



Youth Justice Plan Stockton-on-Tees

2024-2025



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Introduction, Vision, and Strategy



Welcome to the Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Plan for 2024-25. This Plan sets out our priorities for the forthcoming year and how we will work with others to realise our vision and deliver services that promote positive child outcomes, reduce crime and make communities safer. This plan has been developed and agreed by the youth justice partnership.

Youth justice services in Stockton-on-Tees have a proud history of delivering effective, high-quality services to help children stay out of the justice system and reduce reoffending when they do. We are supporting more children and their families when worries first arise.

Proven youth crime and the numbers of children in the justice system in 2023-24, have fallen compared to the previous year - 380 offences by 121 children in 2023-24 compared to 454 by 154 children in 2022-23. This is good news for our children and communities.

Youth justice services in Stockton-on-Tees are rated as “*Outstanding*” by independent inspectors and we remain committed to provide high quality, personalised and responsive services.

Improving our understanding of the lived experience of justice-experienced children and enshrining *Child First* principles in our approaches supports our ambitions in this.

In 2023-24, the Youth Justice Team relocated to sit within a new adolescent service in Children’s Services to refocus efforts to deliver improved services to children at risk of criminal exploitation.

Local analysis tells us that justice-experienced children are amongst the most vulnerable to this form of harm. Our analysis also shows a strong relationship between child exploitation and serious youth violence. These themes will be amongst our priorities for 2024-25.

Our new case management database being introduced will improve our ability to analyse and understand outcomes, children’s needs and the lived experience of justice-experienced children.

I am delighted to be taking the helm of the Management Board at this exciting time in the development of our youth justice services and partnership.

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

Local Context

Stockton-on-Tees is a diverse area of six towns covering mainly urban areas, with some rural villages. It's population is around 200,000 and growing. 8% of the population are from a Black or other minority ethnic group. The population of 10–17-year-olds is over 43,000.

There are areas of great affluence alongside some of the most deprived in England, with some significant differences within the Borough experienced in life and health outcomes. We know that socio-economic factors profoundly influence the lives and opportunities of children and many of the children who come into the justice system are from our most deprived communities.



Decreasing:

Falls in the number of children in the justice system and the number of proven crimes in 2023-24, compared to the previous year.

The number of children entering the justice system for the first time



Increasing:

Complexity of children's needs

The number of children arrested for serious youth violence in 2023-24. Most are at risk of, or are experiencing, child exploitation



Demographics:

Children in the justice system are predominantly male and White British

A substantial proportion of children in the justice system are also known to local children's services

Governance, Leadership and Partnership Arrangements

Youth Justice Management Board

The Management Board delivers strategic direction and coordinates the provision of local services. There is a clear focus on holding those functions, and the wider youth justice partnership, to account for performance at both an operational and strategic level.

The membership and terms of reference for the Management Board have recently been reviewed and refreshed to ensure its continued effectiveness and compliance with '*Youth Justice Service Governance and Leadership, December 2021*'. The main objectives of the Board are:

1. To ensure the preparation and implementation of the annual Youth Justice Plan; to consider and act upon feedback from the Youth Justice Board (YJB).
2. To determine how the Youth Justice Team is to be composed and funded, how it is to operate and what functions it is to carry out.
3. To agree measurable objectives linked to key performance indicators as part of the youth justice plan and evaluate service delivery to improve understanding of 'what works' in preventing offending and reoffending, including consideration of thematic inspections.
4. To influence other strategies and programmes from a youth offending perspective.
5. To agree annual funding arrangements and ensure the effective use of resource. To monitor quarterly financial position statements. To seek opportunities to gain additional resources which add value to core funding.
6. To oversee the appointment and designation of the Head of Service.

The Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services. Board membership is comprised of representatives from the statutory partners: the local authority; police service; probation service and the integrated health board; and from local partners: the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner: the voluntary and community sector: and the courts. The Youth Justice Board is also represented.

The Board meets quarterly. As well as monitoring youth justice outcomes, the Board takes account of emerging trends, policy directives and legislation, research and inspections. Information on compliance with the conditions of Youth Justice Board grant funding, performance reports, quality assurance casework audits and the findings of National Standard audits are presented and discussed by the Board.

More information on the partnership improvements and Board developments in 2024-25 can be found on page 9.

Location

The Youth Justice Team (YJT) is located in our Adolescent & Exploitation Services in Early Help and Safeguarding within Children's Services.

The new Adolescence & Exploitation Service comprises youth justice, specialist safeguarding child exploitation services including the multi-agency child exploitation hub, and targeted early help to children and their families.

The Youth Justice Head of Service role is delivered by the Service Lead for Adolescent & Exploited services, with line management by the Assistant Director for Early Help and Safeguarding.

Resources and Value for Money

Resourcing for youth justice services comes from the Youth Justice Board and the local partnership. Youth justice functions are compliant with the minimum staffing requirements set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and a structure chart is presented on page 25.

100% of the youth justice grant is allocated to staffing costs within the YJT, accounting for just under half of the employee costs for practitioners delivering statutory youth justice work in the courts, community and custody; the supervision and management oversight of case managers and other YJ staff, and admin workers who populate the youth justice case management database and extract performance data. The costs of seconded staff are met by their employing agencies.

