



Youth Justice Plan Stockton-on-Tees

2026-2027



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Introduction, Vision, and Strategy



Welcome to the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan 2026–27. This plan reflects on the progress we have made to date, acknowledges the challenges that remain, and sets out a clear and ambitious direction for the year ahead. It outlines our shared priorities to deliver high-quality, evidence-led and child-centred youth justice services that improve outcomes, reduce reoffending and keep communities safe.

Developed and agreed by the Youth Justice Partnership, the plan demonstrates our collective commitment to continuous improvement, strong partnership working and delivering meaningful, lasting change for children, young people and families.

The Youth Justice Management Board remains steadfast in its commitment to children and to the principles of Child First practice. Across our partnership, we share a strong ambition for every child to be and achieve the best possible outcomes. Our collective focus remains steeped in promoting positive futures, reducing crime and harm, and building safer, stronger communities for everyone.

Thank you to the continued dedication and innovation of the Youth Justice Team (YJT) and the vital service they deliver for children, families and victims. Over the past 12 months, the Management Board has focused on strengthening its own effectiveness, while maintaining a clear understanding of day-to-day practice and delivery within the service. This has deepened our insight into the challenges and barriers faced by children involved in the youth justice system and reinforced the importance of responsive, proportionate and systemic intervention.

We acknowledge the national and local increase in serious youth violence and the significant impact this has on children, families and communities. In response, the

Board has reflected on how we work collectively across the system to strengthen prevention, early intervention and safeguarding approaches, ensuring responsibility is shared and action is coordinated.

This plan reflects our shared commitment to inclusion, continuous improvement and delivering intervention that is both proportionate and transformative. As a partnership, we work as one to understand the issues that impact on our children and to respond effectively, positively and at pace. The year ahead is no different. We remain focused, purposeful and united in our vision and intentions, with a clear commitment to delivering the best possible outcomes for children and young people in Stockton-on-Tees.

Majella McCarthy, Chair of Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Management Board & Director of Children's Services

Local Context

Stockton-on-Tees is a unitary authority with an estimated population of 196,587 (Census 2021) residents. Within the Borough of Stockton there are 6 town centres: Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby, Yarm, Ingleby Barwick. Stockton Town Centre is located on the north bank of the river Tees.

The population age profile below shows that Stockton-on-Tees has a higher percentage of 10-14 year olds compared to the North East and England. The Census (2021) shows that the total population for Children and Young People (CYP) aged 10-17 years is 20,103 residents this is due to increase by 6.3%. A total of 8% of the population are from a black or other minority ethnic groups.

There are areas of great affluence alongside some of the most deprived in England, with some significant differences around life and health outcomes. There are 28.1% of people are living in the 20% most deprived areas in England, this is significantly worse than England (20.2%) but better than the North East (31.0%).

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is responsible for the national collection, assurance, analysis and publication of youth justice data. This function underpins its statutory role in overseeing the youth justice system and advising the Secretary of State on performance, practice, and policy improvement. Data gathered by the YJB provides national evidence base on how children are entering, moving through, and exiting the youth justice system.

The latest report shows a youth justice system that is smaller in scale but more complex in demand compared to the earlier period. There has been continued success in preventing children from entering the system, indicating that early help and diversionary approaches remain effective. This marks a positive shift from the earlier report, which reflected a higher flow of children into youth justice and a broader spread of lower-level cases.

While overall activity has reduced, the nature of current demand has changed. The more recent report highlights that ongoing pressure is increasingly driven by a small cohort of children with persistent and entrenched needs, rather than by new entrants. This contrasts with the earlier period, where demand was more evenly distributed across a larger group of children.

Custody continues to be used sparingly and appropriately in both periods, demonstrating consistent practice and decision-making. The current report reinforces that this approach is being maintained even as case complexity increases.

In summary, the comparison shows clear progress in reducing system entry and maintaining proportionate responses. However, the challenge has shifted from managing volume to addressing intensity, persistence, and complexity, requiring more targeted and multi-agency approaches to achieve further improvement.

Governance, Leadership and Partnership Arrangements

Youth Justice Management Board

The Management Board remains committed to providing strategic leadership for youth justice delivery and plays a central role in coordinating the contribution of partners across the system. It maintains a strong focus on accountability, ensuring that statutory functions and the wider youth justice partnership are held to account for performance, quality, and outcomes at both operational and strategic levels. The Board is responsible for setting clear strategic direction, providing robust oversight, and ensuring that youth justice services remain child-first, outcome-focused, and aligned with national standards and Youth Justice Board guidance.

The Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services and includes representation from statutory partners such as the Local Authority, Police, Probation Service, and Integrated Health Board, alongside local partners including the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, (OPCC) the voluntary and the community sector. Attendance over the past year has been consistently strong. The Board meets quarterly and, in addition to monitoring youth justice outcomes, considers emerging trends, policy developments, legislation, research, and inspection findings. It also oversees compliance with Youth Justice Board grant conditions through regular review of performance information and quality assurance activity.

The Board initially identified that a development session would provide an opportunity to refresh and co-produce the Youth Justice Plan. In January 2026, the Board came together for a dedicated development session, providing a timely and valuable opportunity to take stock of its current position and to set a clear focus for development over the next twelve months. The session was recognised as an important moment to reflect on the Board's effectiveness, strengthen collaboration across the partnership, and sharpen its strategic direction in response to the changing and increasingly complex nature of youth justice demand. We revisited the Board's core responsibilities, its role in overseeing and responding to serious youth violence, and the importance of setting clear future priorities. The session also explored how stakeholder voice and co-production can be strengthened, ensuring that children, families, and partners play a meaningful role in shaping services. These conversations were underpinned by a shared commitment to using insight, data, and learning to inform future priority setting.

