



Cheshire Youth Justice Services (inc Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington)

Youth Justice Plan

2023-2024

Foreword

Welcome to the Cheshire Youth Justice Services annual plan for 2023-24. We are proud of the achievements we have made as a partnership over the last ten years but also recognise there is still much to do to further improve the quality of life for our children, families, communities and those who visit or work across our large and geo-politically complex region.

We have a strong track record of collaborative working in Cheshire with four local authorities working together with other agencies such as Police, Probation and Health colleagues on a wide range of issues including crime, safeguarding and public protection.

As we go forward, we intend to improve the governance structures by way of a review of the partnership agreement and hosting arrangements as well as continue our Child First journey.

We are confident that we will deliver tangible outcomes for our communities and look forward to the challenges ahead.

Helen Brackenbury

Chair of YJS Management Board

Director of Children's Services, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Introduction, vision and strategy

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act states that each local authority area must have a multi-agency youth offending team or service and annually they should produce a youth justice plan. This document outlines the intentions regarding Cheshire Youth Justice Service (YJS) for 2023-2024, as well as reviewing the outcomes from the previous year's plan.

The plan links to, complements and supports the plans of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), the four Community Safety Partnerships and local safeguarding arrangements in the four local authority areas of Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton and Warrington. In addition to the children's strategies and plans in each individual local authority, it also links to the developing Combating Drugs Partnerships in those areas. Cheshire YJS is also a partner in the Serious Violence Strategy being co-ordinated locally by the OPCC.

The primary purpose of the youth justice system is to prevent offending in children and young people. In the Cheshire sub-region, the wider youth justice partnership will continue to work collaboratively and in an evidential and intelligence-led manner in order to protect the wider public and safeguard children and vulnerable adults, including those at risk and this includes governance oversight of the shared youth justice service.

The service underwent a full HMIP joint inspection in 2021 and inspectors found YJS to be a Child-First, trauma-informed organisation. We will continue to build on this foundation, by striving to become even more participatory, whilst embedding a relationship-based practice approach. YJS will continue to work collaboratively with partners and systemically with our children, families and communities in order to reduce youth crime. We will simultaneously continue to improve the experiences of victims and those affected by youth crime in Cheshire – the majority of whom are also children.

The YJS Management Board oversaw the Inspection action plan with all six recommendations having been addressed and approved by the Board.

Local context

The Cheshire sub-region is a large and complex area and the partnership across the four local authorities provides a strong base to meet the various complexities and challenges faced by the county's children, families and victims.

The area is one of approximately 1,000 miles sq with a population of 1.1M, 250,000 of whom are below the age of 18. Across the four local authorities there are around 1000 children in care. Cheshire can be viewed as a largely affluent and rural county with pockets of urban deprivation. Although highly diverse in terms of age, the county is not as diverse compared to other areas of England, with around 96% of residents identifying as 'White British'. The traveller community also has a presence in some areas.

The region has a complex geo-political landscape, neighbouring 15 other local authority areas, with 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. The number of county lines fluctuate throughout the year, however in 2022/2023, Cheshire Police identified an average of 44 (range: 32-63).

Despite the scale, YJS is a comparatively small organisation comprising 76 WTE staff, including seconded workers and 45 volunteers. The human resource arrangements for the entire workforce involve 11 different employing organisations, including local authority, police, probation, three different NHS Trusts and two private providers.

Child First

Both HMIP and the YJB recognised YJS as a child first organisation. The former within the 2021 joint inspection and the latter by granting 2-year pathfinder status for its successful Diversion programme. Throughout 2020-2022, YJS managers delivered training events and individually bespoke consultation to support other youth offending services in improving their Diversion programmes. Cheshire's point of arrest Divert scheme is well embedded within Cheshire Police and other partners and is funded through the OPCC and health funding streams. This ensures the assessment for unmet health needs informs decision making on out of court disposals. From January-December 2022, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) FTE figures for 10-17-year-olds in Cheshire were 124, which is lower than the regional and national average for England & Wales of 166 and 148 per 100,000 respectively.

It is important to note that the Divert Project seeks to assess and utilise appropriate universal and specialist services to ensure children are able to access the appropriate professional support for their needs.

YJS has developed a collaborative commissioning network across the sub-region that brings together several health commissioners and providers to ensure services appropriately meet the needs of children in or on the cusp of the justice system. The Health Sub-group of the YJS Management Board commissioned an update of the Health Needs Analysis (HNA) undertaken in 2015. A more in-depth review was carried out in 2022 by the Public Health Institute at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), led by Professor Zara Quigg. A link to the full report will be available on LJMU's website in the coming weeks.

HMIP noted in their report that the Child First ethos was present not only in YJS but also across the wider partnership, with Cheshire Police being particularly cited. The development agreement and implementation of the Child in Care protocol to prevent unnecessary over-criminalisation is a good example of the Child First philosophy being adopted across Cheshire strategic partnerships. This has resulted in reductions in the numbers of children in care appearing in court for trivial offences. The YJS operates upon a policy of 'Is this good enough for my child or one close to me?' and this was evidenced in the report.

The new Child First on-line learning material developed by Unitas in partnership with the YJB has been included in this year's YJS Workforce Development Plan and places have been purchased for front line practitioners and managers.

Voice of the child

The child and their lived experience is a primary requirement for all dealings with children in the youth justice system in Cheshire and is integral to the model. Capturing the voice of the child, their parent/carer but crucially also the voice of the harmed person (often another child) occurs as part of the initial Divert assessment and is also sought at the end of the programme via Survey Monkey. HMIP found clear evidence of this in practice but we need to develop further innovative methods to promote more active participation of children.

In 2022, a spoken word artist worked with a group of children and young people from YJS, on the power of language and creative expression and YJS has also formed a partnership with Theatre in Prisons Project (TiPP) to put on participatory music making groups. These creative initiatives are examples of '*socially prescribed*' relationship-based, psychosocial therapeutic activities for children in the justice system and exemplify the relational child-first approach YJS will be embedding over the next few years (see section on performance priorities).

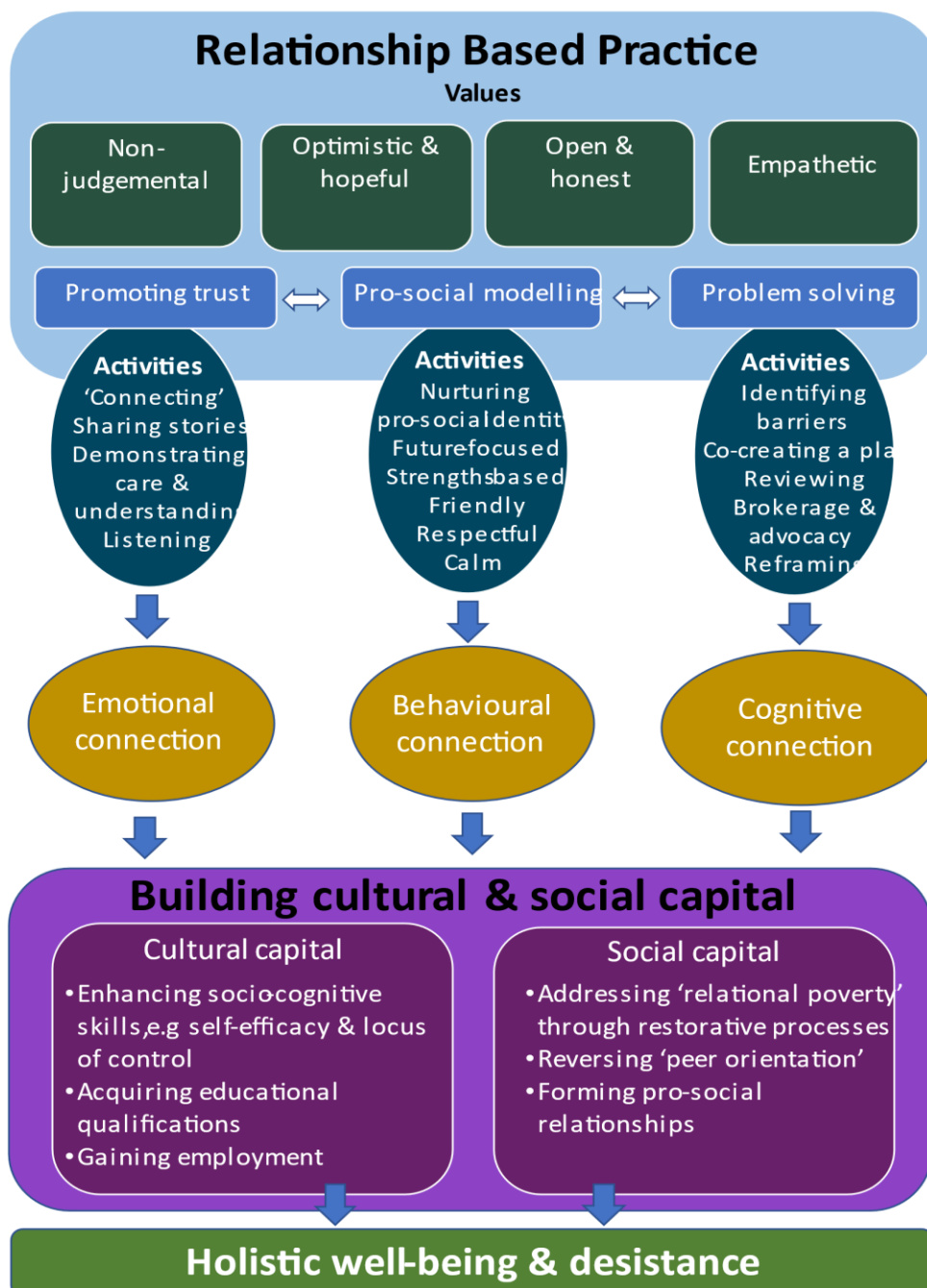
Relationship-Based Practice

YJS have adopted the Relationship-Based Practice Model as shown in Figure 1.

