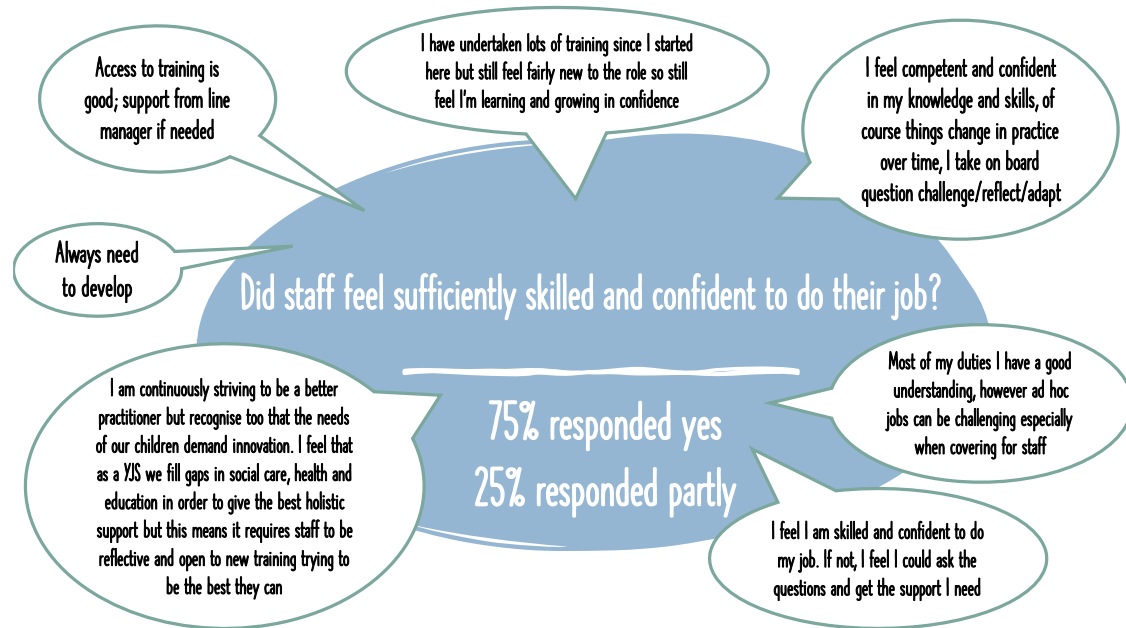


Figure 15. Findings and staff feedback from training needs analysis

Figure 15 gives a flavour of the findings and staff comments.. The analysis revealed the majority of staff were satisfied with the variety and quality of training the service had to offer. The Merseyside and Cheshire training consortium (which commissioned specialist training for the five Merseyside Youth Justice Services and Cheshire) formally ended in March 2025. This is because the move to a fully hosted model in CWCC meant Cheshire YJS was no longer able to hold the purse on behalf of the five other services and none of the Merseyside local authorities were in a position to take over as lead. The dissolution of the training consortium means YJS will need to commission training for staff so this prompted the need for a “stock take” of all current sources of training. A training overview was therefore carried out in spring 2025 and Figure 16 shows a summary of sources with examples.

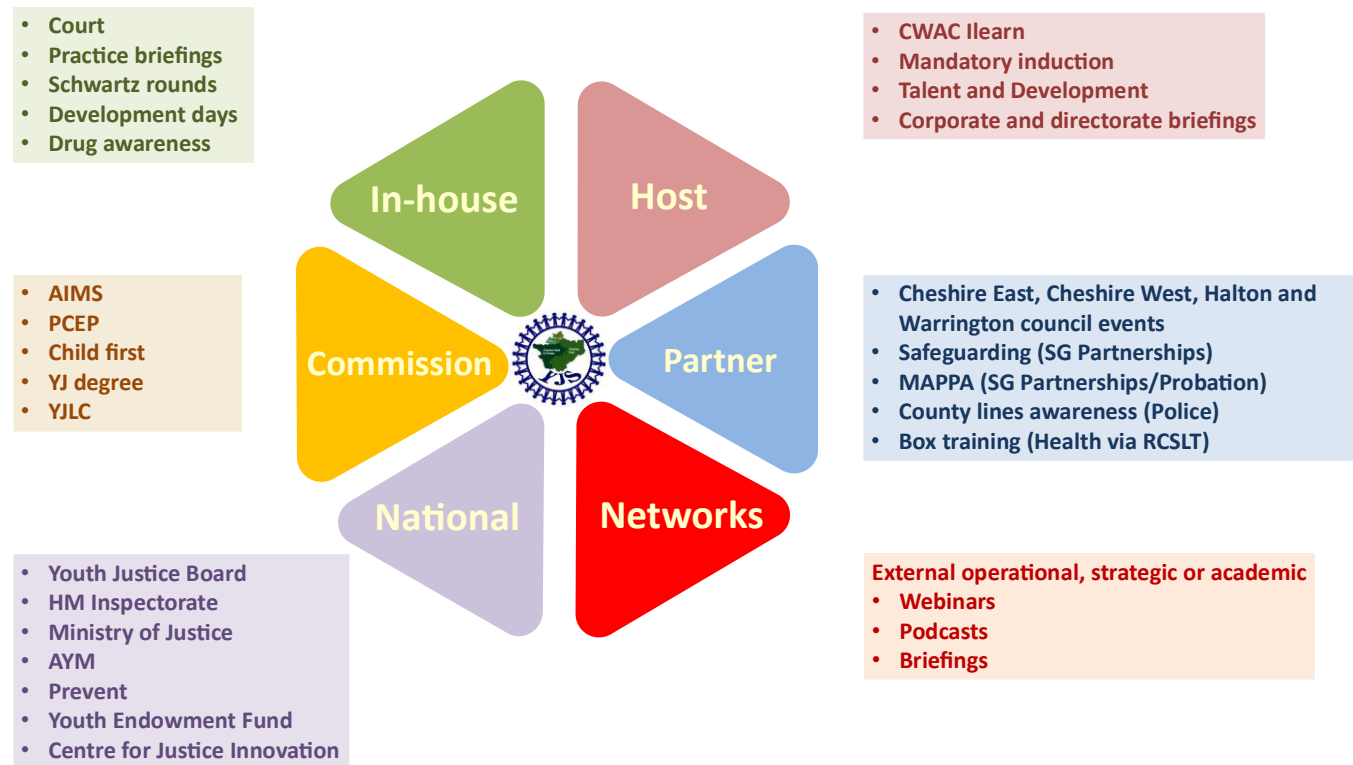


Figure 16. YJS training sources and examples

Occasionally, there are TV and Radio broadcasts pertinent to Youth Justice of interest to staff. Some can spark widespread media and public interest and an example of this in 2024-2025 was the Netflix drama, *Adolescence* (13). In addition, the BBC Radio 4 Reith Lectures (14) this year entitled *Four Questions about Violence*, are of relevance to our work.

In addition to rolling safeguarding refresher training, training undertaken by YJS staff during the last 12 months is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of key work force development activities in 2024-2025

Title	Course Type	Overview
Working with girls in the justice system by Dr Gilly Sharpe Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Sheffield	Academic Guest Speaker (Over Teams)	One of our senior practitioners approached Dr Gilly Sharpe after hearing her speak at a seminar. We were both delighted and fortunate that Dr Sharpe agreed to speak exclusively to our team. This event was attended by 55 staff and recorded for those who could not make it. It prompted the piece of work to review numbers of girls open to Cheshire and develop an action plan to include girls' voices and establish best practice to help girls be the best they can.
All Service Development Day on Participation	Themed All Service Day (In person)	At this event, we revisited our mission and values and also kick started our work on participation, building on the work of Laura Lundy and Louise Forde (speakers from the previous year). The day was facilitated by Peer Power, the leading children's and social justice charity.
Porn Briefing by Axxess Sexual Health Education Team	Guest speaker from Axxess at Practitioners Meeting (In person)	This session aimed at educating Practitioners on how best to support children about developing healthy and consenting relationships and to keep them safe from harm. Practitioners found the training very useful, especially when working with children who have entered the CJS for harmful sexual behaviour.
Court training	Delivered by YJS staff and court staff (In person in court)	Full service training took place over two days in May last year at Chester Magistrates' Court. Staff, panel members, magistrates and legal advisers attended and participated in this interactive session.
Schwartz Rounds	In house open session for staff (In person)	These theme-based sessions were introduced as part of our trauma informed service development. They are a supportive space for any staff to express views and share their feelings and are facilitated by one of our in-house CAMHS workers and a YJS Practitioner trained in counselling. The theme in 2024-2025 was loss of a young person, prompted as a number of children previously known to the service, have sadly lost their lives.
OOCD panels	In house briefing (In person)	This was a briefing on the introduction of OOCD panels and how they will operate.

PDAT Tool	In house briefing	This briefing was to introduce staff to the new Prevention and Diversion assessment Tool (PDAT).
AIMS training	Commissioned	AIM3 training in assessment and intervention took place to increase the pool of AIM-trained staff in response to the increase in harmful sexual behaviour. The majority of YJS Practitioners are now AIM-trained.
Child First Certificate	Commissioned	Two members of staff completed the Child First module in 2024-2025.
Certificate of Effective Practice	Commissioned	Four members of staff have completed or started the certificate in 2024-2025.
Equality and Diversity training	Commissioned (In person)	The last cohort of staff attended the Wipers training in May 2024. This mandatory training for all staff began in 2023 and was commissioned by the training consortium. It was tailored for youth justice professionals to improve cultural competency and awareness of disproportionality in the justice system.