The depth of insight shared by partners and the constructive challenge offered throughout the session significantly strengthened the quality of discussion. Members demonstrated openness, reflection, and a willingness to challenge and support one another, reinforcing the collective nature of the Board's leadership role. Overall, the session demonstrated a clear collective focus and a strong, shared commitment to the continued development of the Youth Justice Management Board. The high level of engagement reflected a genuine investment from all partners in shaping a more effective, collaborative, and forward-looking approach to supporting children and young people.

Structure

The Youth Justice Team (YJT) is located within Children's Services and is positioned alongside a range of early help and family-focused services, including Family Hubs, the Family Support Team, Family Group Conferencing, Therapeutic Services, Youth Support, and the newly integrated front door, Family Help Point. This structure supports a coordinated, whole-family approach and enables early identification of need, timely intervention, and effective co-ordination between services.

The service model is overseen by three Service Leads, with dedicated leadership for Early Help, Youth Justice and Youth Support, and the Family Help Point. This arrangement strengthens alignment across services and ensures clear accountability while promoting integrated practice across prevention, early intervention, and statutory responses.

The YJT is centrally located within the same building as Early Help and statutory Social Care teams, which facilitates regular informal contact and daily professional discussion, particularly where there is active social care involvement. This co-location supports effective information sharing, joint decision-making, and a cohesive response to children and families with complex or overlapping needs.

Strategic leadership for Youth Justice is provided through the Head of Service role, which spans Family Help Point, Early Help, Youth Justice, and Youth Support. This role is line-managed by the Assistant Director for Early Help, Safeguarding and Children in Our Care, ensuring strong strategic oversight, clear links to safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities, and alignment with wider Children's Services priorities.

Resources and Value for Money

Resourcing for youth justice services is provided through a combination of Youth Justice Board grant funding and local partnership contributions. Statutory staffing requirements under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 continue to be met, with the Youth Justice Board grant fully allocated to staffing within the Youth Justice Team and seconded staff funded by their employing agencies.

The service operates with strong management, supervision, and performance oversight arrangements, supported by a management database used to monitor activity and outcomes. The YJT comprises substantive staff and community volunteers and is committed to delivering value for money, with a clear focus on prevention, 'invest to save' approaches, and partnership delivery to avoid duplication and maximise collective resources in supporting positive outcomes for children and young people.

Partnership Arrangements

Youth justice services in Stockton-on-Tees have developed a range of strategic and operational linkages; outlined below:



The range of partners in the team has expanded this year, including the addition of Change Grow Live (Substance Misuse Service). Stronger and revised links have also been established with the Adolescence Team and the Harm Outside the Home Team to jointly tackle Serious Youth Violence. Over the next twelve months, we will further strengthen links with Youth Services to pool resources and enhance early intervention activity.

Most statutory Youth Justice interventions are delivered either in-house or in partnership with key stakeholders. Commissioned arrangements for Speech, Language and Communication services with Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust will continue.

Joint working arrangements with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) funded Custody Navigators remain in place to support children within the police station. These services are critical in ensuring that children are appropriately supported at the earliest point of contact and that professionals are present during key 'reachable moments' to influence decision-making and outcomes.

There is a strong and well-established working relationship between the YJT and Children's Social Care for children identified as children in need, children in our care, and care experienced. Clear working protocols are in place to support this partnership. Reducing the criminalisation and offending of children in our care is a shared corporate priority and is embedded within local decision-making through effective collaboration with Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the Courts.

Multi-agency pathways have been developed to support the effective implementation of Prevent and Modern Slavery legislation. The YJT is also an integral partner within Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). Where a multi-agency response is required to prevent serious harm, information-sharing agreements ensure that relevant information is available to support holistic assessment and effective planning for children. All information is managed sensitively and in line with data protection principles.

As part of its recent White Paper, **Cutting Youth Crime. Changing Young Lives:** The youth justice system reform and delivery plan, the Ministry of Justice has announced new investment in community alternatives to youth custody. The goal of this new funding is to strengthen opportunities for children and young people to live safely in the community, with the support needed, while awaiting trial and/or sentence. Working together across Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool, in partnership with justice systems change organisation, SHiFT, we have secured funding as part of this programme to benefit children and young people at greatest risk of remand to custody across Tees.

Update on the previous year

Help children stay out of the criminal justice system.

During 2024/25, we established bespoke Child First Out of Court Disposal (OOCDD) panels, which have played a significant role in driving a sustained reduction in First Time Entrants (FTEs).

The panel brings together volunteers, police representatives, the Youth Justice Team Manager, a Youth Justice Officer, victim representation and administrative support to ensure accurate documentation. The Youth Justice Officer coordinates attendance and invites other professionals involved in the case, such as social workers or personal advisors, where appropriate. This multi-agency model supports informed, shared decision-making, ensuring that outcomes are proportionate, child-centred, and take full account of risk, need, and context.

The strength of this joint decision-making approach has enhanced the consistency and effectiveness of OOCDDs, increasing confidence across partners and ensuring appropriate diversionary outcomes. As a result, more children are being diverted away from the Criminal Justice System at the earliest opportunity.

This has contributed to a continued decline in the FTE rate in Stockton, representing an excellent level of performance and the lowest number of First Time Entrants recorded in over three years. While performance was already strong 18 months ago, with a rate of 125 (26 children), ongoing system improvements and consistent application of diversionary practice have driven further reductions beyond this baseline.

Two key areas of work have had a particularly positive impact on reducing FTE rates. Firstly, the OOCDD panel process has proven highly effective, with 98 children discussed at panel over the past twelve months and only four going on to become First Time Entrants. The vast majority were successfully diverted away from formal criminal justice processes. Secondly, the FTE audit completed in September 2025 identified the need for Youth Justice Officers to take a more proactive role in court proceedings to maximise diversion opportunities. This has led to clear improvements in practice, including the successful diversion of children charged with driving-related offences away from court where appropriate.

The OPCC has agreed to continue funding Triage disposals and interventions for 2025/26, recognising their critical role in early diversion. Over the last twelve months, a total of 99 OOCDDs were delivered, with Triage remaining the most widely used disposal (53 interventions), followed by Outcome 22 (41 interventions). These figures highlight the importance of proportionate and non-statutory responses in preventing unnecessary criminalisation.