We partnered with lived-experience expert and author Andi Brierley and leading academic on participation (and Board member) Dr Sean Creaney to launch the model at a YJS whole service development day in November 2022. In addition, researchers from the University of Limerick have been invited by the YJS Research Group to give a virtual talk in June 2023 on their findings from a meta-analysis on relationship-based practice.

The Cheshire YJS Workforce Development Plan for 2023-24 will continue to focus heavily on relationship-based practice.

Figure 1. The relationship based model



Conversational audits

The management team now undertake 'Conversational audits' as routine, having piloted the approach in 2022. This methodology provides a richer three-dimensional perspective on YJS practice and service delivery. Some of the direct feedback from children has resulted in changes to service delivery, for example improvements around issuing SMS text reminders and seeing children and young people in different (less corporate) venues. This conversational approach to quality assurance has been well received by the Board and YJS Senior Manager and is being considered by local Children's Safeguarding Partnerships as a new methodology for undertaking multi-agency audits.

The HNA carried out by LJMU, mentioned in the previous section, included direct input from children and families, with current or previous lived experience of the youth justice system (see section 'Progress on previous plan for some headline findings').

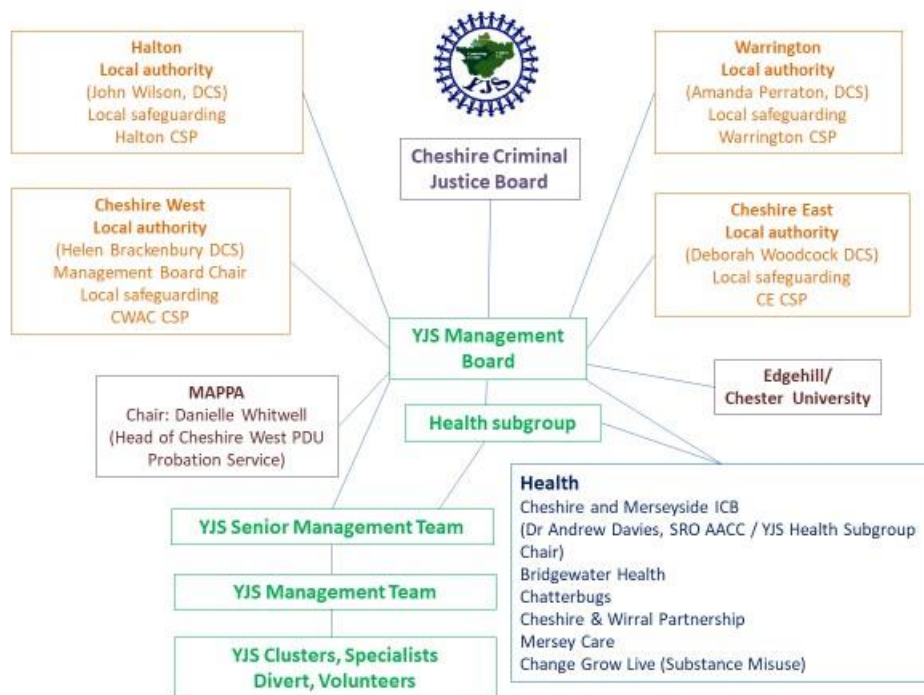
We are seeking to extend the user-voice concept and conversational auditing to capture more direct feedback from people harmed by youth crime. We are currently investigating a complaint by the mother of a harmed person, though early indications are the service acted in accordance with the Victims' Code of Practice.

The YJS enjoys a close relationship with the OPCC, particularly regarding the early interventions and diversion process. The OPCC also has a youth advisory panel, which over the last 5 years has had representation from YJS service users, in an effort to ensure users of the wider youth justice system can feed back directly to those responsible for commissioning and service delivery.

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

A major strength of YJS is the strong strategic and professional links with colleagues in the public, private and voluntary sectors (Figure 2). Whilst this plan specifically refers to the YJS, the wider ambition to improve outcomes for children, adults, residents and visitors to Cheshire, requires the collective input from the wider partnership. Timelines for approval at full council are complicated given the sub-regional arrangement. However, there is commitment from the four Directors of Children's Services to take this Youth Justice plan through their respective council governance channels.

Figure 2: Youth Justice System Strategic Partnership



DCS Director of Children's Services. CSP Children's Safeguarding Partnership, PDU Probation Delivery Unit, ICB Integrated Care Board, SRO AACC Senior Responsibility Officer, All Age Continuing Care

Safeguarding arrangements

Safeguarding partnerships are well established and YJS is an integral element of all four arrangements, participating in multi-agency audits of safeguarding practice and independently chaired learning reviews when necessary. YJS senior managers are also active participants in several Pan-Cheshire safeguarding collaborations including a Contextual Safeguarding Strategic group. The interface between the sub-regional strategy and variable local contextual safeguarding approaches was recently reviewed with the help of an independent consultant and a new Pan-Cheshire 'all-age' contextual safeguarding strategy. HMIP noted strong assessment and identification of potential criminal exploitation in the region but a less well-developed disruption and prevention strategy. Disruption of organised criminal activity and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults from criminal exploitation is a collective ambition and is a huge challenge and future focus for all partners. Contextual safeguarding will remain a key strategic priority for YJS and the following was quoted from the 2022 Joint Areas Thematic Inspection in Cheshire East as an element of good practice from staff around positive partnership approaches to disruption and support for children ensnared in criminal exploitation.

"Recognition of the links between exploited children's poor mental health, sexual health and substance misuse has resulted in effective commissioning and collaboration across the health networks between child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), youth justice services, young person's recovery service and children in care teams."

YJS is a core member of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) as well as having significant operational and strategic links to the Cheshire Integrated Offender Management model. These links have been enhanced by the adoption of a more youth justice focussed role for the police officers as recommended by HMIP with three officers now fully embedded within the service.

YJS has links at both strategic and operational levels with all four Early Help offers as well as the Police-led Complex Youths programme. The latter seeks to identify and intervene earlier with children at risk of becoming the recipients of more formal, court-ordered criminal justice services in the future. Police partners provide Board members with data on number of and reasons why young people are detained overnight, are stopped and searched and released under investigation (see Appendix E) and from these a collective approach can be reached to address any increases or trends. We intend to increase this oversight to include reviews of court process times i.e. delays, as well as excessive bail periods in order to limit the negative impacts on children in the Youth Justice system.

The HMIP report in 2021 noted the complexity of the arrangements within the Cheshire sub-region and judged Governance and Leadership to be 'Outstanding'. The Board were found to be engaged, knowledgeable and of the appropriate level within their own organisations to drive forward the Child First youth justice model.

Board membership and leadership

The Management Board Chair rotates bi-annually between the four local authorities with Cheshire West and Chester Council's Director of Children's Services taking over from Halton for the period April 2022 to March 2024. 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. Job descriptions and induction processes are in place for new Board members but the over-arching partnership agreement is under review with a group led by the new Chair of the Board (Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester Council).

The health sub-group, the only sub-group of the Board, oversaw and addressed the recommendations from the 2015 HNA, which impressed the Inspectorate, as this was a rare achievement. Health provision in the YJS was similarly commended and this was more impressive considering the plethora of health commissioners and providers in the region. The changes to health and social care commissioning with the abolition of CCGs and creation of a single Integrated Care System across Cheshire and Merseyside will create fresh challenges. The sub-group continues to be led by a senior health colleague so is well placed to navigate the roads ahead.

Leadership was also commended in the report with staff understanding the vision of the Board and supported into translating this into practice. HMIP recognised this was not something that simply occurred but was a result of many years of hard work and commitment by the Management team. The challenge is, obviously, to maintain current levels of performance and quality whilst seeking to improve further within an ever-precarious funding and resourcing environment.

YJS Senior Management Team

The Senior Management Team was reduced to two posts in March 2022, which for an area as complex and large as Cheshire, dealing with four local authority partners continues to be challenging.

Notably, the current Head of Service will be retiring in summer 2023 after 18 years at the helm. This will require a transitional strategy to maintain the current high-performance levels and develop the service to be as 'future proof' as possible.

Board Development

Board development continued in 2022-2023 through attendance at the all-staff development day in November 2022. Here direct feedback and dialogue occurred between front line staff and three of the four Directors of Children's Services including the Chair and also Chair of health subgroup. Following a review and update of the partnership agreement, it was noted by the Board that the multiple governance structures for staff with three separate employers for non-seconded staff created inequity, duplication and complexity in management processes. This was an identified legacy from the previous amalgamations of the youth justice arrangements in Cheshire from 2012 onwards and the Board recognised this was an opportune time to correct these anomalies and will explore the potential for a single hosted service in 2023-24. This will also require alignments of IT, HR, Finance and legal and as such represents a major programme of organisational change. A review of the existing partnership agreement was conducted in 2022-23 and adopted by the Board in December 2022. However, a change to a hosted arrangement will necessitate a further review of the partnership agreement along with increased transparency of the funding responsibilities of the four local authority partners. This review will be led by the Chair of the Management Board with dedicated project management support and will seek to resolve the various issues by March 2025.

Resources and services

Over the last 13 years, the partnership has suffered considerable reductions in funding from the YJB. The amalgamation in 2016, of two Youth Offending Services in the Cheshire sub-region, to form the current YJS, was partly in response to approximately £1M per annum reductions.