From April 2025, YJS staff have direct access to CWCC training resources and a raft of Ilearn modules. Ilearn as a training and development platform is being replaced in September 2025, however our commitment to the workforce will continue into 2025-2026, as we will seek to further strengthen workforce development through the following:

- Ensuring all staff are up to date with CWCC mandatory corporate training, DBS checks and service specific mandatory training;
- Developing a more centralised approach to identifying training needs across the service;
- Developing an enhanced training monitoring system and connecting with CWCC Learning and Development Team;
- Revising the Training Plan to be relevant, achievable, and accessible to the whole workforce;
- Continued membership of the Youth Justice Legal Centre, which brings timely and specialist legal advice for professionals and managers and access to a range of in-person training events and remote learning.

Having considered the local data analysis and in support of service priorities, the following workforce development opportunities currently planned for 2025-2026 are shown in Table 3. More opportunities will be added in response to the dynamic nature of working in youth justice.

Table 3. Summary of planned work force development activities in 2025-2026

Theme	Provider	Overview
Online Harmful Sexual Behaviour	Commissioned through the AIM project	To include online sexual abuse, surface, deep and dark web, apps and platforms, hentai and AI and considerations for assessment and intervention. These areas were specifically requested through the Training Needs Analysis.
AIM Restorative Practice and Harmful Sexual Behaviour	Commissioned through the AIM Project (In person)	A 2-day course to enable participants to have a clear understanding of restorative practices and their use in sensitive and complex cases involving harmful sexual behaviour.
IT Canva / forms	In house (Over Teams)	'Learn with us' sessions on how to use these applications.
Acronym training	In house (Over Teams)	New Child First method of recording contacts.
Prevent (online extremism)	Department of Education London (Online)	This session includes incel awareness and takes a deep dive into multiple on-line platforms seen in Prevent referrals on children who've become radicalised on-line.
Professional Certificate in Effective Practice	UNITAS	An on-line modular course covering essential theory underpinning work with children in the justice system – 2-3 cohorts per year.
Child First Module	UNITAS	A shorter on-line course explicitly covering the latest Child First evidence base.

EDI - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Awareness (2 modules) History Challenges	University of Worcester and Worcestershire County Council (e-learning)	Traveller community have a presence across Cheshire and the aim of this training is to help staff develop cultural competence in this community.
EDI - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Awareness	Friends, Family & Travellers (In person)	Aimed at practitioners, the charity Friends, Family and Travellers to give a briefing at the Practitioners' meeting.
Teen to Parent Abuse briefing	Warrington Early Help (Over Teams)	Training has been organised via the Warrington Domestic Abuse Hub.
Transgender Awareness by Axess Sexual Health Education Team	Axess (In person)	This free training aims to increase confidence, knowledge, skills and respect when working with Trans and gender variant people.
Knife Crime Awareness	Ben Kinsella Trust	Exploring the real lived experience of people affected by knife crime and youth violence. Briefing content will be explored in the Practitioners' meeting for staff who could not attend the original session.
Schwartz Round	In House	The theme for 2025 is 'Covid: 5 years on'.
Custody Suite visits	Cheshire Police	Staff are invited to view refurbishments aimed to be more appropriate for children and people with neurodiversity.
Volunteer training	In house (In person)	Delivered over 2 days in the autumn.
Restorative Justice training for new starters	In house (In person)	Delivered with volunteer training in the autumn.

8. Evidence-based practice and innovation

YJS will continue to root all intervention and support with children on the evidence base, but Cheshire will also explore new and innovative ways of connecting with children who find it difficult to access mainstream services. Our approach was described recently by an NHS England lead as the best application of social prescribing in a justice context that she had come across. It was also cited by the LGA as one of their *'innovation in local government'* case studies (10).

Social prescribing in YJS emerged from the recognition that justice-involved children often arrive with previously unmet health needs and after traditional/clinical models of care had failed to reach them. An example being the socially prescribing of fishing as a mindfulness activity in partnership with the Canal and River Trust's 'Let's Go Fishing' programme. In August 2024, five children took part in this session, led by a YJS health worker and one child loved it so much, he stayed all day (Figure 17).



Figure 17. A successful catch with Let's Go Fishing

Adopting a psychosocial therapeutic approach, health workers in YJS are socially prescribing creative and flexible activities to help children improve their health and wellbeing. This has proven particularly effective for males who have experienced intra and/or extra familial violence and are often in a state of hyper-vigilance or hyper-arousal. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is often ineffective with this increasingly large sub-set of our children, so the service has tailored the health offer to become far more psychosocial and adaptable to the needs (and interests) of the children we work with. Our health offer is also supportive towards addressing the impact of trauma.



Figure 18. L's greenhouse and safe haven

L was a vulnerable child awaiting an ADHD and Autistic Spectrum Condition diagnosis and lived in a busy house with five siblings. He found the home environment quite stressful because of the auditory sensory impact and this had caused some intra-familial conflict and police involvement. YJS socially prescribed gardening as a therapeutic activity for L and he has thrived with the responsibility of creating flower beds and growing fruit and vegetables in a new greenhouse, which is now his peaceful safe haven (Figures 18 and 19). L was given fresh **AIR** through **Activity, Interaction** and a new **Role** as a producer of fresh fruit and vegetables for his family.



Figure 19. L's strawberry plants

Cheshire YJS has a well-developed “*Research in Practice*” working group that was recognised by HMIP in 2021 as an exemplar of collaboration between academia and the youth justice sector. YJS is in a knowledge-transfer partnership arrangement with two local universities (Chester and Edge Hill University) and two senior lecturers in criminology, with a national profile for research on youth justice, now co-chair the Research Group. This collaboration ensures Cheshire YJS retains a national reputation for evidence-based practice and stays at the leading edge of innovation in the sector.

The Research Group has been able to secure several key academics to speak directly to the service about their research. YJS were fortunate to have Professor Laura Lundy, author of The Lundy Model (7) (see Figure 10) speak exclusively to our staff on how best to implement her model. YJS has been fortunate to have a number of key speakers talking to staff about the research behind participation, however the Service Development Day in July 2024 was the catalyst for the development of a participatory model across the service, with Peer Power Youth facilitating the session.

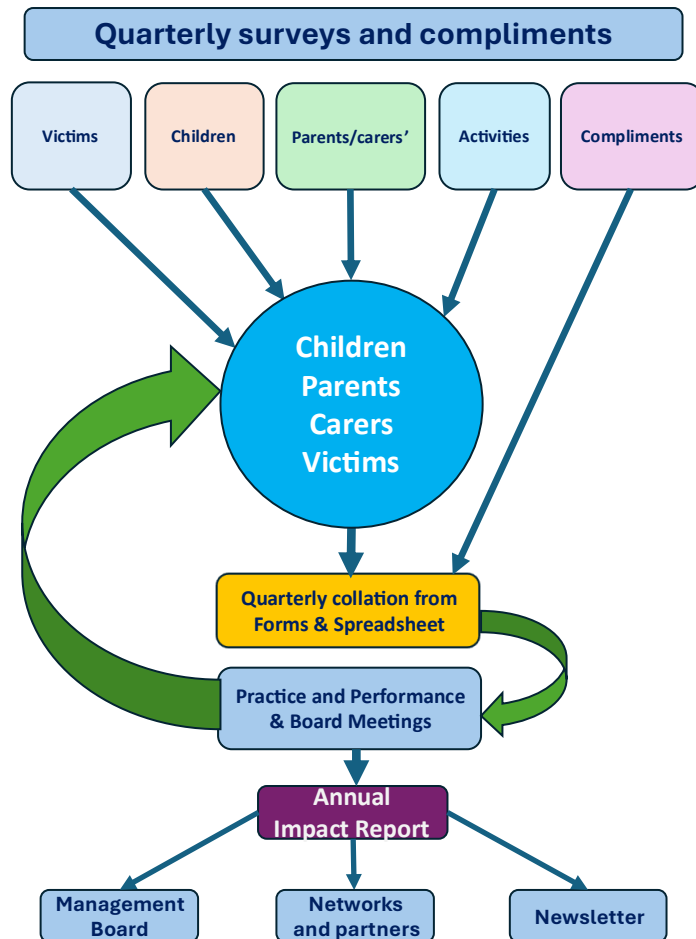


Figure 20. YJS voice and influence flowchart

Figure 20 illustrates how Cheshire YJS has adopted the Lundy Model (7) as a basis to give voice and influence to all our service users (not just children but families and victims too).

We will be using an appreciative inquiry approach in our work and using 1-1 and group-based activities with service users as a virtuous feedback loop to develop and refine our intervention and support. Collaboration with children not only empowers them with a feeling of agency, it helps to develop skills and develop prosocial identity.

In 2025-2026, Cheshire YJS will continue to partner with national not-for-profits including Leaders Unlocked and local VCS groups such as Culture Warrington on bespoke collaborative projects that amplify the voice and influence of justice-involved children.

Ideas in the pipeline for the next 12 months include “Life through our Lens” where children from different areas of Cheshire will co-produce a film reflecting what living in Cheshire is like for them. YJS are also partnering with an arts studio and professional artist to give children further opportunities to express themselves through street art. These are creative and practical examples of applying Child First principles – Activities, Interactions and Roles (Fresh **AIR**) for developing prosocial identity.