The Turnaround programme has also made a strong contribution to positive outcomes. Against a Ministry of Justice target of 19, we delivered 33 successful interventions by March 2026. Turnaround

support has included family work, access to positive activities, and targeted help with Education, Training and Employment (ETE), supporting children to address underlying needs and reduce the likelihood of further offending.

Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement.

Our custody rate has fallen, reducing from 0.23 to 0.18, equating to a decrease from five to four children receiving custodial sentences. Despite this improvement, Stockton's custody rate remains higher than national and local comparators, including the regional average (0.11), England and Wales (0.09) and the Family comparator (0.05). This continues to present a challenge for the partnership, particularly given the seriousness of offences coming before the courts.

Between April and June 2025, three children were sentenced to long custodial terms ranging from four to ten years for serious violent offences. These cases will not be included in the next Youth Justice Board performance dataset and, as a result, the custody rate will reduce further. This reduction partly reflects a reporting time lag, as recent serious custodial cases fall outside the current Youth Justice Board dataset and are not yet captured in the published figures.

Over the past year, we have worked in partnership with HOTH and Cleveland Police to enhance intelligence-sharing, deliver targeted disruption activity in relation to serious youth violence and exploitation, and coordinate multi-agency interventions for children identified as being at risk of involvement in organised crime.

However, the overall custody rate remains impacted by the nature of offending in a small cohort of cases, particularly where children are charged with serious violence, exploitation-related offences and activity linked to Organised Crime Groups operating across the borough. This mirrors the position outlined in last year's report, where serious youth violence was identified as the primary driver behind custodial outcomes.

The Youth Justice Team continues to work proactively to minimise the use of custody wherever possible.

To reduce reoffending

We ensure that all children have a dedicated worker, recognising the importance of consistency and trusted relationships. Recent feedback from children and parents in February 2026, highlights that workers are experienced as supportive, approachable, proactive and reliable, with many children reporting that they felt listened to, understood and safe throughout their intervention. Where children are receiving a Turnaround intervention, practice continues to ensure continuity of worker should they be charged with any offence, which has been identified by families as key to building trust and engagement.

Our interventions remain under continuous review and development, informed directly by the views and experiences of children and parents. Children have spoken positively about the range of activities and interventions they have accessed, including reparation, cookery sessions, outdoor activities and one-to-one work, all of which have supported improvements in confidence, emotional regulation and understanding of behaviour. We have built a flexible intervention offer that responds to different ages, learning styles and individual needs, with a particular focus on positive experiences, relational

work and practical skill-building. Informed by feedback, we are further strengthening how we involve parents and carers, ensuring clear communication, regular updates and opportunities for joint sessions where appropriate.

Across Early Help, Youth Justice, Youth Support and Children's Social Care, staff continue to work closely together to deliver coordinated and effective interventions. This collaborative approach has been instrumental in securing positive outcomes across education, health and wellbeing, with families highlighting the impact of Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) assessments, CAMHS involvement, neurodiversity pathways and therapeutic support. We have strengthened our transition arrangements, including joint development work with Probation colleagues, to ensure that young adults experience a seamless and well-supported transition between services. Additionally working with the newly created transitions team when appropriate, to support the early identification of any adult social care needs.

We have maintained a strong focus on Education, Training and Employment (ETE) through our dedicated ETE worker, providing intensive support to help children re-engage with learning, access alternative provision and develop realistic aspirations for the future. Feedback from parents reflects noticeable improvements in children's confidence, behaviour and engagement with education. Alongside this, we offer a comprehensive health response, with SALT and CAMHS practitioners embedded within the team and monthly health hub meetings enabling coordinated planning. Specialist clinicians from Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust continue to support staff through regular consultations for children with complex needs, strengthening our trauma-informed approach and ensuring children receive timely and appropriate support.

Strengthen our responses to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation

Over recent years, the Youth Justice Management Board has played a central role in advancing and shaping Stockton-on-Tees' multi-agency response to Serious Youth Violence (SYV). As part of this work, nine partner agencies completed the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) Self-Assessment, which captured the breadth of activity being delivered across the partnership while also highlighting gaps in provision. In response, partners then worked closely with Public Health to complete a Rapid Needs Assessment, providing a robust understanding of local need and identifying effective practice to inform future planning. This process laid the foundations for a more coordinated and evidence-led approach to SYV.

Building on this work, the partnership has now developed a Serious Youth Violence Strategy, which will be presented to the Management Board for approval in Summer 2026. The strategy sets out how agencies will work collectively to prevent and reduce serious youth violence through a public health, whole-system approach. It is informed by local evidence and shaped by the voices of children, young people, families and communities. The strategy outlines a shared vision, principles and priorities, the local SYV needs profile, clear actions and how progress and impact will be measured over time.

The strategy builds on existing work led by Cleveland Police, Community Safety Teams and the Harm Outside the Home Team, including targeted action to disrupt adults and organised crime groups who exploit children. This includes joint problem-solving approaches involving Police, Community Safety, Youth Justice, Education and the voluntary sector, with a clear focus on hotspot locations, areas of

concern and safeguarding-led responses to protect children at risk of harm and exploitation.

This is a live strategy, developed in line with the Serious Violence Duty, and will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains responsive to emerging risks, evidence and learning. Through regular review and strong governance arrangements, the partnership will ensure alignment with the Cleveland Violence Reduction Unit's overarching strategy and wider Stockton-on-Tees priorities, while maintaining a clear long-term focus on achieving sustained reductions in serious youth violence and improved outcomes for children and young people.

To reduce the number of School Exclusions

Education Service have undertaken in-depth discussions with key stakeholders regarding suspension and exclusion to inform a robust, evidence-led action plan. This has supported the development of a strengthened multi-service response, improving collaboration, accountability, and outcomes for children at risk of exclusion. As part of this work, we have completed the Inclusive Education Framework Analysis to ensure a consistent, inclusive approach across the borough, alongside producing a support booklet for schools to clearly identify available services and referral pathways. A shared ABC model focused on behaviour and attendance also supports our schools to access support at an earlier time through our school support service.