The Youth Justice Team has a diverse workforce comprising staff on substantive permanent and temporary contracts and community volunteers. In addition, there are 1 member of the team who is employed by another agency and co-located for part of their working week.

We are committed to delivering services that represent **value for money**. A significant amount of time has been spent on understanding the 'value' of services that are delivered, in terms of cost, outcomes and savings created through prevention and 'invest to save' approaches.

We will be delivering a range of services in partnership with others, to avoid duplication and to draw upon the skills and expertise of partners to maximise use of resources and expertise.



Partnership Arrangements

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



The range of partners will be further expanded in the coming year as we consolidate arrangements to realise our new child exploitation offer and reduce serious youth violence.

Most statutory youth justice interventions are delivered 'in house' or in partnership with key stakeholders. Our commissioned arrangement for speech, language and communication services with North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation Trust will continue.

Joint working arrangements with the Office of Police Crime and Commissioner (OPCC) funded Liaison and Diversion Service and Custody Navigators to support children in the police station are continuing; these are significant not only to ensure that children are properly supported but also to ensure a presence during those critical 'reachable moments'.

There is close working between the Youth Justice Team and children's social care for those deemed to be a Child in Need, Child in our Care and Care Leavers. Working protocols are in place. The reduction of criminalisation and offending by children in our care are corporate priorities and is well embedded in local decision making by our partners in Police, Crown Prosecution Service and the Courts.

Multi-agency pathways have been developed to support the 'Prevent' and Modern-Day Slavery duties. The Youth Justice Team is also an integral part of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) when a multi-agency approach is required to protect people from serious harm. Information sharing agreements ensure information is available to support holistic assessments and planning for young people. All information is managed sensitively in accordance with Data Protection principles.

Update on the previous year

Help children stay out of the criminal justice system

During 2023/24 we reviewed and refreshed our Out of Court Disposal (OCD) policy and process. We also introduced our 'Child First' bespoke OCD panels where we invite professionals working with the child to contribute to the discussion and decision making.

The OPCC provide funding for Triage disposals and interventions to children. Triage continues to be our most widely used OCD. The introduction of our OCD panels and our consistent use of Triage has contributed to a significant improvement in our FTE's rate. The latest YJB performance rate is 125 and this is better than all other local and national comparisons.

Over the last 12 months we have fully established our Turnaround Programme. Since January 2023 we have worked with 75 children and have provided a range of interventions which have included family work, positive activities, and support with ETE.

Reduce the use of custody and prioritise effective resettlement

Our custody rate has remained high over the last 12 months. It is currently at 0.29 which equates to six children currently serving custodial sentences (in custody/community phase). The driver behind these rates has been serious youth violence, child exploitation and the influence of Organised Crime Groups. We have worked hard to keep our custody rates at a minimum and this was recognised during our YJB National Standards validation visit in January 2024. All reports go through our pre-sentence meeting process, and most were given comprehensive community sentences that we proposed to the court. We currently have three children who have been released on licence.

At the point of sentence, we hold bi-monthly resettlement meetings to ensure support is available on release. All are subject to a range of licence conditions which include where appropriate electronic tags with trial monitoring. Our CAMHS, SALT, ETE and support workers have been involved to ensure each child has consistent and individual support throughout the whole sentence.

To reduce reoffending

We have continued to review and develop our interventions. Cleveland Police have secured funding for seconded officers to have virtual reality headsets to use in direct work with children. We have renewed and refreshed our knife crime programme and have a range of tools to address violent offending. Our interventions are under continuous review. Where appropriate we have made referrals to the Safer Communities Transitions Project for additional support when 17-year-olds make the transition into adulthood.

We have employed a full-time education, training and employment (ETE) worker to ensure children have intensive support to secure and sustain appropriate ETE opportunities and options. Although funding for our trauma informed pathway ended in 2023, we have had positive discussions with Tees Esk Wear Valley NHS trust to resume this resource in 2024.

Develop our partnership response to Serious Youth Violence

We have continued to develop our response to Serious Youth Violence. We have worked closely with Cleveland CURV and have developed a range of initiatives. The main area of development has been the introduction of Custody Navigators scheme at Middlesbrough Custody suite where Children from Stockton-On-Tees are taken when arrested. This has ensured children have support at the earliest opportunity and trained staff can facilitate a 'teachable' moment. Our Turnaround programme has worked with those children who have been arrested for violent offences but who have not been formally charged. Again, this early intervention response will have benefits of steering children away from becoming involved in serious youth violence. We have previously documented our partnership response in developing an Adolescent and Exploitation Service with additional resources and practices in place to tackle child exploitation and serious youth violence.

To develop an Immediate Justice model of delivery in partnership with the PCC and other Cleveland YJS

The OPCC provided funding so we could develop our Immediate Justice project. We have worked closely with the OPCC and our Community Safety team and developed agreed criteria and pathways for referrals. We have established clear metrics to measure success against outputs and provide monthly performance reports to the OPCC. We went live on the 01/09/2023 and have employed 1.5 members of staff on a short-term basis. The rate of referrals has not been at the expected level since the project started (this is consistent with both Hartlepool and South Tees Youth Justice Teams). We have had 22 referrals from our Community Safety team. We are currently working with the OPCC and Community Safety team so we can widen the criteria in relevant cases.