9. Evaluation

The Health Sub-group of the management Board commissioned the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moores University to evaluate and validate the trauma-informed and relationship-based practice approach adopted by YJS. The passage below is taken directly from their full technical report (1), based on a statistically valid research sample of 70% of the children YJS were working with at the time:

“The (Cheshire YJS) offer now provides that key link into mental health, substance use and Speech Language Therapy support, through an equitable healthcare assessment available to all young people entering the YJS. This provided a key opportunity to assess and identify any unmet health needs in these three areas (and wider health and safeguarding needs), which may not have otherwise been identified, and for many was the first time they had access to such healthcare screening. This multi-agency approach not only allowed for quicker identification during the healthcare screening, but it also meant more timely specialist support for families who would have otherwise had long waiting lists to see specialists from CAMHS and SLT. This was identified as an effective way to open the door to this pathway of wider support, recognising that these health needs were associated to the offending behaviour and need to be addressed to prevent further reoffendingThe Cheshire YJS model also provides an opportunity for multi-agency working, not only to provide that overarching multi-disciplinary offer for children and young people, but also in terms of how services work together across Cheshire....The HNA highlights the key work from YJS and wider services across Cheshire in support of families to reduce inequalities, improve wellbeing, and reduce offending. This required skilled, experienced staff working in a trauma-informed way, using a child-focused approach.”

10. Priorities for the coming year

Building on what we have achieved in the previous year, a service development plan outlining management activity, sits underneath this higher-level Strategic Youth Justice Plan and in 2025-2026 will be used to deliver against the following priorities:

We will continue the priority focus on developing participation and amplifying the voice and influence of children, families and victims and embedding this in all areas of the service. We will facilitate a culture of collaboration where children, volunteers and community groups are enabled to promote prosocial identity and desistance from crime. This will include children co-producing a “Life Through Our Lens” film where they will be encouraged to express what their part of Cheshire means to them. We will also be involving children in the co-design of an induction booklet for new entrants to the service, with explicit focus on making our documentation feel more inclusive for children, families and victims of different culture, ethnicity or faith. We will also be accrediting participatory activities (via AQA) so children without prior qualifications receive a nationally recognised certificate for learning new skills.

We will continue to build on the new comprehensive performance reporting and quality assurance framework, ensuring we are data driven and make full use of the management information system to drive practice development. We will be building two reoffending cohorts; one for children receiving OOCs and one for children sentenced by the court. We will also explore the use of Power BI to further enhance our performance reporting capability and liaise with the OPCC and Cheshire Constabulary on the potential of ARC software to generate a bespoke Serious Youth Violence dashboard.

We will refine our internal governance processes to ensure management and back-office functions help facilitate the delivery of high-quality services including enhanced training monitoring and a training needs assessment to inform the staff training plan.

The new Business and Performance Manager in YJS will be reviewing methods of internal communication following the transition into CWCC including use of Teams channels.

We will continue to enhance our offer to victims to ensure all victims, including child victims, are considered in all circumstances, and are delivered well. We are planning to hold a wellbeing day in partnership with Cheshire Cares for victims of youth crime. It will include offers of therapeutic support and enable victims to give honest feedback on their experience of the justice system in Cheshire and influence how YJS work with victims and other agencies.

YJS will also seek to recruit a lay member who has lived experience as a victim to act as critical friend to the Board and service – in a similar way to the lay member role on MAPPA Boards. They will also represent victims of youth crime on a new lived experience Victims' Panel to be established by the OPCC as a sub-group to the CCJB.

We will undertake comprehensive audits and report findings to Board in the following thematic areas; custody and resettlement, the quality and impact of Education and Training support offers and the effectiveness of work with children on OOCDS.

We will also undertake a comprehensive deep dive into a sample of children to look at the quality of assessment, planning and intervention to support the safety and wellbeing of children and those they may harm.

We will successfully support 60 children through the Turnaround project in 2025-2026 by developing an area-based delivery model.


We will establish a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, ensuring the services provided are inclusive to all, whether under-represented or over-represented.

For 2025-2026, this will have a particular focus on the experiences and needs of girls because they are an increasing proportion of justice-involved children in Cheshire and children from different ethnic, faith or cultural background – because they represent a very small cohort in Cheshire and we need to be inclusive and responsive to the very different lived experience of all children.

10.1 Standards for children

Cheshire YJS has developed a “conversational audit” methodology to undertake practice audits where managers visit or speak to children, families and (where appropriate) victims too. This is now a ‘business as usual’ audit methodology for the service and has been adopted by some of our partners in children’s social care. Direct quotes from children, caregivers or partner agency professionals obtained through conversational audit are illustrative of the kind of trauma-informed, relational practice Cheshire YJS is striving to provide to the children we work with.

The new participatory model also aims to gather the views and ideas of our children.



*You're nice and you talk calmly to me
and you're not quick to tell me off. We
do doodling in sessions while we talk
which gives me something to focus on
rather than having to talk face-to-face
because I'm not good with looking
people in the eye when I talk.*

(YJS Girls Focus Group)

10.2 New performance framework

Striking the right balance between local place-based and pan-Cheshire performance reporting is a challenge for YJS and disaggregating Cheshire-wide data to place often renders the data invalid because the volumes are so low. YJS now have a new performance management framework, using a mix of the recently introduced 10 national KPIs alongside better use of our case management system, Child View. The new performance report has been well received by the Management Board and enabled them to better understand the risk, needs and complexity of our children. A new Business and Performance Manager started with YJS in April 2025 and with the help of CWCC Insights and Intelligence team will explore the use of Power Bi to enhance the way the service and wider partnership use data to inform service delivery and commissioning.

10.3 Service development

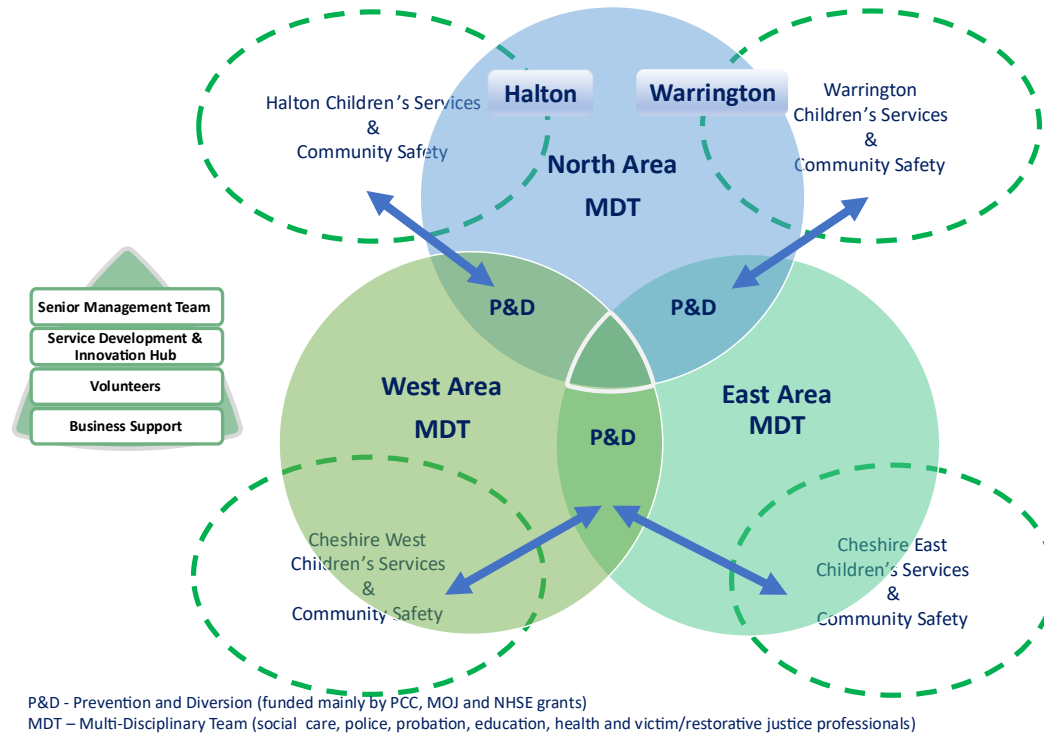



Figure 21. New Area-Based Service Design Model for YJS (from April 2024)

It is critical for a sub-regional youth justice partnership to work closely with statutory agencies and community organisations at a local level, to properly support children in their own communities. To better facilitate this, YJS implemented a modest service redesign in 2024-2025, enabling front-line professionals to work more closely and effectively with place-based partners. Figure 21 shows how YJS remains co-terminus with both police and probation footprints, while aligning closely to the four children's services and community safety partnerships. The Staff Structure in Appendix A also shows how our Area Teams align with place.



*Sometimes feel safe -
sometimes not as there are
people in the community who
are risky/commit offences. I
have lots of family around who
keep me safe
(YJS Girl's focus group)*

The service redesign aligns with the shift toward restorative and participatory approaches and the importance of supporting children to connect (or reconnect) with their local community. Our new structure aims to empower front-line professionals and locality (area-based) operational managers to develop creative partnerships with the voluntary sector. By harnessing previously untapped human and social capital within communities (such as recruiting more local volunteers and establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with small local charities) we will be better able to help children, and some victims to move on positively beyond an offender (or victim) identity.