Alongside this, Education have focused on building capacity and expertise within schools. They have further developed our governor training package on exclusions, which has seen significantly increased uptake compared to previous years and has received 100% positive feedback. They have also delivered free trauma-informed practice training throughout the academic year and developed a supporting vision statement to embed this approach. Many schools who have accessed these CPD opportunities already show a reduction in suspensions and exclusions. In addition, the Key Adult programme is being implemented across three secondary schools, strengthening relational practice and targeted support for vulnerable pupils.

The service have also expanded alternative provision and early intervention offer. Tiered Alternative Provision (AP) has been further developed across the borough, with increased providers on the framework and strong engagement from schools attending half-termly AP network meetings. Targeted support has been enhanced through the Commando Joe programme, providing 11 secondary schools with one day of support per week over six months, alongside one school participating in the longer-term "Leading the Way" project. Collectively, this work demonstrates a cohesive multi-agency effort to reduce exclusions and improve outcomes for children and young people.

To refresh our practice in our victim work and restorative practice.

Work has continued on delivering the victim support action plan, with a strong focus on improving

how the service supports victims of crime and ensuring compliance with the new HMIP inspection victim standards. An audit tool was developed and used to review ten cases, identifying areas for improvement, many of which had already been implemented or were in progress prior to the audit, providing assurance of ongoing development.

Victim contact data indicates that while initial engagement is moderate, with 55% of victims viewing outreach, there is a significant drop-off in deeper engagement. Only 10% of victims go on to accept support, despite a higher proportion (33%) opting to receive updates, suggesting a preference for low-level, information-based engagement rather than direct intervention. This highlights a need within Youth Justice services to strengthen how support is introduced and delivered, ensuring approaches are trauma-informed, clearly communicated, and responsive to readiness. Increasing follow-up opportunities, building trust over time, and utilising updates as a gateway to more meaningful engagement will be key to improving uptake. Additionally, the low rate of automatic referrals to specialist support services suggests further scope to enhance pathways and ensure vulnerable young people and families are proactively identified and supported at the earliest opportunity.

To strengthen victim voice and feedback, a QR code has been introduced to enable victims to share their experiences directly with the service. Processes with the police have been improved to ensure clearer and more consistent approaches to obtaining victim consent for court cases, and the OOCd referral form has been enhanced to better capture victim protected characteristics.

In addition, the Youth Justice Coordinator has renewed their Advanced Practitioner accreditation with the Restorative Justice Council, supporting continued high-quality leadership and expertise in restorative and victim-focused practice

To Develop a Participation Model of Practice

Stockton Youth Justice are working with children to develop a participation model of practice that ensures that the children we work with are fully involved in shaping the future of the service. We understand that a participation model in youth justice should be rights-based, trauma-informed, inclusive and meaningful, ensuring children and young people are active partners rather than passive recipients of services.

It is important that children influence their own casework, service delivery, strategic decisions and accountability processes, while being honest about statutory boundaries and safeguarding responsibilities. Participation is embedded into everyday practice through co-produced plans, choice in how interventions are delivered, and regular opportunities for reflection. We want to expand this further by having structured mechanisms such as a child user group, children with lived-experience giving feedback and consultation on future developments and currently exploring how we share information with children in a meaningful way.

Performance over the last year.

First Time Entrants (FTE's)

The rate of FTE's has decreased in the last year (data taken from January – December 25). The latest published YJB data currently has our rate at 96 and this is a significant decrease of the same period

the previous year from 154. The actual numbers of children who have become FTE's is 21 compared to 33 previously. In comparison to the Region 180, Cleveland PCC area 156, Family 139 and England and Wales 150. This is a promising picture and showing clear evidence that early intervention initiatives are impacting.

Reoffending Rate

The reoffending rate stands at 58.8% for the last YJB reporting period January 2024- March 2024. This remains higher than other comparatives Region 44.3%, Cleveland PCC 55.8% and England and Wales 33.4%.

Reoffences/Reoffender

The latest reoffences/reoffender rate is 3.60 which is slight increase on the previous rate 3.3. However the current rate is lower than other comparisons of the Region 5.42, Cleveland PCC area 5.14, Family 4.27 and England and Wales 4.64.

Use of Custody

The latest use of custody rate is 0.18, this is a decrease on the previous year of 0.28. Our rate is higher than all other measures. The rate for the region is 0.11, family 0.05 and England and Wales 0.9. The custody rate comes from six custodial sentences being given in the past year. All sentences were for violent offences.

Risks and Issues

The Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Partnership continues to operate within an increasingly complex and evolving landscape. While strong partnership working and service integration have enabled the YJT to maintain high standards of delivery, ongoing financial pressures, policy changes and rising expectations present a number of risks that require careful management.

Children involved in the youth justice system in Stockton remain among the most vulnerable in the borough, particularly those entering custody who often present with multiple and overlapping needs, including exploitation, trauma, health and education needs. Although the overall cohort has reduced, reoffending by a small number of children, particularly those involved in serious or violent offences, continues to present challenges locally and nationally. Serious Youth Violence and school exclusions also remain significant contextual risks, increasing the likelihood of children becoming criminalised. Our 2026/27 plan and newly developed Serious Youth Violence Strategy set out how the partnership intends to respond to these issues through a preventative, child-first and public health approach.

Funding remains a significant and ongoing risk. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) core grant continues to be essential in enabling the delivery of a comprehensive statutory service. In addition, while funding from the Ministry of Justice Turnaround Programme and OPCC Triage funding has been critical in supporting early intervention, this funding has reduced, placing additional pressure on the service to prioritise resources against rising demand. The partnership may be required to redesign aspects of service delivery, potentially reducing our ability to intervene early and effectively with children at risk.