Board development

Plans to outsource the role of Board Chair have changed and the Director of Children's Services will continue this. In line with our commitment to deliver effective and high-quality services, the Board has embarked on its own development programme which is continuing into 2024-25.

Activity includes: the temporary secondment of an experienced youth justice Head of Service to support the Board; refreshed membership and terms of reference; Board development days and thematic workshops; development of a new performance dashboard; and the

development of an annual workplan to ensure that key priorities are regularly discussed and monitored.

Key success factors include: the Board regularly receives regular quantitative and qualitative data to support its governance functions and enables challenge where needed; Board has a strong understanding of the lived experience of children and families and the *Child First* approach to youth justice; and the Board has a strong understanding of the profile and level of need of children and their families, any disparity in groups from the local population and is able to advocate for access to relevant services.

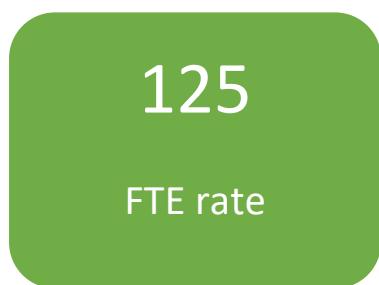
During 2024-25 there will be strategic focus on the themes of **child exploitation** and **serious youth violence**.

To implement a new Case Management system by March 2024

Considerable work has taken place over the last 12 months with our Systems and Information team. We went through the relevant procurement process and NEC/Pathways were selected as our chosen provider. A project plan documented milestones of data mapping, acceptance, and migration. A training needs analysis was completed, and six members of staff completed the train the trainer course and all staff have received training. We are confident we have built considerable knowledge across the staff team.

We were impressed by the Pathways case management system as it is a modern product with a simple and easy to navigate user interface. It is anticipated we will go live in May / June 2024.

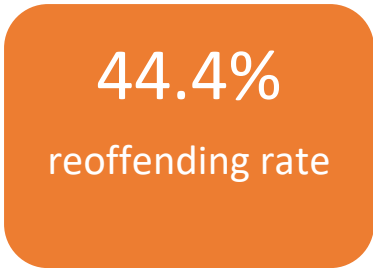
Performance over the last year.



The rate of First Time Entrants (FTEs) in Stockton has decreased in the latest published YJB data from 198 in 2022 per 10,000 to 125 in 2023.

This is a significant reduction in our FTE rate. We are considerably lower than all other comparisons including England & Wales, North-East and our YJS family. The actual numbers of children who have become FTE in this reporting period is 26, down from 40 previously

We have been strong advocates of the Child First approach and divert as many children away from the criminal justice system as possible. The OPCC funding has allowed for the widespread use of Triage and Triage 2. With the introduction of our Out-Of-Court Disposal panel it is anticipated this will assist in our continued efforts to keep our FTEs at a low level.

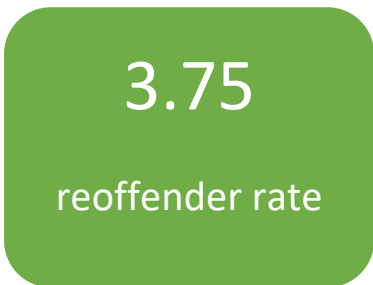


The latest reoffending rate is 44.4%, which is lower than our PCC area but higher than other comparison groups.

This is higher than the previous quarter's performance of 36.4% and higher than the previous year of 21.4%.

The current cohort consists of 18 children where eight reoffended

The previous cohort consisted of 17 children but only four reoffended. If you consider our reoffending data average over previous 12 months of 32.3% this is broadly in line with all other comparisons.



The latest data regarding Reoffences/Reoffender is 3.75.

This is lower than all other comparisons apart from our PCC area. This is an improvement on the last published data which was 4.75. The current figure is based on eight children committing 30 offences between them.



Stockton's custody rate is currently above all national and local comparisons at a rate of 0.29.

The level has remained at 0.29 since the last published data.

The current figure relates to six custodial sentences.

All six custody cases relate to serious violent offending. Stockton-On-Tees have faced challenges in relation to the volume of children charged to Court for serious offences. Most have been given Community sentences and context has been provided in other sections.

Risks and Issues

Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice partnership continue to function in an ever-evolving landscape with the streamlining of services and pressures on resources. Adolescent and Exploitation Services including youth justice are now co-located which allows for collaborative working, wider discussions, and a multi-skilled workforce to respond to need. Change programmes have inherent risks, and our focus is to continue to embed the recent changes while maintaining an outstanding service.

It is evident we continue to work with a group of children that exhibit higher levels of need and more complex behaviours. The YJB grant allows us to maintain a comprehensive and effective service to the children we work with. We have used the recent increase in grant funding to create an additional youth justice officer role and ETE worker (both initially for 12 months). We need to ensure we have sufficient resources in place to meet demand and expectations. This needs to be kept under constant review. Any reduction in the YJB grant would have serious implications.

The YJT is moving to a new case management system in May 2024, and we hope to minimize any disruption this may cause. The Information and System team have worked closely with our provider NEC to ensure any difficulties are resolved quickly. We also need to start exit planning for both our Turnaround and Immediate Justice Programmes as funding ends March 2025. We need to ensure this causes as little disruption to the children and families we are working with.