Local authority and other partners in Cheshire are continuing to face considerable reductions in funding. This poses a significant risk to the partnership's ability to continue to provide high quality, creative, appropriate interventions and services, which reflect existing and emerging local needs. The increased identification of pernicious criminal exploitation along County Lines, as well as other forms of criminal abuse within the localities, is recognised across the region as well as nationally. Whilst YJS is only one of the partners, the ability to identify potential victims of such abuse is hindered by the lack of secure and sustainable investments in the 'Divert' intervention, which is the primary YJS pre-court early intervention.

The uncertainty of funding for Divert was one of the six recommendation areas in the HMIP report and despite the nationally recognised success of Divert as a YJB pathfinder model, it is a non-statutory work-stream. The largest single financial contributor to Divert is the OPCC but that contribution has remained static since 2017. Divert receives no additional funding from the YJB, local authorities or any other partners (other than indirectly from our collaborative health commissioning, which funds pre-court health assessments). With the possible implementation of a deferred prosecution scheme and use of Outcome 22

disposals with youths, it is anticipated that referrals from Cheshire Police will increase in volume. Therefore, a good example of a good use of resources is the extension of the Divert offer previously limited to OPCC funding, as mentioned above. The welcome additional investment in early intervention, offered by the MoJ's Turnaround programme has led to an ability to extend YJS' Divert team to become a full 'Prevention and Diversion' Service. The service has been able to shift some of its human resource upstream from post-court to pre-court to meet the continued demand for out of court assessments.

The Zero-based review from 2018/2019 concluded the current service model is appropriate and effective in the region and that this should continue with improvements of an evolutionary nature, whilst acknowledging the high-quality baseline. No suggested significant reductions emerged from the review but a desire to implement a fair and more transparent funding formula locally was identified. This was undertaken in 2020-21 by the Director of Public Sector Transformation on behalf of the partnership and with the participation of partners, YJS Managers, staff, volunteers, victims and children and parents/carers involved in the service.

Resulting discussions regarding an equitable and sustainable funding regime for the four significant partners, the local authorities, have occurred. A further review in February 2021 led to a review of Governance arrangements in the forthcoming years and as mentioned under the previous section, the proposal to improve efficiencies by moving to a single host organisation. The intent is for one local authority to assume responsibility for YJS and a new partnership agreement be in place by March 2024. This is an ambitious but achievable timeline with the full co-operation of all partners.

The YJS Management Board will continue to oversee the pooled budget from all multiple financial stakeholders to ensure effective use of resources.

Progress on previous plan

Last year's plan focussed primarily on the outcomes of the HMIP inspection and all recommendations were overseen and approved by the Board.

Trauma-informed practice

The journey towards being a trauma-informed service continued, and in some ways accelerated during the pandemic due to a greater awareness of issues of trauma across the nation, as well as in the youth justice partnership. The positive health input to the organisation, particularly from CAMHS professionals, has assisted in this journey and following a comprehensive 3-year workforce development strategy, professionals now routinely view risk and behaviour through a trauma-informed lens. In the 2021 inspection, HMIP and the other inspectorates described YJS as a trauma-informed service and while senior managers are not complacent, they are sufficiently confident to re-focus energy towards delivering a cultural shift towards relational, participatory and systemic practice.

Disproportionality

Whilst the data does not indicate an issue in respect of racial disproportionality in the Cheshire YJS cohort, it is recognised that further work needs to be done both locally and beyond to ensure that an 'explain or reform' model continues to be uppermost in strategic thinking and operational delivery. The Criminal Justice Board review into the Lammy report on over representation of BAME groups in the Criminal Justice system was presented in March 2023 and recommended all criminal justice agencies in Cheshire to agree a methodology for annual deliberations. The YJS Head of Service led the review group on

behalf of the Cheshire Criminal Justice Board and following his retirement, the Probation Service will take over the lead for the 2023-2024 group, with representation from YJS.

Reflecting on the HMIP thematic inspection on the experiences of black children in the justice system, it was acknowledged that coming from a predominantly white area where 95% of service users are white, staff can lack the confidence to speak with (and relate to) young people who may experience racism. Therefore in 2023/2024, Cheshire YJS have commissioned some bespoke equality and diversity training for the YJS workforce.

Health Needs Analysis

The HNA undertaken by LJMU and completed in December 2022 was a significant piece of work. The dataset represented over 70% of all children YJS had worked with in 2022, making it the most contemporary and statistically valid research into the health needs of justice involved children, anywhere in the UK. A workshop of influential stakeholders was convened in December 2022 to share the findings and help inform the recommendations. The YJS senior manager and Chair of the Health sub-group will be promoting the HNA via regional Health and Wellbeing and other relevant boards throughout 2023. Some of the headline findings were:-

- 72.9% of the statutory cohort and 59.5% of the Divert cohort had experienced violent victimisation, prior to their own involvement in offending
- Children with speech and language needs had a higher mean number of offences (2.7 offences) than those without (1.7 offences; $p < 0.05$)
- 50.4% of the statutory cohort had experienced some form of school exclusion. A higher proportion of those with speech and language difficulties had been excluded (58.9%), compared to those without (37.0%; $p < 0.05$)
- Neurodiverse diagnosed: statutory cohort = 46.2%; Divert = 36.3%.
Awaiting diagnosis or referral: statutory = 13.4%; Divert = 18.8%
- 55% of statutory cohort and 22.9% of Divert cohort had experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (compared with 9% in the general population)
- 56.5% of young people who currently used drugs used multiple substances and the mean age at which young people started to use drugs was 13.3 years.

These stark findings will greatly assist intelligent commissioning and service design for the growing cohort of children that YJS quite rightly divert away from the criminal justice system but have a complex set of needs and exhibit risky behaviour.

Partly off the back of the HNA and the work YJS has led around Diversion and SEND, the service achieved Quality Lead status with a 'Child-first' commendation in November 2022 (accredited via MicroLink plc).

Performance and priorities

Performance figures submitted to the YJB and those cited in the HMIP report suggest that YJS continues to achieve high performance against the three main performance indicators set:-

- First Time Entrants (FTEs)
- Custody rates
- Rates of re-offending (binary rates)

Audit

Safeguarding and risk of harm audits conducted over the last 12 months also indicate consistently good practice. The only area identified as requiring improvement in the HMIP inspection (contingency planning to mitigate risk of reasonably predictable future harm) was the focus of an audit in December 2022 where 80% of the 16 cases audited were deemed to be good or outstanding. This report was presented to the YJS Management Board and to local CSP learning and improvement boards.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The requirement by the YJB for local YJS' to report on an additional 10 Key Performance indicators represents a particular challenge for Cheshire YJS such is the complexity of the partnership arrangements across four 'Places'. Cheshire YJS have only had one Performance and Information Manager to coordinate data and performance returns so we have had to create a new Performance and Information Officer post to assist.

Cheshire YJS covers four different 'Places' each with different early help and children's social care databases and varying arrangements for SEND, ETE, Substance Misuse and Mental Health, therefore collating data for the new KPI return is resource intensive. YJS also provide performance returns to the Management Board, OPCC (who joint fund the Diversion scheme), MoJ (for Turnaround) and NHSE, as well as providing Youth Justice specific data to a wide range of SEND, Early Help, Community Safety, Contextual Safeguarding and Serious Organised Crime Boards.

FTEs continue to be significantly lower than regional and national averages and out of court disposals are also reviewed by a multi-agency group led by the local Magistracy on an annual basis. This post-decision scrutiny panel reports approval ratings for out of court decisions in over 90% of youth cases. This is largely attributable to the quality of Divert assessments undertaken by YJS staff and effective Diversionary process with Cheshire Constabulary.

Pan-Cheshire Children's Partnerships are constantly evolving with, for instance, complex needs hub developments in Warrington and Family Hubs in Cheshire East. YJS will lean in and align as far as possible while retaining the integrity of specialist multi-disciplinary teams focusing on the risk and needs of children in the justice system.

Appendix C details the most up to date performance data according to YJS figures. Appendix D gives numbers of FTEs, reoffending rates, number of young people sentences to custody, pre-court and post court case loads and offence types within the four local authority areas.

NB In both Appendix C and D, YJB figures may vary slightly due to additional data not currently being available to YJS.

Education

The education and inclusion specialist, appointed to the Management Board in 2020, continues to be supportive in removing barriers to inclusion and participation in ETE. A small Education team within YJS comprising officers, linked to each of the four local authorities has experienced some gaps in the service recently due to two maternity leaves and only having a half time post in Cheshire East. Despite this, the team works well to achieve good outcomes having an average performance of 65% children and young people in ETE placements at the end of their court orders.

Over-represented children

As previously noted, Cheshire YJS Head of Service led a task and finish group on behalf of the Criminal Justice Board and the YJS Board on local CJS responses to the Lammy report. The review findings and those of the HMIP inspection suggest there is little or no racial disproportionality in relation to community or custodial sentences. The majority of disposals reflected the actual demographic of children in Cheshire.

The findings were reported to the Cheshire Criminal Justice Board, which proposed each criminal justice agency, including YJS should produce an annual review to reflect on any areas of disproportionality, maintaining the reform or explain agenda. This was agreed in March 2023.

In 2022-2023, the protocol preventing unnecessary criminalisation of cared for children was further refined to include more overtly the needs of care leavers entering the adult systems. The review was compiled by a successful multi-agency collaboration across the sub-region and has been signed by the Chief Constable, Chief Crown Prosecutor, OPCC, DCS from all four local authorities, YJS and Probation Service. The protocol was also endorsed by Cheshire Criminal Justice and YJS Management Boards in December 2022.

The YJS Management Board are also requiring an annual review of outcomes for children in care in relation to the protocol. Early indications in 2022 show there has been a reduction in children in care appearing in court of in excess of 30%. The report will reflect the 'so what' test in terms of policy and procedures delivering in real life outcomes.