Further pressure arises from national policy changes, including the introduction of mandatory interventions for children found in possession of a knife. While this aligns with a preventative public safety agenda, it may lead to an increase in demand for Youth Justice interventions and resources,

particularly within a context of constrained funding. There is an associated risk that without adequate capacity and flexibility, mandatory responses may inadvertently undermine the Child First principle of proportionate and individualised intervention.

The ongoing Youth Justice Modernisation Programme also presents both opportunity and risk. Modernisation brings the potential for improved data quality, consistency, digital capability and outcome measurement across the system. However, changes to systems, expectations and reporting requirements place additional demands on staff capacity and require sustained investment in training, implementation and change management to avoid unintended disruption to practice or performance. Operational risks linked to systems and infrastructure remain under review. Following the transition to the Pathways case management system, the team has worked hard to minimise disruption; however, data reporting has remained challenging. The planned NEC system upgrade is expected to improve KPI and performance reporting, but until this is fully embedded, there remains an ongoing risk to timely and accurate data submission.

Plans for the forthcoming year

Child First

The Child Focus¹ approach has 4 tenets, which are summarised as:

As children

Prioritise the best interests of children and recognising their particular needs, capacities, rights and potential. All work is child-focused, developmentally informed, acknowledges structural barriers and meets responsibilities towards children.



Building pro-social identity

Promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.

Collaborating with children

Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.

Diverting from stigma

Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

A Child First approach remains embedded across all Youth Justice practice in Stockton-on-Tees. Staff consistently refer to our cohort as *children*, which both reflects their developmental stage and supports more effective access to appropriate services. Children are spoken to in a strength-based and hopeful way, focusing on their abilities, resilience and capacity for positive change. This approach is reflected in feedback gathered from children and parents, who consistently describe workers as supportive, understanding and respectful, with many children reporting that they felt listened to, safe and understood throughout their involvement with the service.

Diversion continues to be actively promoted across the Youth Justice Team and wider partnership, contributing to a significant proportion of children being dealt with through OOCs. This reflects our ongoing commitment to avoiding unnecessary criminalisation and responding proportionately to behaviour. The continued use of the PDAT assessment framework has strengthened planning and the quality of interventions, ensuring language is child-focused and developmental. Practitioners consistently talk about behaviours rather than offences, and safety rather than risk, supporting children to develop a positive, pro-social identity. This approach is reinforced by feedback from families, who report meaningful improvements in behaviour, wellbeing and understanding.

Strong partnership working remains central to delivering personalised, child-focused

interventions. Support workers continue to engage children in creative and meaningful ways, including access to music studios, bike projects, photography and positive leisure activities. A multi-disciplinary offer is embedded within the team, including Speech, Language and Communication support, health and CAMHS provision, and Education, Training and Employment (ETE) workers. Feedback from parents demonstrates the positive impact of this joined-up approach, particularly where assessments, mental health support and neurodiversity pathways have helped children better understand themselves and improve engagement with education and daily routines.

We continue to actively promote opportunities for children and families to share their views, including the use of QR codes to make feedback accessible. As a result, children have provided feedback on programmes such as Turnaround and have directly contributed to the design and development of resources within our children's space at the No Limits Hub. The February 2026 feedback report highlights high levels of satisfaction across both children and parents, with strong relationships, clear communication and trust consistently identified as key strengths. One area of learning raised around parental inclusion has been positively received and is informing ongoing improvements in practice.

Overall, we remain firmly committed to ensuring that children and families have a meaningful voice, both in shaping individual intervention plans and in influencing broader service development. Our ambition is to deliver motivational, respectful and relationship-based support, grounded in children's strengths and lived experiences, to promote long-term desistance and improved outcomes for children, families and communities.

Resources and services

Regular financial monitoring reports continue to be presented to the Youth Justice Management Board, enabling members to review spend, consider emerging pressures and agree any required actions. Income and projected expenditure are based on the current Youth Justice Team structure, confirmed funding streams and approved national and local service initiatives. As in previous years, staffing costs account for the majority of expenditure, reflecting the service's commitment to maintaining a skilled, specialist workforce capable of meeting the complex needs of children.

All funding carried forward within reserves remains earmarked for planned Youth Justice activity, and any future use of reserves is subject to approval by the Management Board. There is currently no financial contribution required from Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Service towards remand costs; however, this position continues to be monitored and may change should remand numbers increase.

The Youth Justice Team continues to utilise 100% of its available funding, including YJB grant, partner contributions and in-kind support, to deliver statutory and non-statutory services. These resources support improved outcomes for children and families and underpin strong performance. During 2026/27, performance improvement will continue to be driven through a place-based, problem-solving approach, with a particular focus on our most vulnerable and

complex children, enhancing support for First Time Entrants and strengthening engagement with Stockton's diverse communities.

The financial position, detailed in the table on page 26, reflects a slight uplift to the Youth Justice Board grant following the national 2026 settlement. Importantly, confirmation of three-year YJB funding provides greater financial stability and enables more effective forward planning and workforce sustainability.

Funding for the Ministry of Justice Turnaround Programme will continue to be reported separately during the 2026/27 financial year, this also comes with the additional security of three years funding. The service also continues to benefit from payment in kind contributions from Police, Probation and Health partners, which remain integral to delivering a comprehensive multi-disciplinary offer. While the OPCC has confirmed continued funding for the Triage programme for 2026/27, this funding has been reduced by half, increasing the importance of close monitoring and prioritisation to ensure early intervention capacity can be maintained.

Workforce Development

During 2025–26, the team has continued to place a strong emphasis on workforce development and maintaining high standards of practice through a structured programme of learning and reflection. Monthly Effective Practice sessions have been consistently delivered, providing staff with regular opportunities to refresh and deepen their knowledge across a range of key Youth Justice areas, including Early and Late Release arrangements, Home Detention Curfew (HDC), MAPPA processes, victim awareness, and risk, safety and wellbeing. These sessions support consistent practice, reinforce statutory responsibilities and promote reflective learning across the team.