The YJT along with many other teams from across Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council will move to a refurbished big open office environment. This will be a different way of working for many staff.

The YJT does not have a centralised place for appointments with children. The team use a variety of venues across the borough including family hubs. We need to identify a space in Stockton town centre where children and families can come for appointments and will accommodate staff and bring together resources to deliver effective services.

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.

The Child First approach means that all staff consistently refer to our cohort as children and not young people. The impact of this has been it is more effective when gaining access to appropriate services. We talk to children in a positive way about their strengths and ability for positive change.

We have promoted diversion throughout the team/partners and consequently we have seen a significant reduction in FTE's. We avoid criminalising children unnecessarily. The YJT strives to promote a pro-social identity. We are adopting the new Prevention and Diversion assessment tool at the earliest opportunity as this is more child focused and is cemented on a strengths-based model. We are also in the process of restructuring the format of our Pre-Sentence Reports to be more child friendly/strengths based.

We have continued to build a strong partnership approach to our work so we can continue to develop personalised child focus work. We have speech, language and communication, health and education and training workers in place along with support workers who can work with children to develop inclusion, positive relations, interests, and activities.

¹ YJB Strategic Plan, 2024-27

We recognise Child First practice is part of an ongoing journey and we have planned to hold a Child First effective practice workshops every six months.

The voice of the child is a key element of the Child First principle. In July 2023 we produced a report for the Management Board which collated 41 responses from Children and parents/carers from our feedback questionnaires. The feedback was extremely positive, and it was apparent children and they parents/carers felt supported by youth justice staff. The children commented on the good work we do on ETE, practical help and intervention work. Many parents remarked the situation was 'better' with our intervention. Although this is constructive feedback, we recognise we need to do more to achieve active participation and collaboration with children.

We are committed to ensuring that young people and their families have a voice; that they have an influence in their individual intervention programmes *and* in broader approaches to service delivery and developments. We aspire to deliver motivational, respectful and strength-based approaches to promote desistance from crime. Participation is one of our strategic objectives for the next year.

Resources and services

Regular financial reports are presented to the YJ Management Board with recommendations for the board to discuss and agree. The income and projected expenditure represent finance estimates based upon the Youth Justice Team structure, agreed funding and service initiative from a national and local level. As in previous years, staff costs will continue to constitute most of the expenditure. All monies carry forward in reserve are earmarked for planned Youth Justice business, and all future spend of the reserve would be agreed by the board.

There is currently no requirement for Stockton-on-Tees Youth Justice Service to contribute to remand costs, but this may change if the numbers increase.

We use 100% of our grant, partner contributions and available resources to deliver these services and we believe they produce improved benefits and outcomes, and our performance will be improved in 2024–25 by understanding and working with the diverse communities in Stockton. This will be delivered with a joined-up problem-solving approach, focussing on our response and long-term support, using a consistent approach in working with our most vulnerable, complex, and high-risk teenagers and enhancing our offer for First Time Entrants.

The table on page 26 represents the closing financial position for 2023-24. Expenditure was slightly over budget, due to the pay award that was agreed mid-year, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council have covered that. The budget has seen a slight increase in the YJB grant, due to an uplift in 2024.

The Ministry of Justice Turnaround programme financial profile will be presented as a separate report in the 2023-24 financial year. We have continued to receive payment in kind for Police,

Probation and Health workers. The Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner has committed further funding for our Triage programme.

Workforce Development

We updated our workforce development policy in November 2022 to ensure all YJT employees and seconded workers have sufficient skills to enable them to carry out their job effectively. Staff receive monthly supervision and a yearly appraisal along with completing a range of mandatory training. All YJT in 2023-24 staff have received training on Pathways case management system, Hidden Harm (NPACS) and Prevent. The YJT have a monthly Effective Practice session with all staff. The sessions are designed to develop knowledge and skills. In 2023-24 we have completed work on Child First, the victim's journey, new case guidance and the YJB Diversion and Prevention assessment tool. Our CAMHS worker has also undertaken reflective practice sessions with staff.

The YJT currently have 10 Referral Order panel volunteers. Referral Order panel member meetings take place on a quarterly basis and an element of training is provided during these sessions. Panel members are also offered two 1:1 sessions each year. They also have access to Stockton Borough council training.

In the last year we have had several new members of staff joining the team. All have received our two-week induction programme which includes, meetings, training, and shadowing opportunities. Our training plan for 2024-25 covers such areas as transitions to probation, breach case management, harmful sexual behaviour refresher and custody processes.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

Stockton-on-Tees YJT always seek to improve practice to ensure we achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families. Consequently, we continually work towards improving the services we provide and extend our offer based on best and evidence-based practice. We have built upon good practice over many years and desistance theory is embedded into our way of working. We ensure children have consistency of case managers so we can effectively form relationships with the children and families we work with. Our partnership approach/offer is an example of our current good practice. We have Police, Probation, ETE, SALT and CAMHS workers all in place and we are responsive to children's needs. We have continued to invest in a bike project as children's feedback about their experience there has been consistently positive.