The Service Development Hub is functioning well as the central “engine room” for innovation within the service and the new leadership team will ensure quality of practice at a pan-Cheshire level, while empowering (through a distributed leadership model) creative area-based partnerships in the places where children, caregivers and victims live.

In 2025-2026, Cheshire YJS will refine some of our internal governance processes to ensure we are as productive as possible, with a lean service spanning a large geography and complex network of partners. The transition into CWCC was a major undertaking and the next 12 months will be a transitional period while the service beds in.

The new Business and Performance Manager will be reviewing multiple methods of internal communications to ensure key messages are getting through to dispersed teams in the simplest and most effective way.

11. National priority areas

11.1 Children from over-represented groups

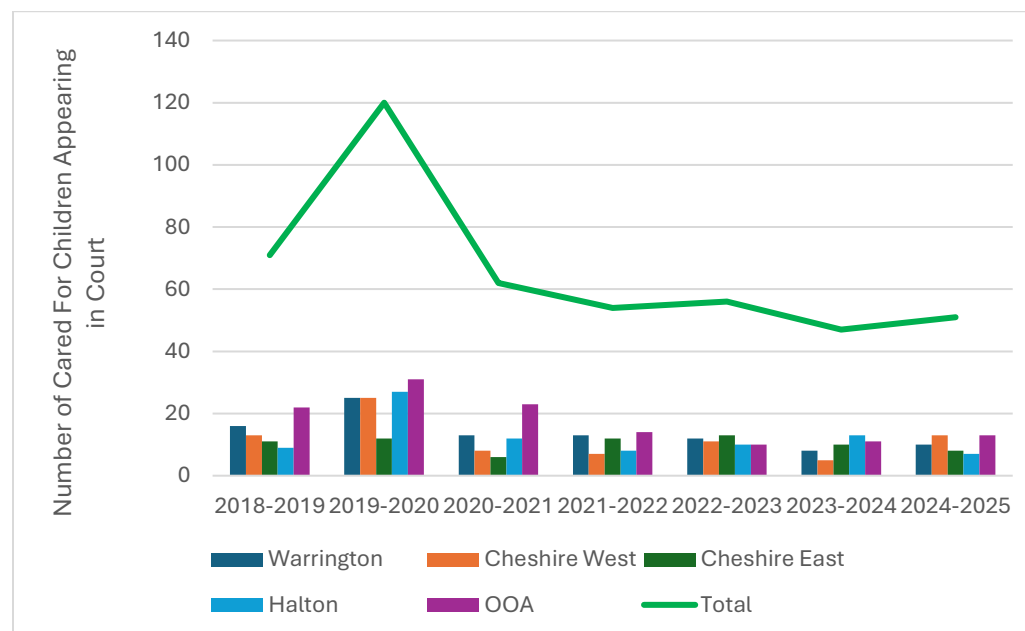


Figure 22. Number of cared for children appearing in Cheshire courts by local authority between April 2018-March 2025
(Data source: Local YJS data)

The data above also includes children placed in Cheshire under the care of local authorities outside the county (out of area [OOA]) who receive the same diversionary options.

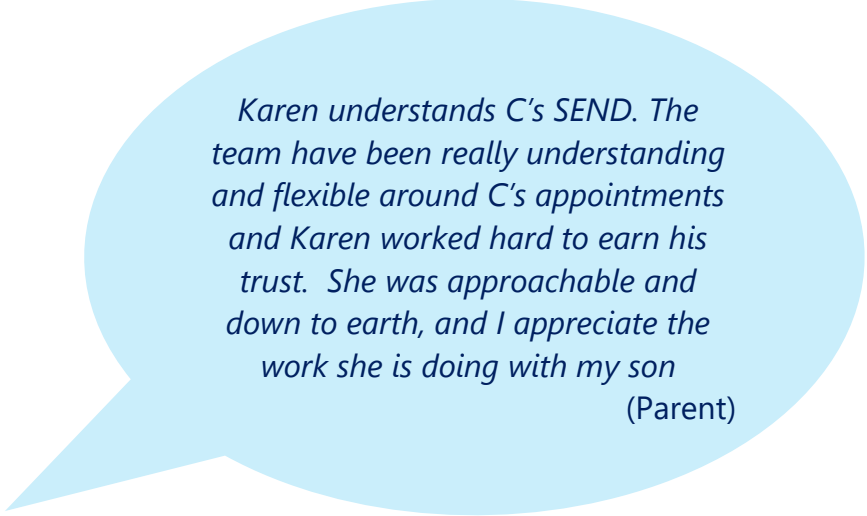
Sustained lower volumes since the protocol was produced in early 2020 is good evidence of what can be achieved through collective commitment at scale across YJS and Children's Services.

The high prevalence of our children struggling with health or neurodevelopmental difficulties prompted the Health Sub-group of the YJS Management Board to commission the Public Health Research Institute at Liverpool John Moore University to look at the health needs of children open to YJS (see section Board Membership and Leadership).

An over-represented group of children in the justice system are cared for children and care leavers. The YJS Management Board's response to data revealing disproportionality in this group was to agree a pan-Cheshire protocol. This aims to minimise the criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers and details a '3D' police and partnership response of *"Discretion, Delay and Diversion"*.

Since the protocol was launched, there has been a clear downward trend of cared for children appearing in court (Figure 22). This shows the impact from a high point in 2019. The numbers of cared for children appearing in court in 2024-2025 has risen very slightly but this is because of a recent change in the counting rules. Children who only became cared for following the offence they had committed have been included in the 2024-2025 figures.

The HNA (1) revealed a stark over-representation of neurodiversity in our children and a direct correlation between four or more adverse childhood experiences, school exclusion and entry to the justice system. Public health consultants on the Health Sub-group have used this analysis in both place-based Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) specific Strategic Needs Analyses. The HNA revealed there is a correlated trajectory for children who ‘camouflage’ their SEND through disruptive behaviour, experience fixed-term or permanent exclusion and then enter the CJS some time thereafter. In 2025-2026, the Head of Service for YJS will continue to raise awareness at local Health and Wellbeing Boards and be a strong advocate for improved upstream identification and support for children with SEND.



Karen understands C's SEND. The team have been really understanding and flexible around C's appointments and Karen worked hard to earn his trust. She was approachable and down to earth, and I appreciate the work she is doing with my son
(Parent)

The alarming racial disparities in the youth justice system nationally are not replicated in Cheshire. Figures 23 and 24 show the most current data available (offences committed in the year ending March 2024 and drawing from 2021 census data).

Comparing the youth offending population with Cheshire's 10-17-year-old population as a whole, reveals that unlike most areas in the UK, it is actually white children who are very slightly overrepresented and ethnic minority groups slightly underrepresented. However, when separating ethnic minority groups into Black, Asian and Dual Heritage (Figure 24), we see Black children only represent 1% of children in Cheshire but 2% of the offending population. The volumes are too low to be statistically significant but YJS will continue to carefully monitor ethnic disproportionality.

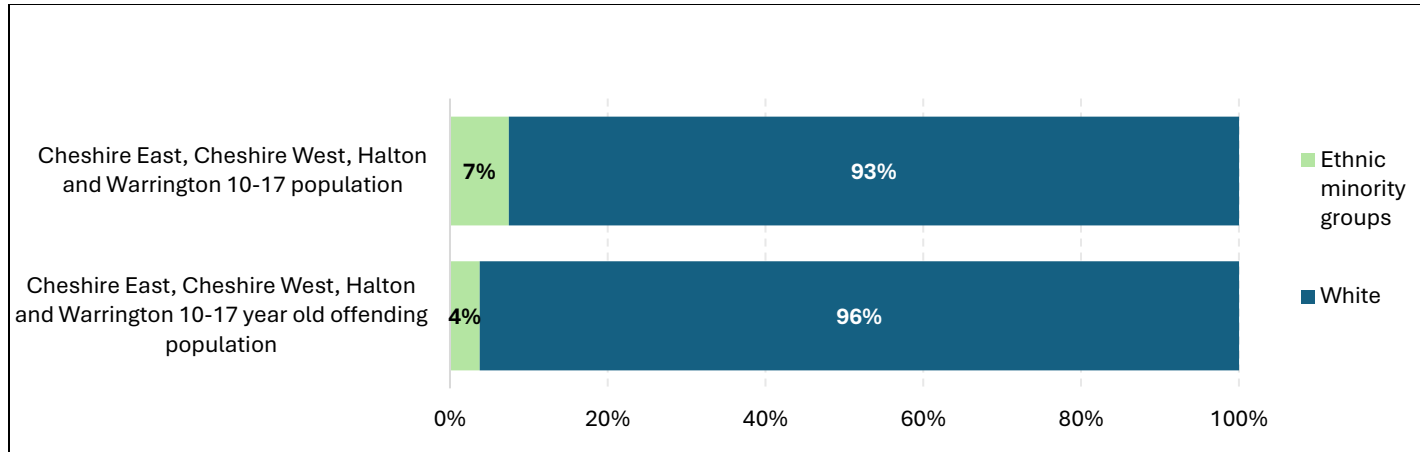


Figure 23. Ethnic minority groups vs white in the 10-17 population and offending population in Cheshire
(Data Source: YJAF)