In March 2026, staff attended a specialist conference on stalking delivered in partnership with Forensic CAMHS, recognising stalking as a newly emerging and increasingly complex area of work within Youth Justice and ensuring the team remains informed of developing research, risk factors and intervention approaches.

Several team members have also completed Systemic Practice training, undertaking five-day and fifteen-day courses to strengthen relational, whole-family and formulation-based approaches to assessment and intervention.

In addition, two officers have completed AIM3 assessment and intervention training, and all officers are now fully trained in AIM3, ensuring a consistent, confident and evidence-based response to children presenting with harmful sexual behaviours.

To support workforce sustainability and quality, all new staff complete a comprehensive two-week induction programme, which includes Asset Plus training, ensuring they are well equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools required to deliver safe, effective and child-centred practice from the outset.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

We continue to actively explore and implement evidence-based interventions and resources to ensure our practice is responsive to the individual needs of children. In doing so, we consistently take account of learning needs, special educational needs (SEN), speech, language and communication needs, and neurodiversity, adapting approaches to promote accessibility, engagement and positive outcomes.

To better support children at key points of vulnerability, we have developed custody passports, which provide clear, child-centred information about individual needs, risks and protective factors to support children effectively while in police and youth custody.

The team also continues to use virtual reality (VR) headsets as an intervention for children involved in knife crime, supporting awareness of consequences, victim impact and decision-making in an engaging and developmentally appropriate way.

During 2025–26, we contributed to wider Children's Services resource groups, working collaboratively to develop and strengthen resources and approaches across three priority areas: knife crime, online safety and peer influence. This collaborative work supports consistency across services and ensures that interventions are informed by current evidence, emerging risks and the lived

experiences of children.

Evaluation

Over the past twelve months there has been a significant programme of evaluation and quality assurance activity, which has directly informed the service development plan. The Youth Justice Service remains committed to continuous improvement, with a strong focus on ensuring that practice consistently delivers the best possible outcomes for children and their families. Evaluation enables us to reflect, review and adapt our approaches so that we respond more effectively to the needs of children.

During the year, a range of audits and evaluations were completed. Child-focused audits highlighted strong and consistent Child First practice across assessment, planning and delivery. Assessments were thorough and strengths-based, planning was proportionate and needs-led, and interventions were personalised, flexible and effective. Children consistently felt listened to and supported, with strong multi-agency working contributing to positive outcomes. Areas for learning focused primarily on strengthening case recording and summaries, rather than the quality of practice itself.

The First Time Entrant audit found that most children entered the system due to the serious nature of their offences, in line with national guidance requiring direct court charges, meaning diversion was not always appropriate. Overall court practice was strong, with children and families well supported and clear efforts made to explore diversion wherever possible. However, a small number of missed opportunities were identified, where stronger recommendations for Out of Court Disposals, clearer recording of diversion rationale, or further engagement at the police station may have avoided criminalisation. These findings highlight opportunities to further strengthen confidence, consistency and recording to support continued reductions in FTEs.

In addition, we have considered parent and child feedback, alongside targeted audits on the use of remand beds and the Turnaround programme. Feedback gathered from children and parents indicates high levels of satisfaction, with workers consistently described as supportive, approachable, responsive and trusted. Children reported feeling listened to, understood and safe, while parents highlighted the strength of relationships, clear communication and the positive impact of the service on their child's wellbeing, behaviour and engagement with education. Multi-agency support, particularly around health, communication needs and emotional wellbeing, was identified as having a significant and lasting impact. One area for learning was identified around consistent parental inclusion, reinforcing the importance of maintaining clear communication and joint working with families throughout an intervention.

Learning from all evaluation activity continues to directly inform service improvements and development planning. The Youth Justice Service remains fully committed to ongoing audit and evaluation as a key driver for effective, reflective and child-centred practice, ensuring that children's voices and lived experiences remain central to how services are designed and

delivered.

Priorities for the coming year

1. Help children stay out of the criminal justice system.

We will:

- Embed and consistently promote diversionary practice through OOC panels, including the effective use of Triage, Outcome 22, and restorative interventions.
- Deliver targeted and intensive interventions for children identified through the Turnaround programme, addressing both offending behaviour and underlying needs.
- Maintain delivery of Triage services in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- Convene quarterly multi-agency meetings with the Police to review all cases where children become First-Time Entrants to the criminal justice system.
- Develop and implement action plans arising from these reviews to address emerging themes, patterns, and systemic risks.
- Continue to develop and create innovative interventions to effect change for children.
- Work closely with the Youth Support Team to proactively identify and engage children at risk of entering the criminal justice system.
- Strengthen early knife crime prevention and intervention activity.

2. To reduce reoffending.

We will:

- Develop and deliver contemporary, evidence-informed programmes addressing driving-related offences, aligned to risk, responsibility, and harm reduction.
- Facilitate workforce development through structured staff workshops focused on social skills training and positive behaviour change.
- Further strengthen and embed our transition offer in partnership with Probation to ensure continuity of support for young people moving into adulthood.
- Maintain a strong focus on identifying and addressing health needs, ensuring all children are appropriately assessed and supported in relation to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), CAMHS, and Education, Training, and Employment (ETE).
- Continue to provide a comprehensive and accessible offer of sports and physical activity opportunities for the youth justice cohort, promoting wellbeing, resilience, and positive engagement.

3. Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement.

We will:

- Continue to convene pre-sentence meetings in all cases where custody is being considered, to ensure robust community-based sentence options are fully explored and recommended

to the Court. All reports will be completed using a Child First approach, clearly evidencing the child's needs, circumstances, strengths, and progress.

- Where appropriate, propose Intensive Supervision and Surveillance, to provide the Court with confidence that children can be managed safely and effectively within the community.
- Ensure all resettlement cases are reviewed through Management Board meetings to identify and address any gaps in provision, with escalation to senior Board members where strategic decision-making is required.
- We will work with the Tees to effectively develop the remand partnership in conjunction with SHIFT.
- Embed early and effective release planning for all children leaving custody, with oversight and progress monitored through monthly resettlement meetings.
- In appropriate cases, work proactively with Courts and defence solicitors to support a single sentencing exercise for children with multiple matters before the Court, reducing delay and promoting proportionality.