Evaluation

We intend to build on feedback gained from the YJB validation visit which concluded *"Outstanding practice is evidenced. Stockton has a high volume of court work and a very experienced team. Where there are issues with court or with police decisions, additionalities such as a court user group or a SPoC might assist in challenging these"*, February 2024.

Priorities for the coming year

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

We will:

- Introduce YJB Diversion and Prevention Assessment tool for all OOC cases.
- Continue to promote diversion principles at our OOC panels and use of Outcome 22.
- Provide comprehensive interventions for children identified through the Turnaround and Immediate Justice programmes.
- Continue to deliver Triage services in partnership with the Office Police Crime Commissioner.

2. To reduce reoffending.

We will:

- To consider how we introduce Youth Endowment Fund recommendations of high impact interventions into practice. This to include Social Skills Training and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.
- To be pro-active in making referrals to Safer Communities Transitions Project for 17-year-olds who need additional support.
- To use core grant to make the 12-month ETE worker post permanent as this is having an impact on providing every child with the opportunity to engage in appropriate ETE.
- To provide a comprehensive offer to the youth justice cohort regarding sports and physical activities.

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

We will:

- Continue to hold a pre-sentence meeting in all possible custody cases to ensure comprehensive Community Sentences are recommended to court.
- Propose where appropriate electronic tags with trial monitoring as this will promote confidence to the Court that children can be managed safely in the community.
- All resettlement cases will be discussed at Management Board meetings to ensure any gaps in provision are known and escalated to Board members whose seniority can make key decisions.
- Ensure early planning is in place for those children leaving custody. This will be monitored by monthly resettlement meetings.

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

We will:

- Work closely with our Adolescent Exploitation social work team to develop positive pathways for children to steer them away from Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation.
- The YJ Management Board will, at pace, drive and shape a refreshed multiagency approach to serious youth violence
- Work in partnership with CURV
- Focused Deterrence - To help Children understand the consequences of violent crime.
- To identify children at risk of serious youth violence at the earliest opportunity through our work with Custody Navigators, Turnaround Programme, and Immediate Justice and provide them with support.

5. To Reduce the number of school exclusions.

We will:

- To monitor school exclusion across the youth justice cohort.
- Utilise ETE clinic and Fair Access Panel to raise concerns around school attendance and exclusions.

6. To refresh our practice in our work victims and restorative practice.

We will:

- Increase capacity and resilience for staff to undertake victim and restorative justice work.
- Increase participation of victims at Referral Order panels
- To review all our process and practice in relation to victims and restorative justice.
- Within 6 months adopt YJB advised to model victim services using framework for devised by Gwent & Caerphilly YOS for example, victim safety and contact forms.

7. To develop a Participation model of practice.

We will:

- Create a participation working group.
- Liaise with local partners Bright Minds and Cornerhouse Youth Project to model best practice.
- Gather children's lived experience and new ways to gain feedback to help us improve our youth justice services.
- To hold creative workshops with children to find out how best to support them to build positive identities.



National priority areas

Children from groups which are over-represented

It is paramount Stockton-On-Tees YJT are aware of issues of disproportionality and take appropriate action. It is recognised that nationally children from some ethnic minority groups are more likely to be criminalized. Over the last 12 months the Management Board have been provided with quarterly reports which document the ethnicity of the youth justice cohort. The report compares information to the latest census data (2021) on Stockton's population and in terms of ethnicity was 92% White, 4.6% Asian, 3.3% Other. We have not found any disproportionality in terms of ethnicity as the cohort has consisted of 93% White. The YJB information on the Stockton cohort for April – June 2023 on racial disparity reports in terms of reoffending the cohort, 94% were white and 6 Asian/Asian British. Again, this is in line our local demographics. Although the numbers are small, we are committed to continued scrutiny and analysis of data.

The Management Board have also monitored children known to wider services. A report was presented to the Management Board in October 2023. This consisted of an in-depth audit which looked at the characteristics of 62 children. This found 35 were open to Children Services and 27 who are not.

Prevention

Our prevention offer is from the Targeted Youth and Missing from Home (MFH) Team which sits within the Adolescence and Exploitation service. The team are responsible for direct work with children where there are risks or vulnerability around all aspects of exploitation. They also provide a dedicated response to children who go missing from home.

All engagement with the Targeted Youth team is voluntary and they prioritise face to face contact and direct work, taking full opportunity of any reachable moments presented between them and the child. All direct work is aimed to be individual to each child's needs, innovative and using evidence-based practice tools, which underpins our good practice and quality assurance framework.

Targeted Youth aim to reduce the need for statutory involvement by responding to the early indicator of exploitation, to prevent the need for social care action. Both YJT and Targeted Youth Support have close links with SBC Community Safety team who can identify children who are displaying anti-social behaviour in the community. Targeted Youth Support also deliver Appropriate Adult support, intensive support, reparation work, personal development sessions for children open to the YJT.