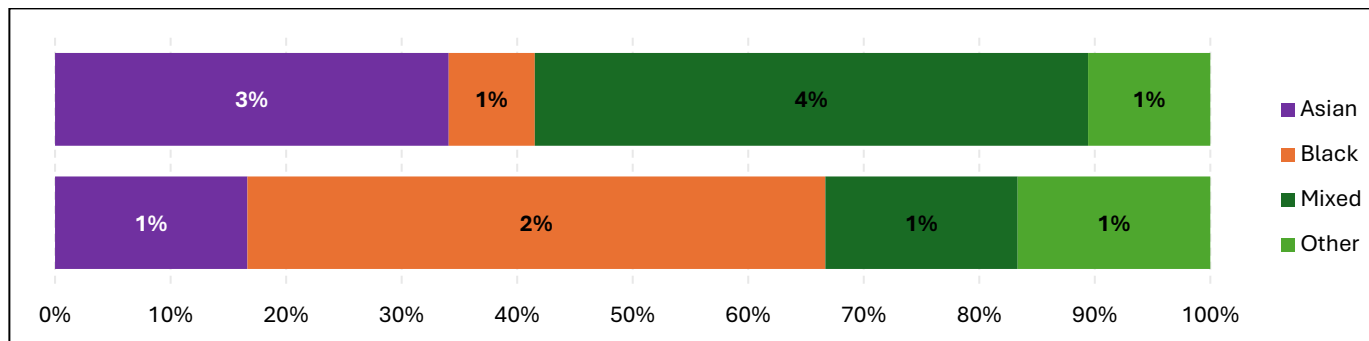



Figure 24. Ethnic group proportions in Cheshire in the 10-17 population and offending population in Cheshire
(Data source: YJAF)

One potential area of *'invisible over-representation'* in Cheshire that YJS has raised with partners at the CJB's Disproportionality Sub-group, relates to children (or adults) from GRT communities. Anecdotal (and student) research suggests children from these communities are sometimes recorded on police and other criminal justice databases as White British, White Irish or White European.

There is a GRT self-identity classification, but some individuals choose not to identify themselves because of a cultural mistrust of authorities. Therefore, CJS data on arrest, detention, and sentencing in respect of GRT children may not be accurate. The cultural competence of staff is the key aspect here and Cheshire YJS do have an in-service GRT 'champion' who is well linked with specialist advocacy and support services. As well as planned staff training in GRT awareness for 2025-2026, we will ensure our data is as accurate as possible by hearing directly from the child about their identity.



*Jess and Kevin were
respectful of our
culture (travellers) and
that matters
(Caregiver)*

11.2 Policing

A newly appointed Chief Superintendent, with the portfolio of protecting vulnerable people, sits on the Management Board and all four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships. This valuable connectivity provides useful constructive challenge and support, for example, renewed focus on detention of children overnight in police custody (Section 11.8).

Cheshire Constabulary delivered on the recommendations made by HMIP to place fully seconded police officers into YJS and have provided a fourth seconded police officer in 2025, so the service has one officer for each place as part of the multi-disciplinary team. They have participated in both police- and YJS-led training and have improved both the flow and response to intelligence in respect of harm to or from children.

The NPCC guidance on the role of police officers within youth justice was recently updated (6) and YJS and Cheshire Constabulary have reviewed the job descriptions of seconded officers to strengthen the focus on victims and prevention and diversion activity.

Cheshire Constabulary have recently restructured with changes in the Criminal Justice Outcomes Assurance Team and the previous Complex-Youths scheme is no longer operating but police continue to be very active in the local contextual safeguarding response to criminal and sexual exploitation. YJS seconded police officers and place-based police officers routinely share intelligence to help safeguard children and disrupt criminal groups. YJS and Cheshire Constabulary will continue to work closely together to refine and where necessary adapt the new OOCJ joint decision making model to ensure the partnership remains firmly 'Child-First' in both principles and practices.

11.3 Prevention

Unlike many single local authority youth justice teams, YJS is not part of a wider adolescent and family support service providing a broader prevention offer. The funding and delivery model spanning four authorities means we are more of a purist youth justice service only working with children *after* they have been arrested. Prevention and targeted youth support form part of each local authority's early help offer with some sub-regional services, commissioned by Cheshire OPCC. YJS will seek to align our diversionary work to continue to divert ***away from*** formal criminal sanctions when it is safe and appropriate to do so and ***into prevention*** projects entirely outside the CJS. The principles of avoiding 'net widening' and the unintended consequences of 'labelling' or entrenching a criminal self-identity for a child are critically important and are evidenced principles underpinning this strategy and continue to apply across Cheshire.

11.4 Diversion

The Head of Service for YJS holds the national portfolio on Diversion for the Association of YOT Managers (AYM) and engages with ministers, national charities and think tanks, such as Centre for Justice Innovation, in roundtables on best diversionary practice. Cheshire will continue an evidence-based approach to diversion that avoids criminalising children for behaviours symptomatic of trauma, abuse, and unmet need. This not only provides better outcomes and improved prospects for children but because children diverted away from receiving formal sanctions are less likely to re-offend, it also results in fewer victims.

Figure 25 shows significant reductions in FTEs since the incremental introduction of Divert across Cheshire. The current operating model began in 2010 in Halton and Warrington and expanded into CWCC and Cheshire East in 2013 and 2015 respectively. FTE numbers have remained consistently low and below regional and national averages since 2016 when Cheshire became a pan-Cheshire shared service, covering the entire policing footprint. This contrasts with many of our geographical and statistical neighbours who, in recent years, have begun to see an increase in FTEs.

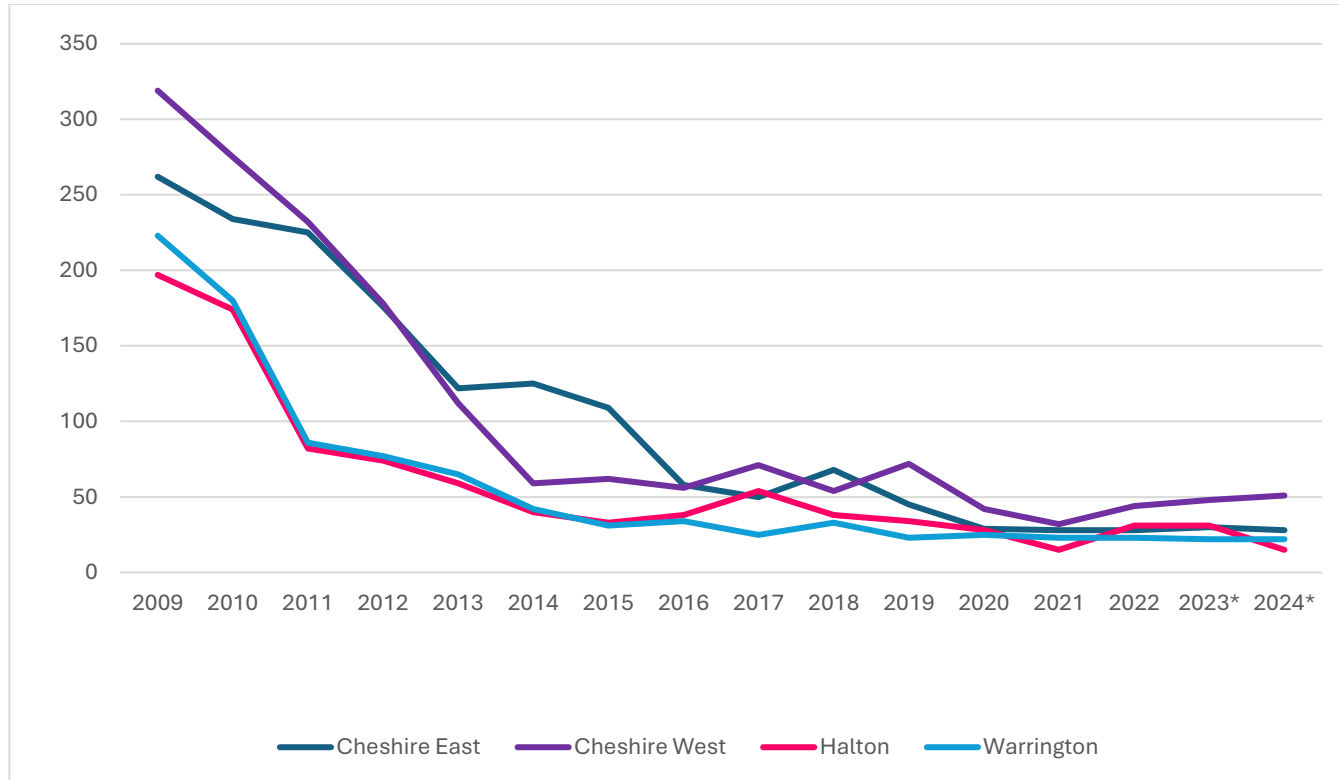


Figure 25. Trends in FTEs in Cheshire by local authority 2009-2024
(Data source: PNC except for *local YJS data)

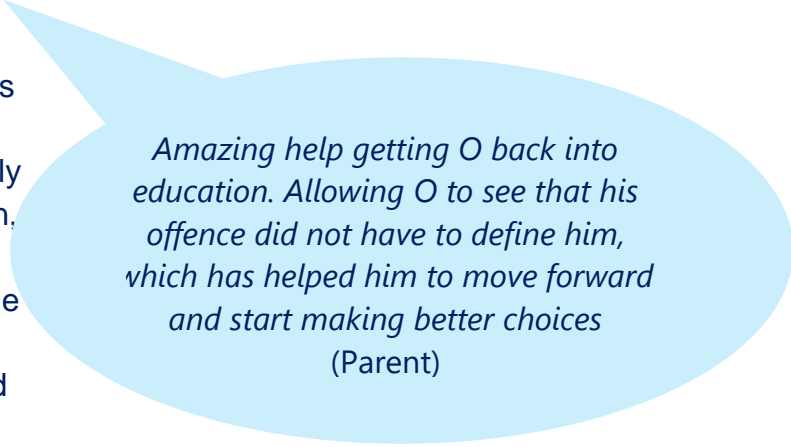
The helpful 4-year grant investment from the MOJ (Turnaround Programme) ends in March 2026. This investment has enabled YJS to get a little further upstream, while also enabling us to support children and families who needed longer or more intensive support. We will ensure individual children have transition plans in place where continued support beyond the end of the Turnaround programme is necessary and will be working with local authorities to prepare for the implementation of YFPPs, which for Cheshire local authorities will be from April 2027. As part of the serious violence duty, we will work with the OPCC to ensure VCS providers (Remedi and Queensberry Alternative Provision) are targeting help and support to the right children, in the right ways, at the right time.