4. Continue to Strengthen our responses to Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.

We will:

- Launch and implement a Serious Youth Violence Strategy, which will be overseen through the Youth Justice Management Board.
- Identify children at risk of SYV and knife crime at the earliest opportunity through HOTH screening, Custody Navigators, the Turnaround Programme, and intelligence relating to POCS and LOCS.
- Deliver targeted, direct interventions for children involved in or at risk of SYV, addressing unmet needs.
- Work in close partnership with the HOTH and Adolescent Social Work Teams to disrupt pathways into serious violence and child exploitation and to promote safe, positive alternatives.
- Recognise and respond to the high prevalence of exploitation among children involved in SYV by embedding NRM considerations within assessment, planning, and intervention.
- Regular oversight of SYV activity through the Youth Justice Management Board.
- Establish Prevention Partnership Panels in partnership with CURV to coordinate early intervention and preventative responses.
- Expand and evaluate SYV interventions, using evidence of impact to inform service development and continuous improvement.

5. Early Intervention and Prevention

We will:

- Strengthen early intervention and prevention through close collaboration with schools, family support services, youth workers, and community partners to identify and respond to emerging risks at the earliest opportunity.
- Deliver the Turnaround Programme to children who have been arrested and are at risk of further offending, providing targeted, preventative support that successfully engages children before patterns of offending become embedded.

- Use Out of Court Disposals (OOCd) as a key prevention and diversion mechanism, ensuring children receive timely, needs-led interventions that support desistance and promote crime-free futures.
- Provide access to wider specialist support services for children engaged with Youth Justice and prevention services, addressing vulnerabilities such as education, health, family context, and wellbeing.
- Expand constructive engagement opportunities, including the Skills for Success programme and creative and positive activity offers, to develop life skills, resilience, and pro-social identity.
- Ensure all early intervention and prevention activity is underpinned by a Child First approach and informed by evidence of what works, with progress and impact reviewed through governance arrangements.