Diversion

Stockton-on-Tees YJT is committed to a diversionary approach in our work. We believe we should avoid unnecessary criminalisation of children and deal with them at the lowest possible level. The YJT are keen to ensure where there is a linked offence children receive an alternative outcome that does not result in a criminal record, avoids escalation into the formal youth justice system and associated stigmatisation. Our OOC framework has a range of disposals (Restorative Interventions, Outcome 22, Triage and Triage 2) that avoid children having a criminal record so we can, through assessment and intervention help them form/maintain a pro-social identity. In the last 12 months we have had 103 children subject to one of the above and all children have been provided with an intervention. In the last year only 13 out of 116 OOC disposals received either a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution. We have therefore embedded our diversionary principles into practice. This is evidenced by our significant reduction in FTE's.

Education

Access to opportunities for ETE for the youth justice cohort is fundamental for their prospects. The YJT continue to hold a bimonthly ETE clinic which is attended by colleagues from Careers Services, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Education Improvement Teams. The meetings discuss all NEET children on the YJT caseload with a focus on problem solving, sharing information and escalation. It also includes cases of school aged children where they have been concerns regarding attendance. In the last year it became apparent from this meeting that specialist skills and dedicated time is needed to work with the youth justice cohort. Many have low self-esteem, poor educational attainment, attendance and motivation, SALT and SEND needs. Finding the right pathway with the right support is challenging for staff who also have mainstream cases on their caseload. Consequently, the Management Board agreed for the YJT to employ a ETE worker rather than continue with the previous model of workers across the Careers Team being allocated cases. The YJT have had an ETE worker in place since October 2023. Our current post 16 performance is 80%, a significant increase from 38% when the ETE worker started. The data for Statutory School age young people remains at 100%. It is positive to report that the ETE worker is having an impact. Specifically, work with post 16 children to encourage them to consider appropriate training courses e.g., NACRO and Princess Trust has been successful.

Restorative approaches and victims

The YJT have a youth justice co-ordinator role and this post has responsibility for Restorative Justice and victims. Most victims are contacted and an offer of involvement in a restorative process is initiated. This offer includes direct mediation, ensuring the voice of the victim is heard, direct/indirect reparation and letters of apology/explanation. We have a high satisfaction rate with the victims who have choose to engage in a restorative process. Our Immediate Justice programme has meant we have had more victims to contact over the last year and we have needed to consider how we build capacity for staff to undertake victim and restorative work.

We have also developed a portfolio of reparation projects, for example family hub and allotment projects. HMI Probation new inspection framework starting in 2025 will inspect victim work and will focus on quality of work. The YJB have recently provided good practice guide from the restorative and victim work undertaken by Gwent and Caerphilly Youth Offending Service. Given these two developments our 2024-25 Youth Justice Plan will have a strategic objective of reviewing our practice and approach with our restorative justice and victim work.

Serious violence and exploitation

The link between the exploitation of children and serious organised crime gangs and the connections with the supply of drugs and serious violence is well understood in Stockton, as is the intrafamilial harm whereby family members of children are involved in OCG and serious violence. It was evident the Partnership in Stockton needed to develop a coordinated response to criminal exploitation and youth violence. Stockton has responded to this by strengthening its response and building on its MACE with a dedicated service area with the creation of the Adolescent and Exploitation Service in December 2023.

The Exploitation Team sit in the Adolescent Service and is a Social Work Team that has at its core the safeguarding of children who are going missing and/or being exploited or at risk of exploitation. The team will work with cases that are open to Children's Services using a co-working model, so there will be an allocated Social Worker and an Exploitation Team Social Worker allocated to the child.

The service will work with children from the age of 10-18 years of age who are likely to suffer harm from exploitation, although this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The Service can work with children for as long as necessary or whilst there is consent, with regular Exploitation Team Around the Child (ETAC) reviews taking place between 4-6 weeks (depending on the risk) to assess the effectiveness of the plan.

We work in close partnership with Police (CET and MFH), Health, Community Safety and CCTV surveillance, Police custody navigator, health navigator from hospitals, YJT, Virtual School and the Missing From Home Team who are part of the Exploitation Service.

In bringing together the knowledge, expertise and resources of all partners, the Team can share information swiftly, create a full picture of risk and need and provide a creative and effective response that is always guided by the particular needs and wishes of the individual child, young person, and their family.

This is under pinned by our Core Principles which are: Youth voice and experience: development and transitions in their lives: Intervene early and help prevent further harm: Intervention: Disruption and Information sharing and data analysis.

The team will work with cases that are open to Children's Services using a co-working model, so there will be an allocated Social Worker and an Exploitation Team Social Worker allocated to the young person.

The MACE arrangements provide assessment and risk management responses to those Persons and Locations where exploitation harm is present for children. Persons and Locations of Concern are managed in partnership through the Community Safety led Joint Action Group and Police led MARSOC management of which YJT are partners. As such, the partnership is collectively responsive to support disruption of the contextual risks for children at risk of exploitation harm. In addition, there is the oversight of NRM submissions through the Tees Strategic Exploitation Group (TSEG), as such YJT work in partnership with MACE to ensure appropriate referrals are made, and information is shared to support identification of children at risk of Modern Slavery and Trafficking.

The YJS partnership facilitates the seamless transfer of information on risk and vulnerabilities across a range of forums which include, the strategic Multi-agency Child Exploitation Meetings (MACE), Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC). We continue to work closely with CURV and the funded custody navigators scheme provides a holistic approach in engaging and intervening with children at the earliest opportunity.