11.5 Education

Our HNA chimes with national research in showing a correlation between educational exclusion and subsequent entry to the CJS. Children who are excluded from school tend to have lived experience of childhood trauma. There is a concerning trajectory (nationally not just in Cheshire) of early childhood exposure to violence and SEND being camouflaged as conduct issues, leading to educational exclusion (for some children). A sub-set of these excluded children then go on to use illicit drugs to self-medicate their trauma and criminal exploitation and criminality follows.

Audits and learning reviews show the powerful protective effect education can have on children who have suffered trauma. Positive self-identity and belonging are critical to helping children achieve desistance from offending, and the significant role education and training providers play in reducing risk through promoting prosocial identity cannot be overstated. Inclusive, trauma-informed-values-led-educational establishments not only manage risk well within their own environment, but also contribute hugely to reducing risk of harm in their communities.

Most children receiving YJS support are beyond school age, so the emphasis is more on helping them into post-16 training or employment, with flexible and bespoke support offers being most suitable for those children who have typically experienced considerable educational disruption. YJS has dedicated Education, Training and Employment specialists for each local authority area to support children directly or indirectly by brokering tailored support in partnership with the respective local offer. As an inclusive-employment lead for post-16, the educational representative on the Board is a good advocate for justice-involved children and provides both challenge and support to managers in the service.



Amazing help getting O back into education. Allowing O to see that his offence did not have to define him, which has helped him to move forward and start making better choices
(Parent)

In 2025-2026, YJS will be registering for the Unit Awards Scheme (15), through the nationally recognised organisation, AQA. Many justice-involved children have struggled in mainstream education and left without qualifications. This scheme will enable YJS practitioners to work collaboratively with children to meaningfully engage and support them in demonstrating skills, experience and knowledge in a wide range of subjects. The Unit Awards Scheme allows students to engage with learning and have their achievements formally recognised with a certificate each time they successfully complete a unit of learning. They can build up a portfolio of certificates to evidence their skills, knowledge and experience. The scheme promotes close collaborative working with children, boosts confidence, increases engagement and improves motivation,

helping them to make progress on their lifelong learning journey, which can be sustained following the end of their involvement with YJS.


For a partnership covering four local authorities, with over 100 high schools and post-16 colleges, the majority of which are academies, YJS and even Directors of Children's Services have limited influence on admissions or exclusions. Promoting inclusion and supporting trauma-informed practice in educational settings is something Children's Trusts have pushed and YJS will continue to advocate for the needs of children. The Head of Service will continue to provide data to inform local joint strategic need analyses and deliver presentations to forums of educational leaders. Education as a protective factor is a stated priority for 2025-2026 in local safeguarding children partnerships.

11.6 Restorative approaches and victims

Reviewing victim processes and ensuring the support offer from Cheshire YJS is in line with the new Victims and Prisoners Act is a priority for 2024-2025.

Cheshire YJS will continue to work with victims and deliver the full range of restorative support:

- **Restorative Justice Conferencing** – a structured meeting between the victim and the child
- **Direct Reparation** – repairing any damage caused by the child
- **Shuttle Mediation** – similar to the conferencing model but where both parties do not meet but have someone as the go-between
- **Letter of Apology/explanation** – child is supported to write to the victim
- **Indirect reparation** – work done within the community on placements.



Janet was very empathetic and excellent to deal with
(Victim)

Figure 26 shows our children repainting a Family Centre in Cheshire. The activity repaired damage caused in the local community while also introducing a group of children (and their families) to this centre so they could access the supportive programmes and activities on offer.



Figure 26. Repainting at a family centre in Cheshire

*I am really grateful for the
time and patience my worker
had for me and really
understood me*

(Victim)

11.7 Serious violence, exploitation, and contextual safeguarding

This plan draws from and is closely aligned with the Cheshire SVS, which covers a 5-year period from 2024-2029, with annual reviews to reflect on progress against planned outcomes and update delivery plans against emerging trends (2).

YJS contributed data and insights to the production of a Strategic Needs Analysis, to inform the SVS and the Head of Service is a core member of the SV Duty Leadership Group. Cheshire has relatively low levels of SV so does not have the infrastructure of a VRU. Lifting an approach from a large metropolitan city would be unlikely to deliver the same successes here so we have had to think differently about our approach. The Strategic Needs Analysis highlighted Domestic Abuse and Youth Intervention as two clear priority areas for reducing serious violence in Cheshire and revealed the extent to which serious violence affects children and young people. Amongst all forms of serious violence explored, children under 18 appear prominent amongst the victim and offender cohorts for possession of weapon

offences and knife crime incidents. As part of the workforce development plan, YJS Senior Practitioners will be approaching the Ben Kinsella Trust to deliver a session on knife crime awareness to practitioners in 2025-2026.

Understandably, public concern about serious violence increases when people witness or experience it themselves – or when tragic events bring considerable media attention to it. Fear of knife crime and serious youth violence are also amplified by social media, with children being exposed to violent content that can distort their perceptions of safety in public spaces.

Table 4 below shows in 2024, 36 serious violent offences were committed in Cheshire by children (convicted by the courts). This is a slight increase on 2023 but the rate of serious youth violence in Cheshire is 3.4 (per 10,000 children) which is down from the peak of 4.5 in 2022 and is well below the rate for England and Wales as a whole. In fact only the South West of England has had a lower rate of serious youth violence in the last 2 years.

Table 4. Serious violence offences committed by children in Cheshire compared regionally and nationally

YJS region	2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number of SVO	Rate of SVO	Number of SVO	Rate of SVO	Number of SVO	Rate of SVO	Number of SVO	Rate of SVO
Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington	32	3.2	47	4.5	27	2.6	36	3.4
North West	291	4.1	302	4.2	328	4.5	512	7.2
East Midlands	207	4.6	193	4.2	195	4.1	202	4.2
Eastern	348	5.8	316	5.2	371	5.9	394	6.2
London	1,030	12.4	868	10.4	822	10.0	917	10.8
North East	32	1.3	88	3.6	106	4.2	111	4.8
South East	307	3.8	283	3.6	312	3.9	386	4.8
South West	102	2.0	143	2.8	169	3.3	169	3.3
Wales	60	2.1	64	2.2	94	3.2	104	3.6
West Midlands	315	5.4	386	6.5	322	5.3	382	6.6
Yorkshire	250	4.8	263	5.0	248	4.7	318	5.9
England and Wales	2,942	3.9	2,906	5.2	2,967	5.3	3,495	6.2

(Data source: SV toolkit in YJAF)

The data in Figure 27 relates to the number of arrests for knife crime across Cheshire and Figure 28 shows this by local authority. It confirms the number of children arrested for carrying or using knives increased slightly in 2022, yet reduced in 2023 and has remained at broadly low levels for the last 5 years.

Apart from two profoundly serious events with tragic outcomes in recent years, Cheshire has not seen the significant and sustained increase in knife crime experienced elsewhere in the country. It should also be noted that given the data starts in 2020 when the UK went into lockdown all recorded offences were artificially low for both 2020 and 2021, so if 2022 was taken as the starting point, then knife crime offences would be trending downwards in all areas of Cheshire and not just Warrington (Figure 28).