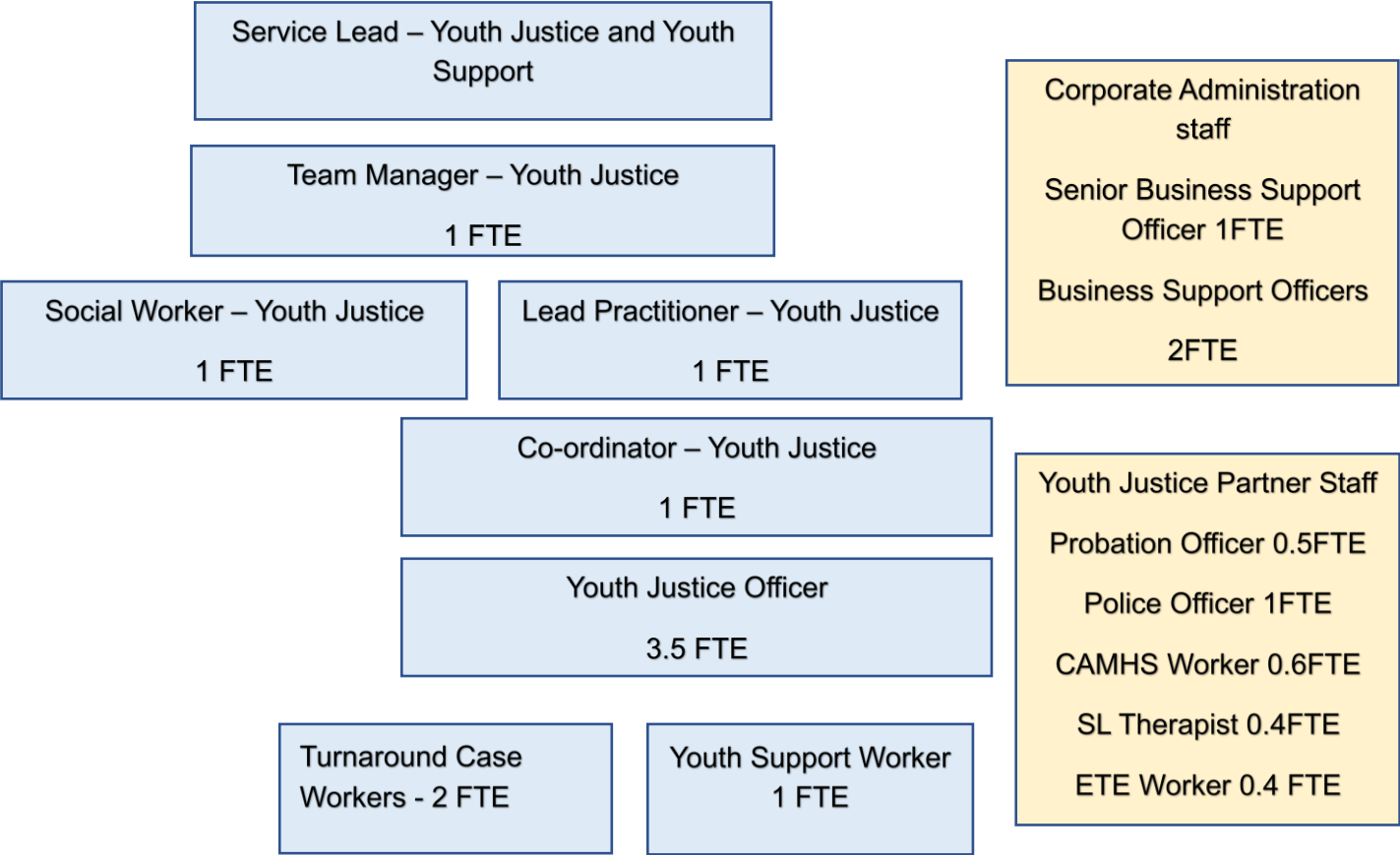
6. Child's Voice

- Place children and young people at the centre of service design and delivery, ensuring their views and experiences directly inform decision-making and practice.
- Use innovative and accessible participation methods, including digital tools, to gather feedback and promote meaningful involvement.
- Build on recent co-production work with children to review and redesign Youth Justice leaflets and written materials, ensuring information is clear, child-friendly, and accessible.
- Continue consultation with children on service environments, including the Youth Justice youth space, using feedback to inform ongoing improvements.
- Expand participation beyond traditional QR-code and paper-based feedback, including exploring the development of a child user group to strengthen sustained engagement and co-production.
- Ensure participation outcomes are embedded within governance and performance monitoring, complementing existing Youth Justice Board priorities relating to reducing reoffending, reducing the use of custody, and preventing children from entering the criminal justice system.
- Monitor progress through the Youth Justice Management Board, including oversight of the Youth Justice Modernisation Programme and its role in driving systemic improvement.

Appendix 1A: Staffing Demographics

Youth Justice Team staff demographics		
GENDER	Female	17
	Male	4
	Other	0
ETHNICITY	White	95.2%
	Asian	04.8%
	Black	0%
	Mixed	0%
	Other	0%
DISABILITY	YES	0
	NO	21

Appendix 1B: Youth Justice Team structure chart



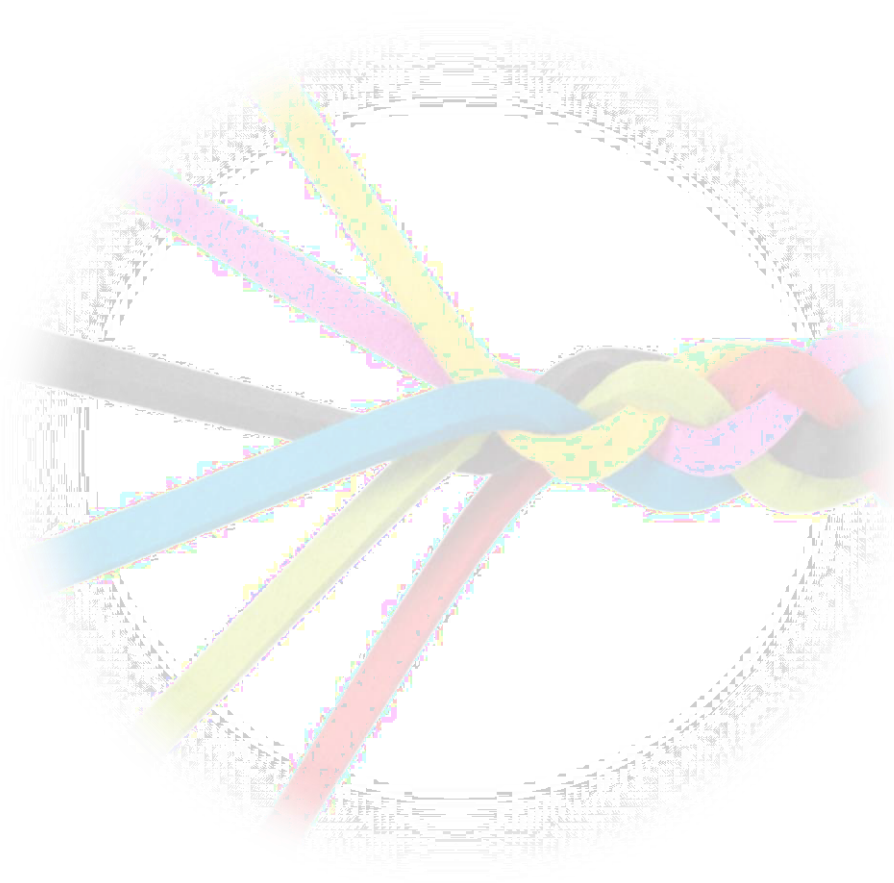
Appendix 2: Budget Costs and Contributions

Below is a summary of the YJT's financial profile for 2023-24. As in previous years, the majority of expenditure was on staffing costs.

BUDGET 2024/25	budget	outturn 2024/2025	outturn variance
Staff	832,086	832,086	0
Premises	42,778	42,778	0
Professional Services	31,500	31,500	
Indirect Staffing Costs (Transport & Training)	12,000	12,000	0
Office Costs	33,420	33,420	0
Central recharges	53,000	53,000	0
Total Expenditure	1,004,784	1,004,784	0
Income	1,004,784	1,004,784	0
Net Expenditure	0	0	0

Glossary

AssetPlus	A strengths based structured assessment tool based on research and developed by the Youth Justice Board looking at the child or young person's offence, personal circumstances and factors affecting desistance from crime
Child Exploitation	Safeguarding activity which focuses 'beyond the child's home and families,' to target those adults who are exploiting (targeting, tricking, and coercing) children for their own purposes and needs.
CURV	Cleveland's Unit for Reduction of Violence
ETAC	Exploitation Team Around the child.
ETE	Education, training, and employment; work to improve educational and learning outcomes
FTE	First-time entrants to the criminal justice system
HOTH	Harm Outside The Home
HMIP	HM Inspectorate of Probation
Justice System	Involves any or all of the agencies involved in upholding and implementing the law: police, courts, youth justice, probation, and custody providers.
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
OPCC	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
Pathways	The new YOT case management system
PDAT	Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool
Restorative Justice	The use of restorative approaches within a justice context. Brings those harmed by crime (victims) and those responsible for the harm (the offender) into communication, with a view to repairing the harm caused
Safety & Wellbeing	Terminology introduced by the YJB / AssetPlus to describe potential adverse outcomes where concerns exist that the young person's safety and well-being may be compromised through their own behaviour, personal circumstances or because of the acts / omissions of others
Safeguarding	Action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJT	Youth Justice Team



For more information on this Plan, please contact the Youth Justice Team

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