Detention in police custody

We have established arrangements in place for children detained in custody. Youth Support provide Appropriate Adults during office hours 9 -5 and the Emergency Duty Team provide an after-hours service. All staff undertaking AA work have been PACE trained. Staff will work with the Police to facilitate that a parent/carer will attend in the first instance. If this is not possible, we will act as AA and ensure the child understands the process and any interview is conducted fairly. Furthermore, we will provide updates to parents/carers and relevant professionals.

Cleveland Youth Justice Services continue to hold a monthly Children in Custody meeting. This is aligned with a business priority for the YJB to ensure custody is used appropriately. The meeting is attended by the Police, emergency duty and custody teams. We focus on all children who were held for more than 12 hours. Stockton on average has 10 – 12 cases each month which meet these criteria. The meeting looks for assurance that these children have support in place. We have found in most cases the reasons why children are held for over 12 hours is because a 'live' investigation is ongoing, or the child is not fit for interview due to intoxication. We have also had an agreement in place with Aycliffe Secure Home where they will provide a PACE bed if one is available. Over the last 12 months we have had several children who was placed in a PACE bed before attending court the following day.

In partnership with CURV, Hartlepool and South Tees YJT we launched a Custody Navigator scheme in April 2023. The scheme has trained staff available six days a week to support children in custody. Good communication channels are in place, so information is shared across partners in a timely fashion, so children's needs are addressed.

Remands

In the last year we have reviewed our bail and remand policy, and this has formed part of a recent effective practice sessions with staff. The YJT provide a trained and specialist youth justice officer to attend each day, if required. We have an extensive range of bail packages available to the Court including ISS. Good partnership relationships are in place with Police, CPS, defence solicitors, Children Services, and others. We work closely with Children Services, so appropriate support is provided if children have any accommodation issues. Over the past year we have had three children who have been remanded to custody. These were for serious offences which include Section 18 Wounding and Aggravated Burglary. However, within this period the YJT have provided robust bail packages to the Court which included the use of BSS and ISS. We have had eleven children subject to bail packages where either a remand or extensive bail conditions have been actively pursued by the CPS. The YJB National Standards validation visit on the 31/1/2024 felt our work in this area was outstanding.

Use of custody

In last year's plan we had proposed how to minimise the use of custody in Stockton-on-Tees. We developed clear mechanisms which included, holding a Pre-Sentence meeting in all possible custody cases to ensure comprehensive Community Sentences were recommended to the court. In appropriate cases we have proposed ISS and the use of electronic monitoring. Our custody rate is currently at 0.29 which is higher than all other comparisons. The figure currently relates to six custodial sentences. All the custodial sentences relate to serious violent offences. In three of the cases, we initially proposed the children should receive a Community Sentence, which the Court agreed to. However, one case was subsequently sent to the Court of Appeal, and they revoked the YRO and imposed a DTO. In the other two cases the children breached their YRO's and the Court resentenced them to DTO's. In these cases, YRO plannings and back on track meetings were held. We offered considerable flexibility and worked closely with the children and their families to encourage compliance. Both were subject to electronic monitoring and were unable to manage this requirement of their YRO.

Although the custody rate is of concern, we have also produced many other PSR's where custody was being considered and these children were given community sentences. The feedback from the YJB validation visit said Stockton-On-Tees YJT are 'making every effort to steer children away from custody'.

Constructive resettlement

Over the last 12-month Stockton-on-Tees YJT have continued to focus our attention on resettlement. We have considered the learning from HMI Probation thematic report into resettlement in 2019 and Case Management Guidance – Custody and Resettlement and YJB – How to Make Resettlement Constructive (Sept 2018). We recognised the importance of appropriate accommodation and ETE on release to build a positive identity for the child. Since our last Youth Justice plan, we have had three children released from custody. All returned home to live with family and the YJT ETE worker has provided specialist support to explore suitable options. Our CAHMS worker has also provided seamless support from liaising with

health professional in the custody to arranging appropriate appointments in the community. We have also ensured we have a range of personal development sessions in place, and this can range from cooking to going to the gym. We have also embedded bimonthly resettlement discussions between the Team Manager and Youth Justice Officers for each resettlement case. The meetings are designed to provide an update on the plan and to overcome any potential barriers to effective resettlement.