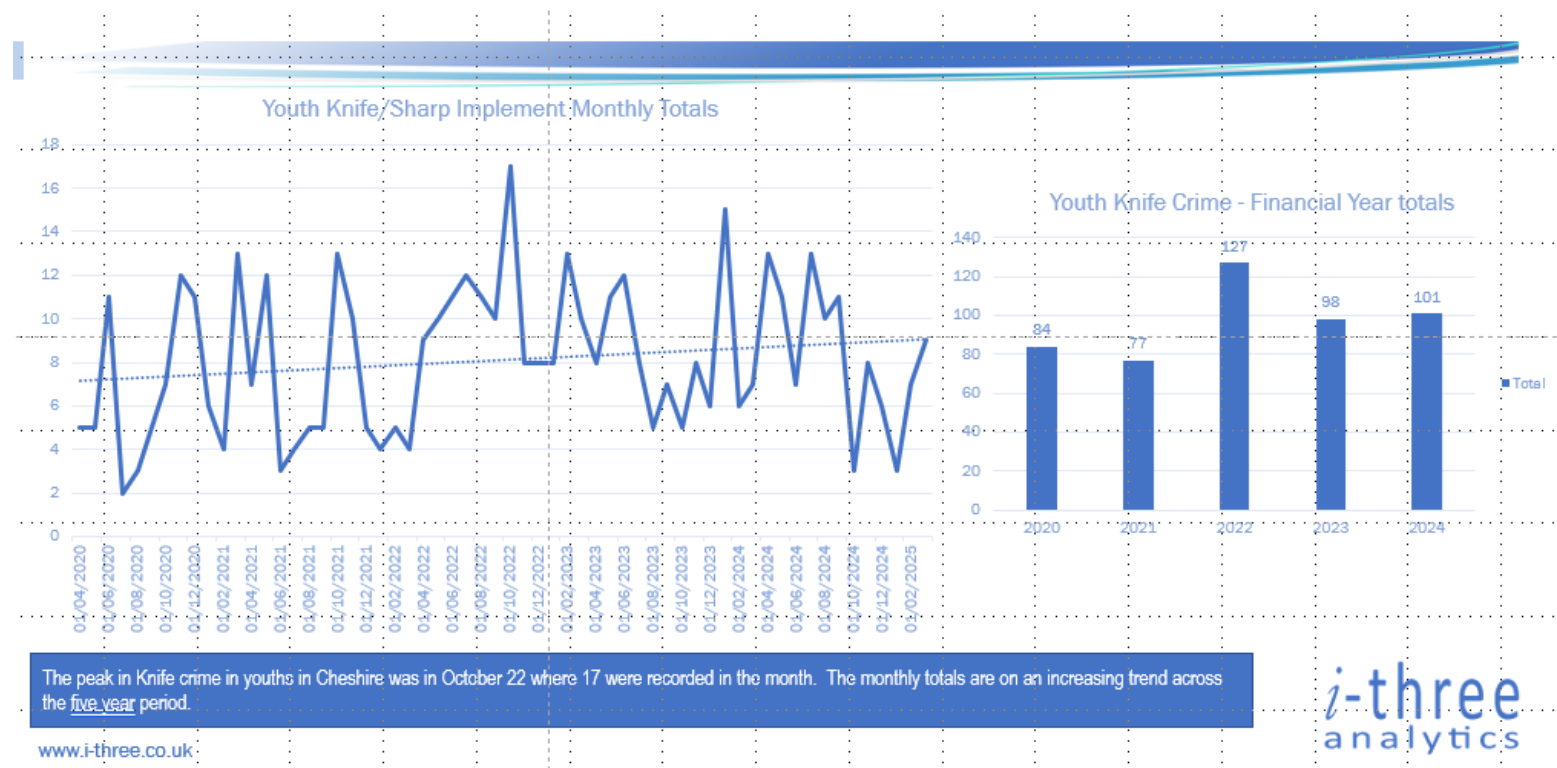


Figure 27. Youth knife/sharp implement crime trend for Cheshire 2020 - 2025
(Data source: Arc i-three analytics [Cheshire OPCC])

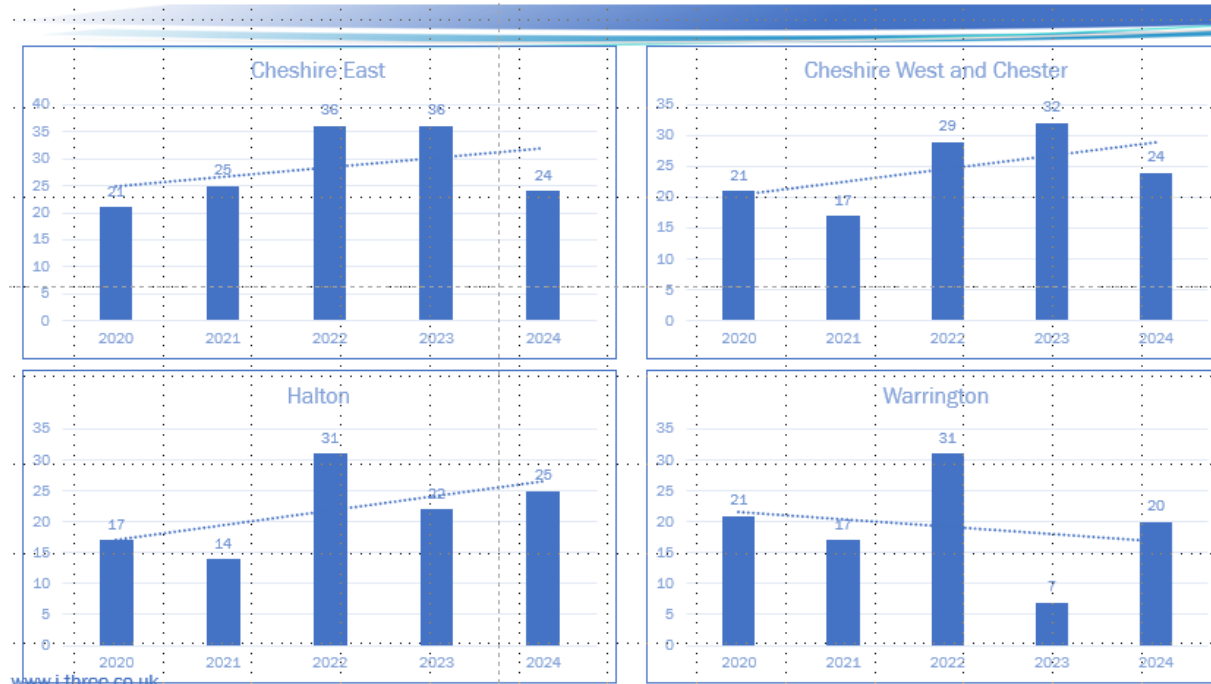


Figure 28. Youth knife/sharp implement crime trend for Cheshire by local authority 2020 – 2025
(Data source: Arc i-three analytics [Cheshire OPCC])

Contextual safeguarding partnerships are established at place and the YJS is an integral partner of these arrangements in all four areas. Good partnership and intelligence sharing with police (including cross border with Merseyside in particular, which is the major ‘exporter’ of county lines into Cheshire) ensures the National Referral Mechanism is applied appropriately. There have been several cross-force-operational examples of sensitively managed police investigations to tackle organised crime and protect Cheshire children, who have been exploited to supply drugs for high tier Merseyside organised crime groups.

YJS managers will continue to contribute to the design and delivery of multi-agency, contextual safeguarding training at place, particularly in relation to child criminal exploitation. YJS also participates in safeguarding audits, rapid reviews, and independently-chaired learning reviews, when necessary.

The comprehensive needs analysis that informed the Cheshire SVS (2) showed 73% of youth justice children had convictions for violent offences, but also revealed a similar proportion of these children had themselves experienced violent victimisation *prior* to the onset of their own offending. Violence breeds violence and needs to be ‘treated’ in a similar way to transmittable diseases, which is why the Cheshire SVS has adopted a public health approach.

11.8 Detention in police custody

Figure 29 shows the number of children detained overnight in Cheshire, is extremely low and equates to five children on average per month across the three custody suites or 6% of the total number of children arrested by Cheshire police over a 12 month period.

The low and unpredictable demand on local authorities for emergency Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) beds means they have not always been available when required, so occasionally children are detained in police custody as a last resort. Overnight detentions in custody continues to be a standing agenda item for scrutiny at the YJS Management Board and as a partnership, we are taking decisive action.

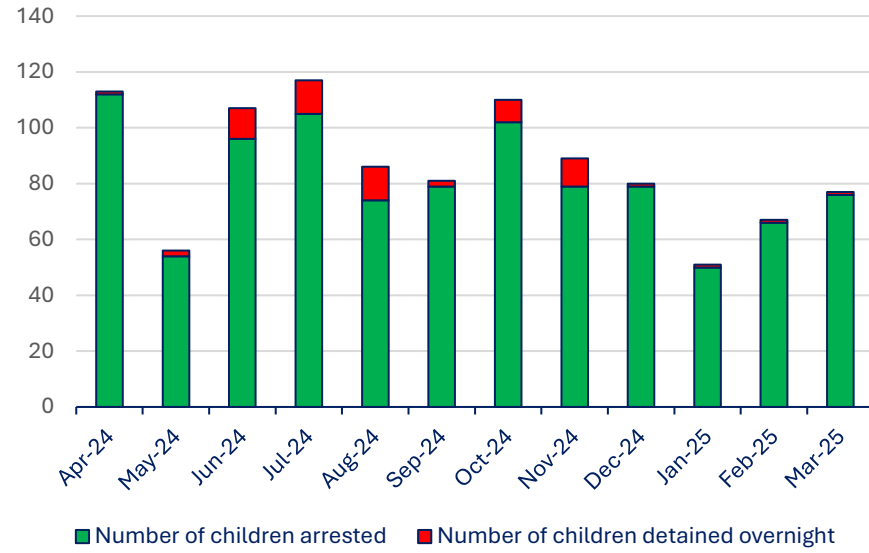


Figure 29. Numbers of children detained overnight in Cheshire compared to number of arrests from April 2024-March 2025
(Data source: Cheshire Constabulary)

From 2024, Directors of Children's Services have received a notification every time a child from their area is detained overnight due to an alternative PACE bed not being available. The police representative on the YJS Management Board is also the senior accountable officer for police on all four Children's Safeguarding Partnerships and has formally raised the paucity of PACE beds at executive partnership Boards. Cheshire and Merseyside Commissioners have been exploring shared PACE beds as part of the Commissioning Workstreams for both fostering and residential as there is a lack of sufficiency in both areas. Consideration is being given to residential and other safe spaces, but foster care is the preferred option. A collective solution could be viable due to the low numbers of children detained for each individual local authority. A commissioning manager in St Helens Council is leading this workstream on behalf of the Directors of Children's Services across Cheshire and Merseyside.