Prevention and Diversion

Cheshire's award-winning Diversion project has been referenced elsewhere in this plan. It continues to maintain low rates of FTE across all four local authorities. The number of FTE entering the youth justice system for the YJS area has decreased considerably by 32% over the past five years (Dec 2018 = 184 v Dec 2022 = 126 FTE). YJS operates a more purist Diversionary scheme and does not have its own funded Prevention team. Instead, it aligns to the four local authority Early Help offers by diverting children away from the criminal justice system and supporting them to access universal or targeted support services in their local community. The MOJ 'Turnaround' funding has been very welcome and enabled Cheshire YJS to broaden the referral criteria and refine the pathway for preventative support to work with children for longer (where necessary) and with children who were previously ineligible for Divert. We expect improved identification of children vulnerable to exploitation at an earlier stage of the youth justice system. YJS was swift to respond to utilising the Turnaround funding by adapting the Divert model. Year 1 funding was largely used to mobilise and recruit additional staff but has also been used as match funding to pump prime projects with local voluntary, community or social enterprise (e.g. the Rage Fitness project in the west of the county).

Serious violence and exploitation

The Serious Youth Violence analysis from the OPCC shows Cheshire has a relatively low incidence. Several multi-agency applications to the Youth Endowment Fund to support work around serious youth violence have been unsuccessful and have been awarded to areas with higher levels. Single incidents of violence cause considerable impact on communities and families, so this area of work continues to be monitored by the Management Board.

Exploitation has been referenced elsewhere in the plan and remains a key strategic priority for the service and the wider partnership.

Constructive resettlement and use of custody

Use of custody is extremely low across Cheshire (typically fewer than 10 children across the whole of the county are on remand or sentenced at any one time). Close scrutiny of Cheshire children in custody, in particular their safety and wellbeing and resettlement plans is ensured through a mix of in-house Multi-Agency High Risk Meetings, circulation of a custody tracker directly to all four Directors of Children's Services, which includes resettlement and release plans and flags any gaps.

A monthly report on those children in custody is shared with DCS to ensure any CSC issues regarding release plans are addressed prior to release.

Restorative Justice and Victims

HMIP commented favourably on the Cheshire restorative justice (RJ) offer, which adheres strictly with the Victim's Code of Practice. All victims are contacted by YJS and offered a service irrespective of whether the child who harmed them is dealt with by Diversion or charged. RJ performance is reported quarterly on a scorecard to the OPCC. In 2022-2023, the fully training RJ Team, contacted 226 harmed persons and completed 16 direct RJ Conferences.

National standards

The YJS Management Team undertake comprehensive internal Risk of Harm and Safeguarding quality assurance audits every year. These are now conducted routinely as 'conversational audits' whereby direct feedback from parents, young people and in some cases, victims, is included to inform the quality of youth justice delivery. As a Pan-Cheshire service, YJS also participate in regular multi-agency practice audits coordinated by the four children's safeguarding partnerships according to their priority themes (typically neglect, exploitation and domestic abuse).

Youth justice self-assessment shows good adherence to national standards with any over-rides appropriately authorised and recorded in case files by managers. In 2019-2020, the Management Board undertook a strategic self-assessment with individual Board members working with a named youth justice manager to self-assess against each of the five National Standards. In 2023/2024, a refresh of National standards will again be led by Board members.

The schedule of reporting on Quality Assurance audits to Board and thematic areas of focus will be discussed at the June Board. One thematic on Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding currently underway is likely to be suggested for September and Diversion at a later date.

Challenges, risks and issues

Cheshire YJS always faces a set of challenges based on the large and complex socio-political and geographical footprint we serve. Change is the only constant and this is exacerbated by the inherent difficulties in a service, which has four local authority partners, four separate Children's IT database and recording models, 11 different employers of staff working in co-located or seconded to YJS. The re-emergence of a single Probation Service, which has resulted in three distinct delivery units within Cheshire, brings both challenges and opportunities. This is particularly seen around transition cases, public protection and early intervention processes in terms of transitional safeguarding and criminal exploitation.

The long-term funding and resource allocation for the early intervention work, including Divert, remain an issue with financial austerity still in place. Continued investment in a high quality and well performing youth justice service will continue to compete against other worthy resourcing needs. At the other end of the continuum, safe, suitable accommodation for the small number of children on the cusp of custody, who have very complex needs and display risky, sometimes, violent behaviour, remains a challenge.

However, the single biggest challenge for the organisation is how to maintain and improve high quality services in the post-pandemic world. Our strong links to academia, amongst the best ever seen by the Inspectorates, will assist us in ensuring that interventions are based on sound academic evidence to achieve the desired outcomes of an ever evolving local and national youth justice agenda.

The health offer to children in the justice system across Cheshire has been a particular strength in recent years and the refresh of HNA is timely. However, the changes in the commissioning landscape with the abolition of CCGs, creation of a Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System means there is some uncertainty over what will be commissioned at *system* level versus *place* level. The Health sub-group to the YJS Management Board has been pivotal in driving forward investment and overseeing improvement in the health offer to children in or on the cusp of the criminal justice system.

The current Chair of the sub-group is a passionate advocate of addressing the health needs of children in YJS and has agreed to continue to lead the group in 2023-24. The findings of the HNA will guide the subgroup, health commissioners and providers around drawing up an action plan.

Service improvement plan

The HMIP report in 2021 has essentially indicated a very positive outlook for YJS and indicated the highest scores of any youth offending service, subject to a full joint Inspection. This is the most intensive level of scrutiny any youth justice service can be subjected to by five differing Inspectorates and was assessed as Good overall.

The Chief Inspector of Probation noted

This joint inspection, assessing the quality of work by the Youth Justice Service, highlights a clear ambition for children, sustained and effective partnerships, and generally sound operational delivery. Cheshire has achieved the highest score of any of the joint inspections undertaken with colleague inspectors from the police, health, social care and education that we have completed to date.

The Inspection action plan was fully implemented in 2022-23 and places YJS in an even stronger position to further improve our delivery in terms of outcomes for children, communities and victims in Cheshire.

Workforce development

For many years, Cheshire YJS have been part of a well-established and coordinated pan-Merseyside Collaborative Training Group (CTG) which commissions bespoke and specialist youth justice training for staff in YJS and neighbouring youth justice services. The focus on the previous two years has been the embedding of trauma-informed practice. CTG also offer annual updates of AIMS 3 assessment and intervention training as well as Restorative Justice training.

The focus on 2023/24 will be equality and diversity training for all staff to increase confidence of working with young people who may be subject to racial and other discrimination.

We will continue to promote training and events which explore the cultural approach to relationship-based practice.

YJS have a grow your own philosophy and are able to support unqualified practitioners through the youth justice degree programme.

There is also an expectation for all front-line staff to carry out the Unitas Child-First module. This is a new national Child-First qualification and the content features several resources contributed by YJS.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

Social prescribing

One innovation begun in 2022 that will be further developed in 2023-24 and beyond is '*Social Prescribing*'. This initiative has been cited by LGA as an example of innovative practice with vulnerable children. Essentially YJS prescribe psychosocial therapy for children in the form of an activity that a young person is interested in that aims to have a positive impact on their physical or mental health and in turn reduce their likelihood of offending. Cheshire YJS will be undertaking asset mapping of potential projects and partnerships with VCSE across Cheshire with a view to developing a variety of socially prescribed projects for children and young people. Examples in the pipeline include Rage Fitness and Edsential in Cheshire West, Lets Go Fishing in central Cheshire, Livewire in Warrington and R.O.A.R in Cheshire East.

Social prescribing is also an integral part of the relationship-based practice model. For example, one child was linked to a mature volunteer who initially assisted him to learn how to play chess. Out of this developed a well-valued inter-generational relationship, which has assisted the child move forward with various issues in his life. This approach, as well as person centric is also relatively resource neutral – using existing resources differently to assist children to develop the resilience required to face issues beyond their time-limited interactions with the formal youth justice system.

YJS Research group

The Inspection noted the strong ethos of research-led by practice and an organisational commitment to develop research at both academic and local strategic level. The staff-led research group which received input during the year from such well-respected academics as Professor Neal Hazel, Dr Tim Bateman, Dr Ali Wigzell and others, is an example of this commitment. The research group will seek to extend its remit and attendance to beyond Cheshire with the culture of 'remote' attendance enhancing this prospect, an unexpected benefit of the pandemic.

Links to academia

Links to Edge Hill University and Chester University are well established. These have led to shared research projects such as a study of Covid resilience in staff and children by Chester University and student placements, which are now resuming following the pandemic restrictions. The Head of Service also acts as a visiting lecturer at both universities to further the experience of students at both undergraduate and post graduate level. He also sits on the Master's Degree Criminology Advisory Board at Edge Hill University.

In addition, a book from the knowledge transfer conference in 2022, co-hosted by YJS and Chester and Edgehill Universities, has been accepted for publication in late 2024.

Conversational audits

A conversational audit was carried around safeguarding in 2022 and this was extremely successful at gaining the voice of the child and parents/carers and reflect their real-life experiences. Seventeen cases were audited and 70% were rated as good. Five out of 17 cases required improvement due to case planning and case formulation as opposed to concerns for children's safety or wellbeing not being identified, shared and addressed. The audit sample revealed a very high prevalence of self-harm and substance misuse, with history of drug overdose noted in several children – frequently as a feature of children choosing to self-medicate rather than take prescribed medication (e.g. for ADHD).

The approach and findings were shared with the safeguarding partnerships and this has inspired at least two of the local authority areas to seek to develop the same methodology within their own quality assurance and participation approaches. YJS will continue to carry out safeguarding audits with a conversational element within the methodology.