Standards for children in the justice system

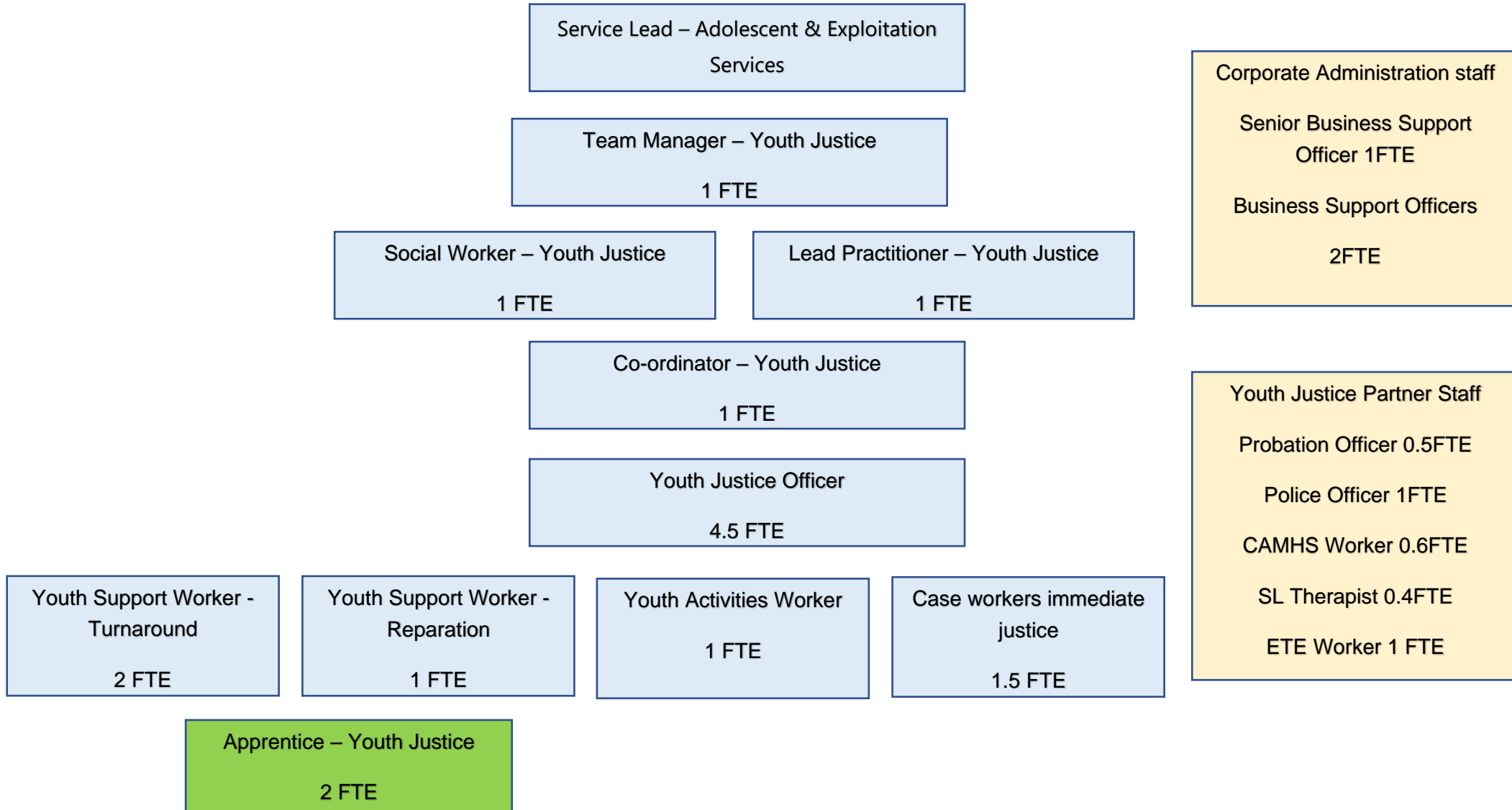
Stockton-on-Tees YJT completed the required National Standards self-assessment on standard two - At Court, last year. We reviewed our Strategy, Reports and Process. We considered a range of documents which included our remand policy and our practice in Court along with auditing 20 cases which were either Pre-Sentence Reports or Referral Orders. The self-assessment determined our Strategy as good and Reports and Process as Outstanding. The YJB selected Stockton-On-Tees YJT for a validation visit on the 31.1.2024. We provided a considerable range of evidence prior to the visit and the YJB reviewed the documentation as well as meeting staff and asking further questions to the management team. The YJB rated our work at Court as Outstanding across Strategy, Reports and Process. They remarked, 'Outstanding practice is evidenced'. The YJB said all possible steps are evidenced to divert children from court. In the last year 16 diversions were made from court. PSRs advocate for individual circumstances & social worker/ responsible person attends at court. Relationship-based practice model is embedded so one person is with the child throughout journey. Clear Child First approach and contact made with child and family pre-court to ease anxieties. Court officers advocate for the child, reminding the court where necessary of EHCP/ SAL issues/ ASD/ LAC, etc. The YJB said in terms of an area of development Stockton need to work with partners to re-establish a court user group.

We have embedded an audit process in the last year. We undertake audits on both OOC, and Statutory work which are aligned with HMI Probation standards and methodology. We have audited 15 cases over a 12-month period along with a further 20 for the National Standards audit. Themes have emerged around reviewing risk of harm and safety and wellbeing ratings and the format of plans for OOC. These issues have been addressed through effective practice meetings.

Appendix 1A: Staffing Demographics

Youth Justice Team staff demographics		
GENDER	Female	20
	Male	4
	Other	0
ETHNICITY	White	96%
	Asian	04%
	Black	0%
	Mixed	0%
	Other	0%
DISABILITY	YES	0
	NO	24

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 2023/24	budget	outturn 2023/2024	outturn variance
Staff	959,745	975,790	16,045
Premises	42,778	42,778	0
Office Costs	63,221	50,221	-13000
Central recharges	53,000	53,000	0
Total Expenditure	1,118,744	1,121,789	3,045
Income	1,118,744	1,121,789	3,045
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
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.
MACE	Multi-Agency Child Exploitation
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
OPCC	Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
Pathways	The new YOT case management system
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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