11.9 Remands

In 2024-2025, there were only six children in total across Cheshire remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation (Figure 30). All remands were for serious offences, where a community alternative to remand was not viable, due either to the seriousness of the offence and/or where the local authority were unable to source alternative accommodation on the day.



Figure 30. Children remanded into youth detention by local authority in 2024-2025 (right) compared to 2023-2024 (left)
(Data source: Local YJS)

Cheshire YJS retains the confidence of the courts by ensuring children are assessed promptly for robust packages of bail support as an alternative to remand. We have a proactive partnership with local children's social care and policing regarding remands into local authority care, but, as mentioned in Section 11.8, options are constrained by the paucity of safe, suitable accommodation where risk (to victim or wider public) and the child's own complex needs can be adequately managed. Placement sufficiency for local authorities is a national issue that the Association of Directors of Children's Services and others are very vocal on because accommodation for children facing serious criminal charges is an added complexity (and cost).

Through the current national framework for remands, the MOJ provides local authorities with a small financial contribution toward the costs of remands (Table 5) with the allocation based on historical bed night data. A consultation on the funding of remands to youth detention accommodation was published in early 2024 and Cheshire YJS responded on behalf of the partnership, highlighting Cheshire's low remand number. Table 4 shows the uncontrollable costs incurred by Cheshire local authorities (particularly for Halton in 2024) because local authorities have no control over length of time from initial charge through to conclusion of trial. A fundamental review and fairer funding formula for remands is still being worked on by the MOJ consultation with stakeholders such as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and AYM.

Table 5. Remand allocation from the MoJ for Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington 2024-2025

Local Authority RIC	2024/25 Budget	2024/25 Actual Spend	2024/25 Remaining/Deficit
Cheshire East	£121,297	£55,272	£66,025
Cheshire West	£42,123	£0	£42,123
Halton	£1,883	£124,880	-£122,997
Warrington	£0	£0	£0
Total for YJS	£165,303	£195,038	-£14,849

(Data source: Local YJS)

Table 6 shows the number of bed nights of children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

Table 6. Number of custody bed nights 2024/2025

Local Authority	2024/25 Bed Nights
Cheshire East	168
Cheshire West	0
Halton	159
Warrington	0
Total Cheshire wide for YJS	327

(Data source: YJS local data)

11.10 Use of custody and constructive resettlement

The number of children in Cheshire who receive a custodial sentence is low, with typically fewer than 10 children across the whole of the county serving custodial sentences at any one time. Use of custody is rightly reserved for those children who have committed serious crimes, usually for serious violent or sexual offences.

Figure 31 shows custodial sentences were imposed on eight children from Cheshire in 2024, comprising four Cheshire East children, three Halton children and one CWCC child. In 2024-2025, no Warrington children were sentenced to custody.

All children released from custody before reaching aged 18 years have individual resettlement plans in line with the principles of constructive resettlement. The low number in Cheshire means we do not have a specialist resettlement team but our children do benefit from the continuity of multi-disciplinary support (YJS worker plus health and education professionals) that follows them from court, through their time in custody and after release. Custody and resettlement will be one of the thematic audits undertaken in 2025-2026 and because the volume is low, it means YJS will actually be doing a deep dive into the casework of every child sentenced to custody in Cheshire in the last 2 years.



Figure 31. Number of children given custodial sentences in 2024-2025 by local authority
(Data source: Local YJS)

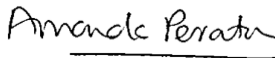

11.11 Working with families

YJS will be working with partners at place as the Families First programme is embedded. Frontline practitioners are encouraged to adopt a whole family approach in their work. YJS professionals work collaboratively with Early Help, Social Care and other locality-based services to ensure that families have access to help and support where this is needed.

As a service, we are committed to promoting this approach within practice and welcome the new Families First initiative and the opportunities to strengthen integrated services for children and families in the coming years.

Parents and Caregivers are also a key strand in our work to develop participation.

You really understood my son's challenges. Desire to help improve the behaviours for my son to provide a better home life balance and to influence positive changes
(Parent)

Sign off, submission and approval		
Amanda Perraton Chair of YJS Board Executive Director for Children and Families Cheshire West and Chester Council		27 June 2025
Tom Dooks YJS Head of Service		27 June 2025

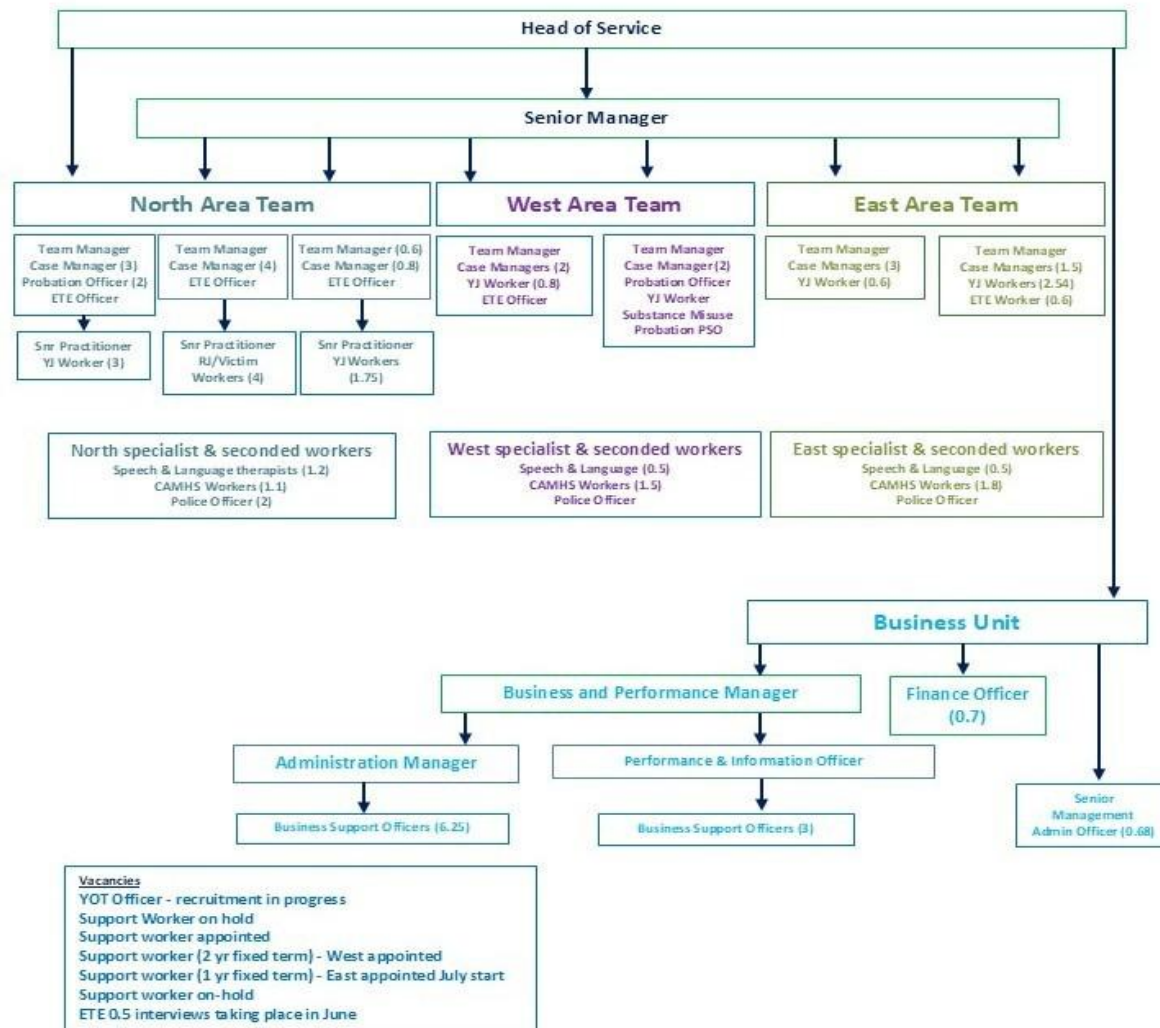
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Appendices

Appendix A. YJS organisational structure



Appendix B: Staffing of the YJS by sex and ethnicity; No. of individual people

Ethnicity	Managers Strategic		Managers Operational		Practitioners		Administrative		Referral Order Panel Volunteer		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Asian											0	0
Black						1					0	1
Mixed								1			0	1
White	1	1	1	6	9	44		15	9	32	20	98
Any other ethnic group											0	0
Not known											0	0
Total	1	1	1	6	9	45	0	16	9	32	20	100



**Cheshire
Constabulary**



Dan Price
Police & Crime
Commissioner
for Cheshire

**Probation
Service**



Cheshire and Merseyside



**Cheshire West
and Chester**



WARRINGTON
Borough Council