Prevention and Diversion

Prevention and diversion continues to maintain the low FTE trajectory in Cheshire and was a YJB pathfinder project sharing good practice to the sector and cited on the YJB good practice research hub. In addition, as part of the pathfinder project, we offered bespoke review, development assistance to several Youth Offending Services and partnerships, which were well received.

Trauma informed and relationship-based practice

Trauma-informed and relationship-based interventions form the heart of 'business as usual' for YJS staff but are also elements of a creative, Child First culture that was noted as strong not only in YJS but across the wider partnership.

IT innovation


YJS is a Centre for Excellence as designated by CACI, the software supplier of the YJS database Childview. In conjunction with a data analytics company, we are exploring the potential of the development of a predictive analytics tool to assist in the case management of active cases and early identification of potential entrants to the youth justice system in order that targeted preventive work can be utilised in a more efficient and focussed manner. This development will be ongoing during 2023-24 and we will actively seek engagement and partnership from other youth offending services and relevant partners.

Looking forward

YJS continues its journey of improvement but the following priority areas have been identified for 2023-24

- Ensure transitional arrangements are in place following change of Head of Service in summer 2023
- Ensure the findings of the health needs analysis are considered by relevant strategic partners to improve access to services for children in the youth justice system or at risk of becoming so
- Explore with an aspiration to move to a single host arrangement to reduce inefficiency, inequity of employment and clarify partnership responsibilities, whilst also improving local Place based delivery and reporting models
- Child-first, trauma-informed and relationship-based practice will continue to be embedded as routine
- Embed turnaround project with an expanding Prevention and Diversion Service to work with a broader cohort of children on the cusp of the youth justice system
- Continue to develop anti-exploitation strategies in partnership with the Police, local authorities and other partners such as health and education
- Disproportionality review to be completed in line with the Cheshire Criminal Justice Board subgroup methodology
- Explore potential of an early safeguarding diagnostic tool with CACI

Sign off, submission and approval

Chair of YJS Board - name	Helen Brackenbury Director of Children's Social Care Cheshire West and Chester Council
Signature	
Date	

Appendix C

Review of Performance for 2022-23

Introduction

The Youth Justice Service Performance report continues to be presented to the YJS Management Board on a quarterly basis and includes the national performance measures as outlined below.

The report is accompanied by Scorecards as a breakdown for each of the Performance Measures by Local Authority so that performance can be monitored on a local basis and YJ Management Board reps are encouraged to share this performance information within their own local forums and agencies.

YJS submits quarterly information to the Board in the following areas:

1. **Reduction in First Time Entrants:** young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time, either before the court or receiving a caution
2. **Reduction in Youth Re-Offending:** monitoring a select cohort of young people already in the youth justice system to determine if they re-offend, and if so, with what frequency and seriousness
3. **Reduction in the Use of Custody:** reducing the numbers of young people who receive a custodial sentence in a Young Offenders Institution, Secure Training Centre or Secure Children's Home

Although there is no specific target attached to each of the above, Youth Offending partnerships need to show that they are working towards achieving a continued reduction against each measure and this is closely monitored by the YJB/Ministry of Justice (MoJ). It is a condition of the YJB Grant that is issued to achieve positive reductions in the three performance areas. The data is publicly available and published on a quarterly basis by the MoJ.

First Time Entrants¹ and Prevention and Diversion

The official data for this indicator comes from the Police National Computer (PNC) and is published by the MoJ and is shown in rolling full years for the 12 months to March, July, September, and December of each year but always 6 months behind real time. The YJS Performance Report includes this data to show how we compare both regionally and nationally.

Locally for scorecards, we will continue to use local, real-time data in relation to the number of young people entering the Criminal Justice System, including anyone who receives a Youth Caution or above.

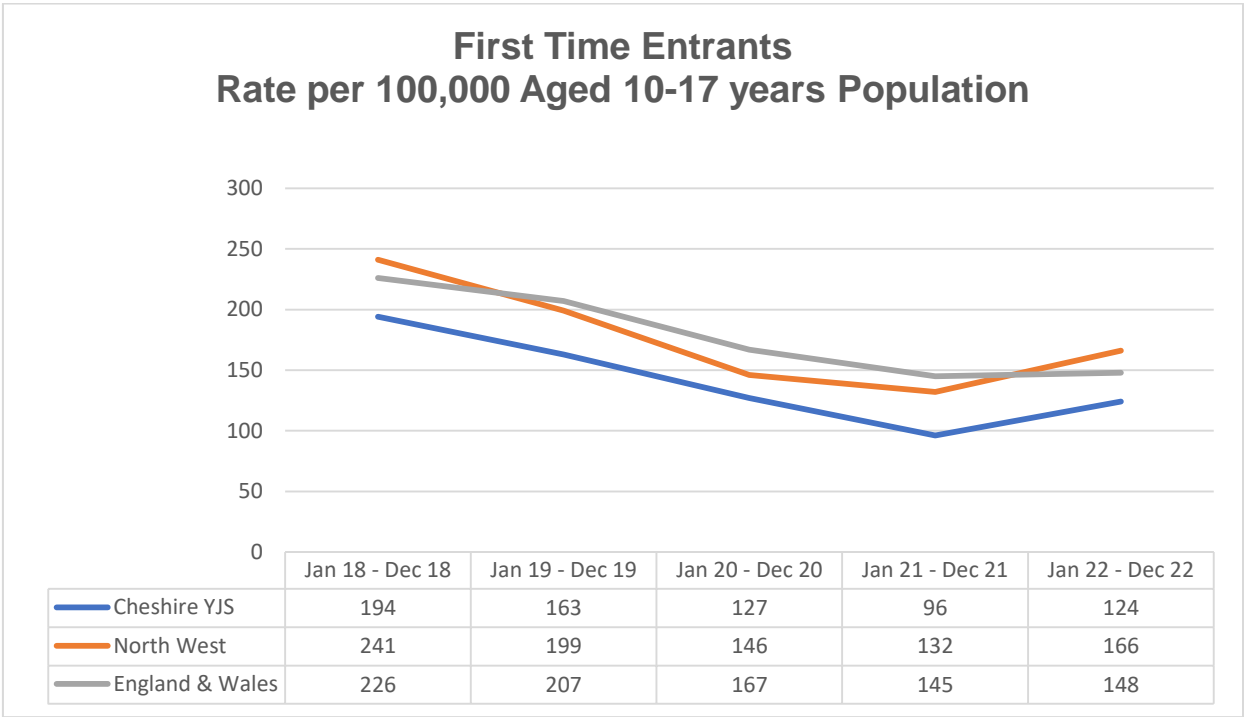
The Prevention and Diversion (pre-court) cohort will also continue to be tracked over a 12-month period and reported on quarterly, with both quantitative and qualitative analysis including case studies and service user feedback.

The number of FTE entering the youth justice system for the YJS area has decreased considerably by 32% over the past five years (Dec 2018 = 184 v Dec 2022 = 126 FTE).

¹ Ministry of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics (December 2022)

Across the board, during the same period there has also been a decrease in the “Rate of FTE per 100,000 aged 10-17 population” as shown in the table below. YJS has seen a greater overall percentage reduction (36.1%) compared to both regional (31.1%) and national (34.5%) figures.

As the current number and rate is extremely low, the opportunities to further reduce this rate are minimal.



Re-offendingⁱⁱ

The official data for this indicator, like FTEs, comes from the PNC and is 2 years behind real-time information. The YJS Performance Report uses this data to show how we compare both regionally and nationally for both the Binary Rate (% of young people reoffending from the overall cohort) and the Frequency Rate (a measure of the total number of offences committed by those reoffending divided by the number of young people in the cohort who reoffended).

The MoJ changed the methodology for measuring reoffending in October 2017 to align the measure with that used for adult reoffending. Under the new methodology, a 3-month rather than a 12-month cohort is used. The cohort is still tracked over 12 months.

Changing from 12-month to 3-month cohorts tends to mean a greater proportion of prolific offenders within the cohort and hence higher reoffending rates, though both measures show similar trends over time.

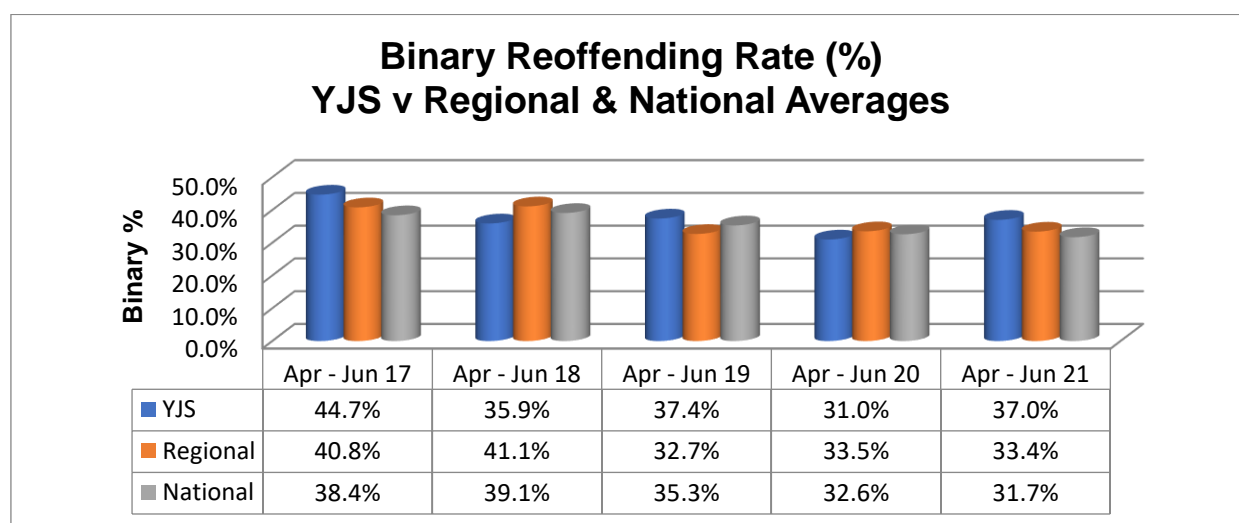
Locally it was agreed that the YJS would build its own cohort, consisting of all young people who received a pre-court or court disposal or were released from custody between 1 January 2022 and 31 March 2022. Reoffending activity will be monitored over a 12-month tracking period and this is the data shown in the local scorecards. It is proposed that in Cheshire we also continue to track offending by cared for children and report on their reoffending as a distinct cohort given we have collective corporate parenting responsibility for this group of children.

The latest MoJ published data shows the April–June 2021 cohort monitored for 12 months. The result of having a smaller cohort of young people is that it only takes a small increase in offending to significantly impact on the percentage change.

The reduction in the overall cohort numbers shows the positive impact and success of the YJS Prevention and Diversion Project, which enables young people to be offered a number of opportunities to receive alternative options to formal justice disposals. This has significantly reduced the number of FTEs into the criminal justice system.

The cohort of young people that do re-offend, remain the most challenging, complex and hard to engage young people within the YJS area and we continue to increase our efforts to target and address this.

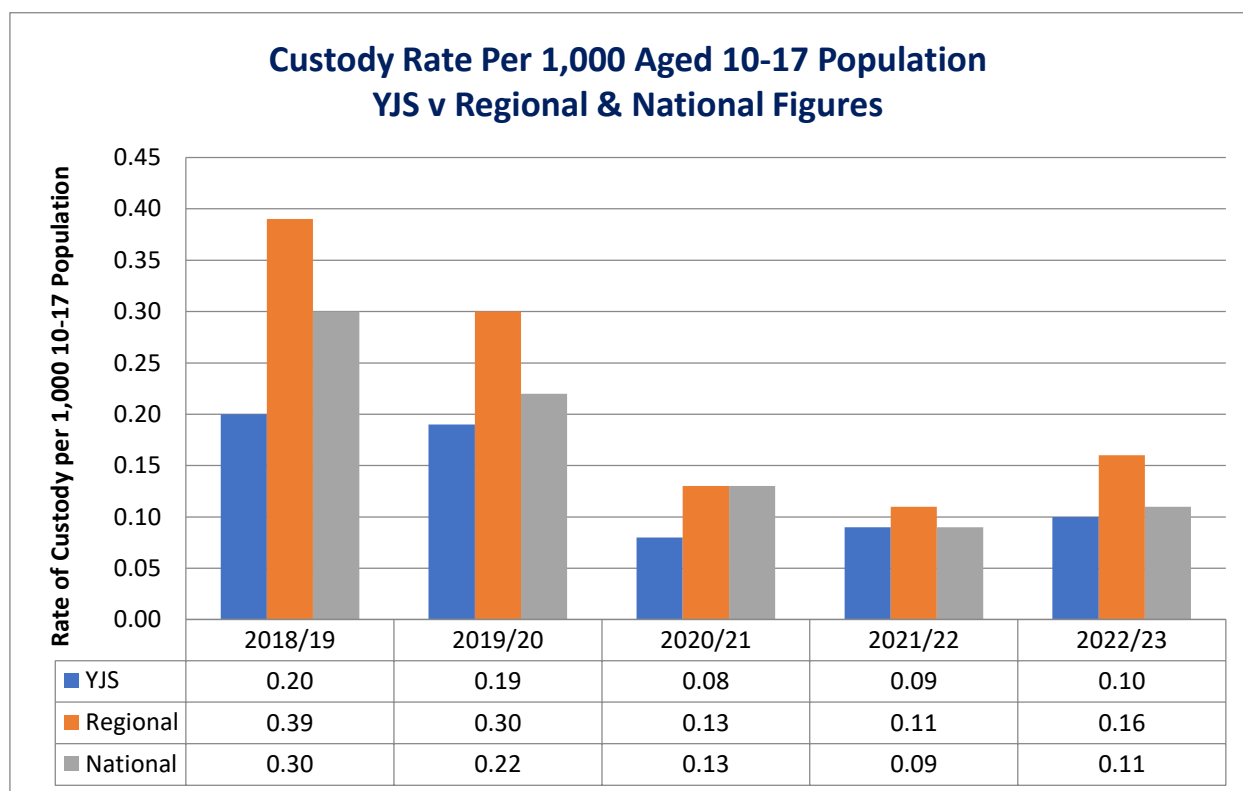
The YJS, Regional and National binary rates for the last five yearly cohorts are presented below.



Rate of Custodyⁱⁱ

The latest data issued from the YJB for the Use of Custody shows that nine YJS young people received custodial sentences in the year ending March 2022, which remains static from the year prior.

The following graph outlines the “custody rate per 1,000 of the 10-17 population” showing YJS performance exceeds both regional and national rates.



Remand Bed Nights

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 introduced a new remand framework for 10- to 17-year-olds in December 2012. The key changes made by the legislation were as follows:

- 10-17-year-olds are treated according to the same remand framework (including remands to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation) regardless of their age and gender;
- 12-17-year-olds can only be remanded to youth detention accommodation if their offending is serious enough to warrant a custodial sentence including murder, attempted murder, rape, firearms offences, drugs and aggravated robbery or there is a history of failing to attend court;
- Every child or young person remanded to youth detention accommodation are now treated as “looked after” by their designated local authority;
- Placement of children and young people remanded to youth detention accommodation is a function of the Secretary of State for Justice but this power is exercised concurrently and in practice by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB).

A remand to youth detention accommodation is currently to either a secure children's home (SCH), a secure training centre (STC) or a young offender institution (YOI).

Young people remanded to custody are more likely to display entrenched patterns of offending behaviour and/or are more likely to have committed serious offences. Many of these young people have suffered trauma, lived in households affected by domestic abuse, mental health, substance misuse, suffered loss, been excluded from school, experienced drug or alcohol-related dependencies and have mental health or special educational needs. Some of the young people will be influenced by others or have got mixed up with criminal group activities.

Establishment Type	No. Bed Nights 2021/22	No. Bed Nights 2022/23	Difference 2021/22 v 2022/23
SCH	12	45	-33
STC	0	0	0
YOI	507	361	146
Total	519	406	113

Education, Training and Employment (ETE)²

These figures represent the most up to date MoJ view of those young people in full time education or employment.

In the 2022/23 reporting period, 146 young people completed their Intervention with YJS, of which 81 (55%) were in full time ETE provision. This is a more than a 30% improvement on the comparative data for Regional and National, which both stands at 38%.

² Youth Justice Management Information System, Final YOT Data Summary (114) April 2022 – March 2023

Appendix D

Performance data by local authority April 2022-March 2023

Cheshire East

No. of First Time Entrants	34
Reoffending Binary Rate	38.5%
No. Sentenced to Custody	4
Caseload Pre-court	84
Caseload Statutory	48

Offence Type	Number of Offences
Arson	0
Breach Conditional Discharge	1
Breach of Statutory Order	2
Criminal Damage	14
Domestic Burglary	2
Drugs	9
Fraud & Forgery	2
Motoring	8
Non-Domestic Burglary	2
Other	6
Public Order	10
Racially Aggravated	0
Robbery	5
Sexual Offences	6
Theft & Handling	7
Vehicle Theft/Unauthorised Taking	5
Violence Against a Person	57
Total	136

Cheshire West and Chester

No. of First Time Entrants	55
Reoffending Binary Rate	15.4%
No. Sentenced to Custody	2
Caseload Pre-court	129
Caseload Statutory	44

Offence Type	No of Offences
Arson	2
Breach Conditional Discharge	0
Breach of Statutory Order	1
Criminal Damage	12
Domestic Burglary	0
Drugs	11
Fraud & Forgery	0
Motoring	13
Non-Domestic Burglary	3
Other	1
Public Order	9
Racially Aggravated	0
Robbery	1
Sexual Offences	21
Theft & Handling	8
Vehicle Theft/Unauthorised Taking	3
Violence Against a Person	58
Total	143

Halton

No. of First Time Entrants	39
Reoffending Binary Rate	40%
No. Sentenced to Custody	0
Caseload Pre-court	45
Caseload Statutory	48

Offence Type	Number of Offences
Arson	0
Breach Conditional Discharge	1
Breach of Statutory Order	1
Criminal Damage	30
Domestic Burglary	0
Drugs	16
Fraud & Forgery	1
Motoring	7
Non-Domestic Burglary	5
Other	3
Public Order	14
Racially Aggravated	0
Robbery	4
Sexual Offences	2
Theft & Handling	15
Vehicle Theft/Unauthorised Taking	1
Violence Against a Person	60
Total	160

Warrington

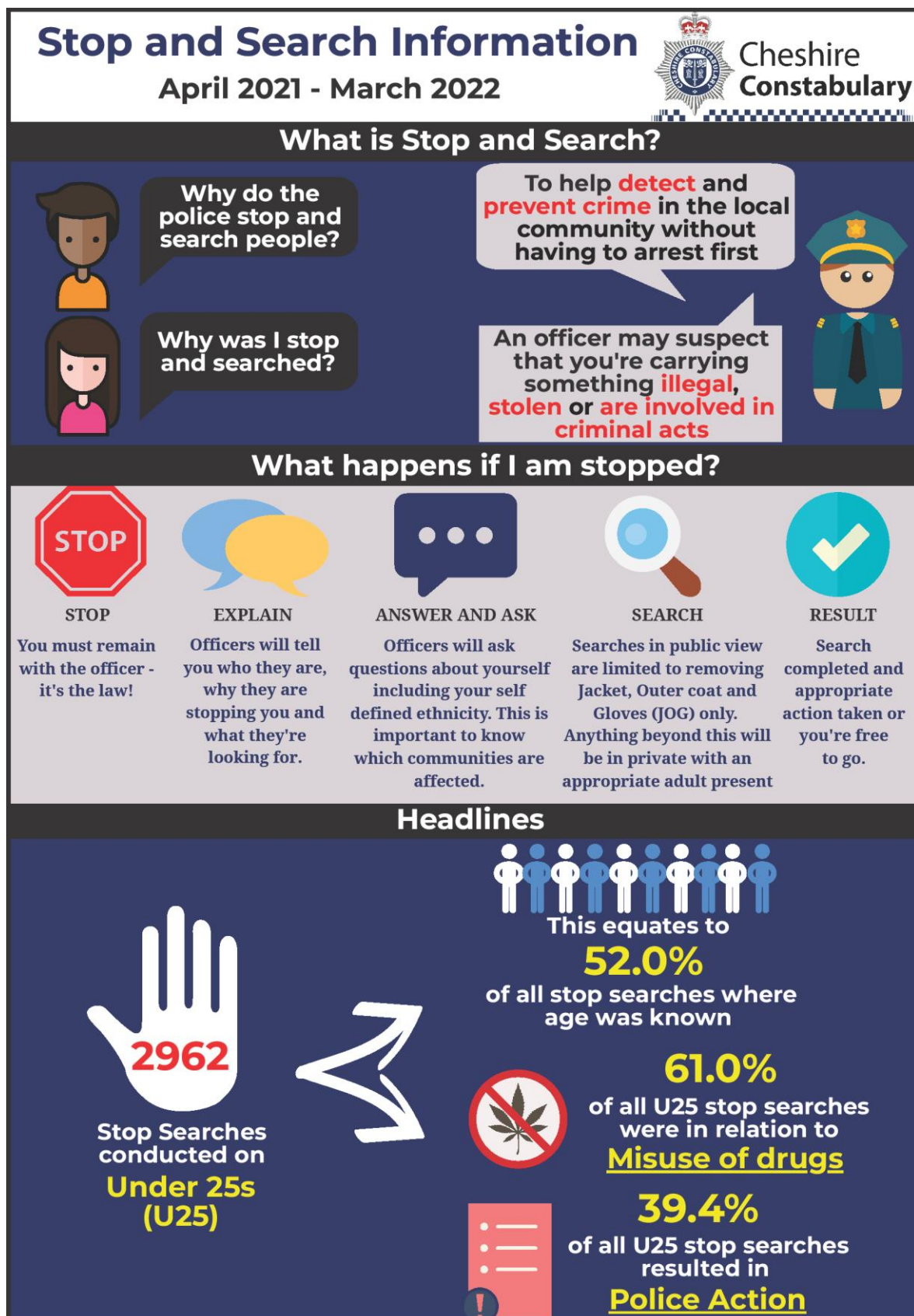
No. of First Time Entrants	31
Reoffending Binary Rate	62.5%
No. Sentenced to Custody	3
Caseload Pre-court	49
Caseload Statutory	30

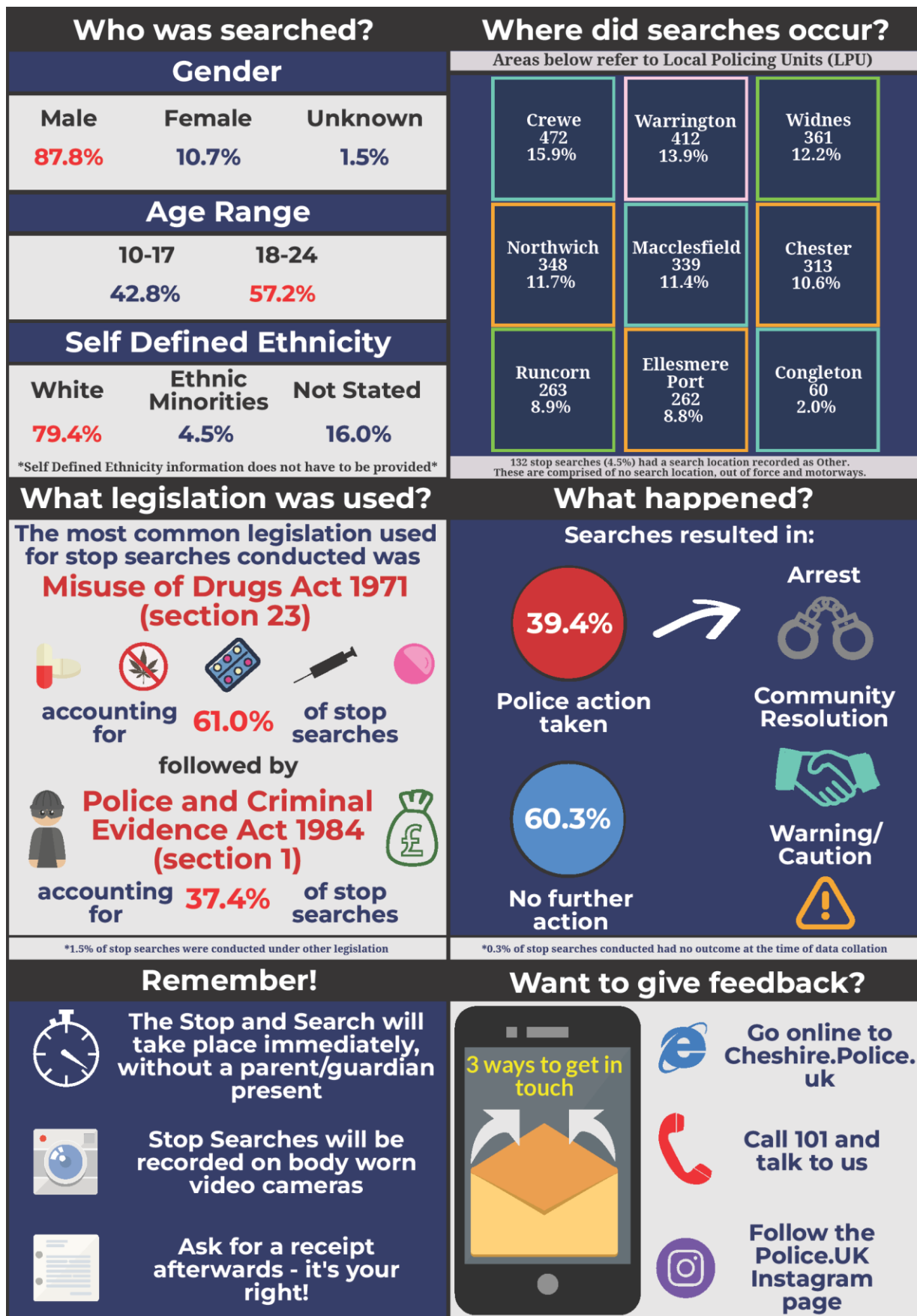
Offence Type	Number of Offences
Arson	1
Breach Conditional Discharge	0
Breach of Statutory Order	2
Criminal Damage	11
Domestic Burglary	0
Drugs	6
Fraud & Forgery	0
Motoring	13
Non-Domestic Burglary	1
Other	2
Public Order	9
Racially Aggravated	1
Robbery	5
Sexual Offences	8
Theft & Handling	3
Vehicle Theft/Unauthorised Taking	3
Violence Against a Person	57
Total	122

Appendix E

Overnight detentions, stop and search and released under investigation

Date source: Cheshire Police





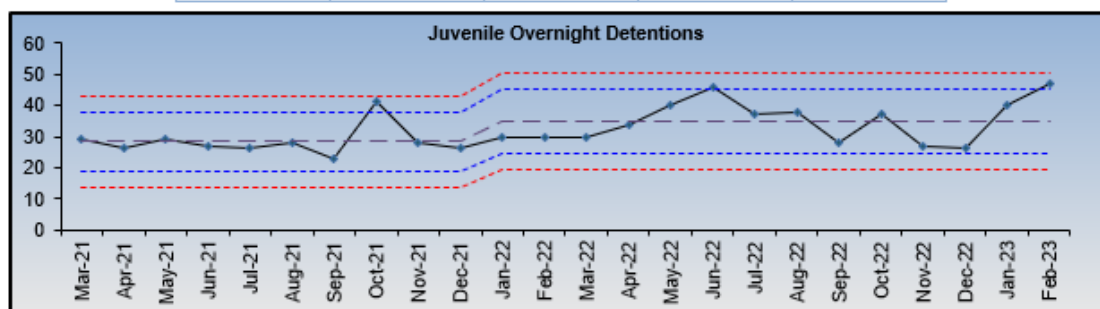
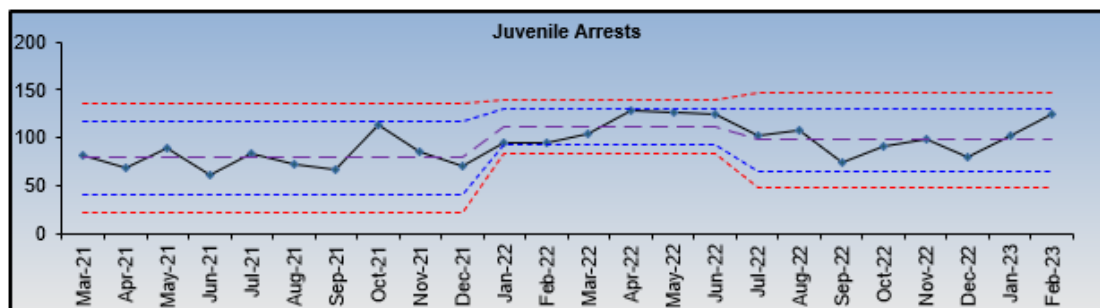
Number of young people released under investigation in May 2023

Investigation Team or Unit	Count of Custody number
AIT East	18
AIT North	15
AIT West	15
Crime operations	6
Custody / criminal justice	4
Local Policing Unit (LPU) Chester	21
LPU Congleton	5
LPU Crewe	15
LPU Ellesmere port	9
LPU Macclesfield	9
LPU Northwich	6
LPU Runcorn	12
LPU Warrington	11
LPU Widnes	8
Online Child Abuse Investigation Team	3
Other	22
RCU	3
Unknown	3
Grand Total	185

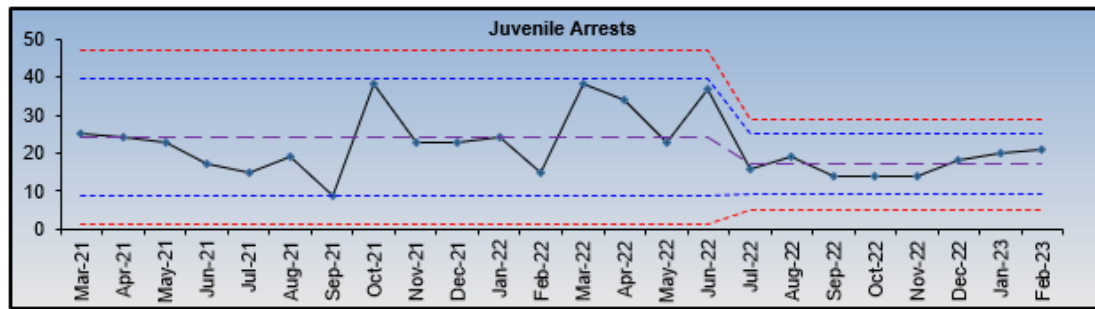
Arrests and Overnight detentions (March 2021-February 2023)

**Overnight detention = detained for any 4 hours between 00:00 and 08:00*

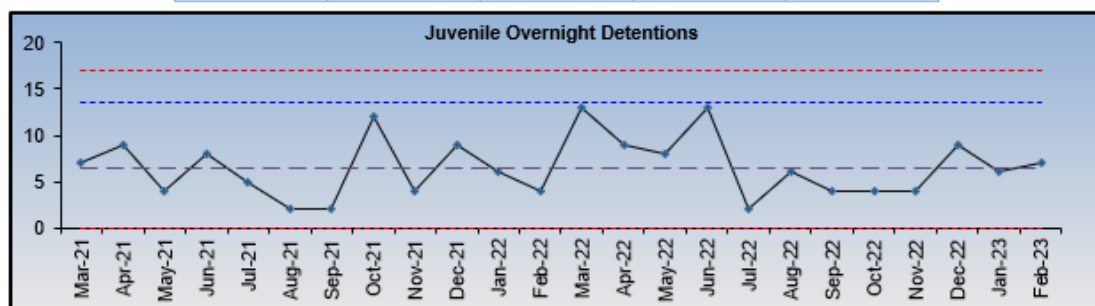
All Arrests



- Juvenile arrest volumes show an increase for Halton and Warrington at the end of February resulting in an increase at Force level.

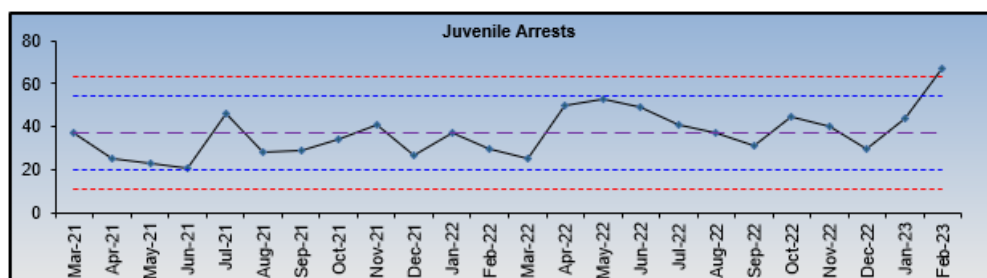


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
230	Feb-23	21	Jul-22	Decreasing

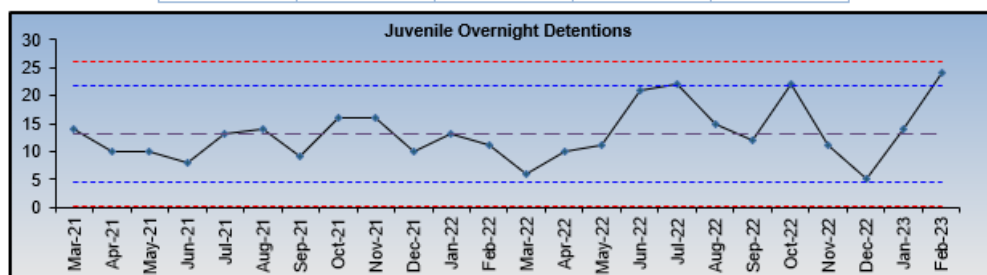


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
72	Feb-23	7	N/A	N/A

NORTHERN Custody Suite

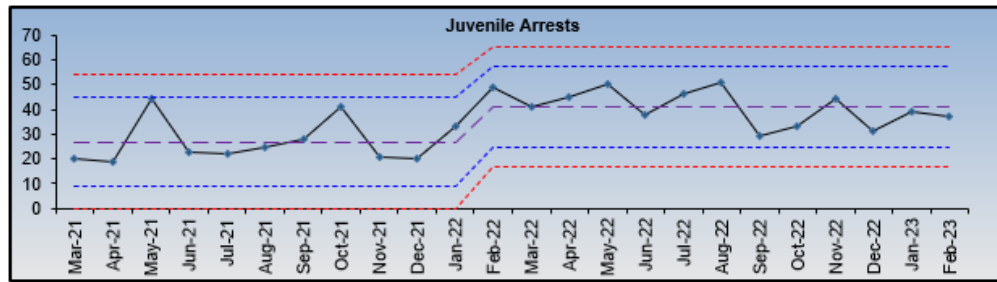


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
487	Feb-23	67	N/A	N/A

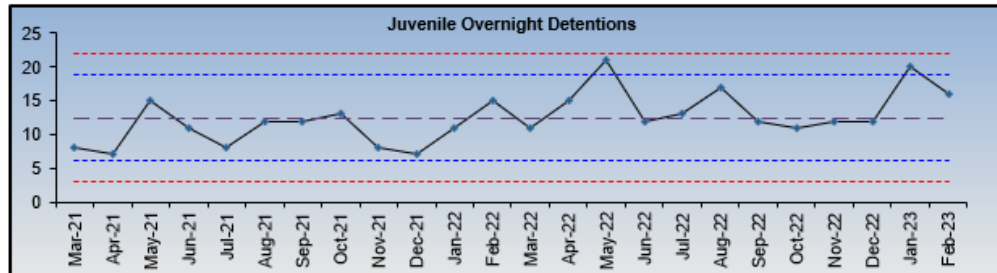


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
167	Feb-23	24	N/A	N/A

EASTERN Custody Suite

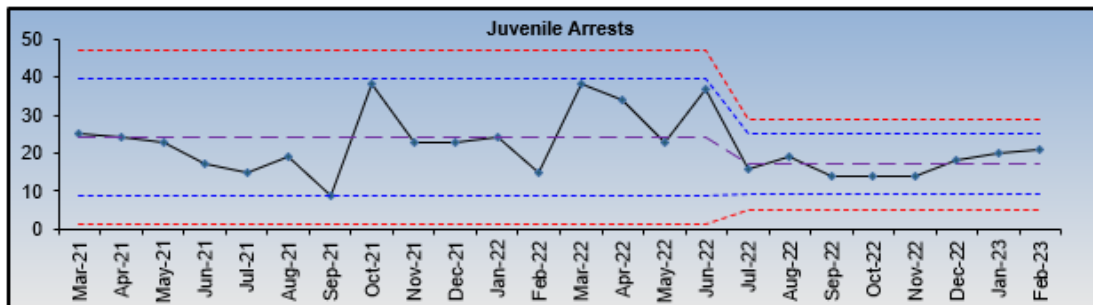


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
443	Feb-23	37	Feb-22	Increasing

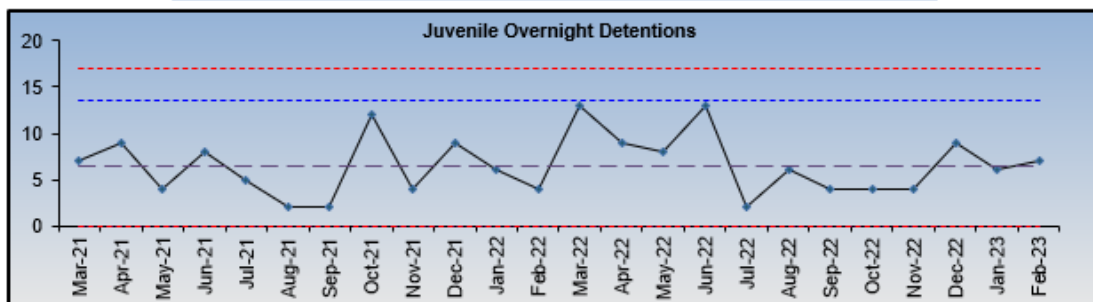


Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
161	Feb-23	16	N/A	N/A

WESTERN Custody Suite



Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
230	Feb-23	21	Jul-22	Decreasing



Total FYTD	Data complete to end of	Total last month	Date of last calibration	Direction at last calibration
72	Feb-23	7	N/A	N/A