

**DORSET
POLICE**



Service	Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service
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YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2025/26

Head of Service	David Webb
Chair of YJS Board	Paul Dempsey

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Youth Justice Plan 2025/26

1. Executive Summary

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

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

During the past year, DCYJS has made progress on our partnership priorities, including:

Keeping children out of the formal justice system: the number of children across Dorset and BCP who received a first caution or court order dropped from 108 in 2023/24 to 106 in 2024/25. The 2023/24 figure was a significant reduction on previous years.

Reducing over-representation of minority groups in the youth justice system: local children from ethnic minorities are not over-represented among those entering the justice system but may progress further through the system. Children in Care and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are over-represented locally and nationally. Action is being taken to reduce over-representation of these groups.

Reducing youth violence and extra-familial harm: there was a reduction in the number of children entering the justice system for violent offences in 2024/25, compared to the previous year. The number of children being arrested locally has reduced in the past three years.

Improve education outcomes for children in the justice system: DCYJS worked with Upton Country Park to provide a project supporting young people to become ready for college or employment.

DCYJS applies the 'Child First' principles that are promoted by the Youth Justice Board. A parent said that *'having YJS involved was at first a worry due to the offence, but it has turned out to be a godsend with all the support'*.

The DCYJS Partnership Strategic Priorities for 2025/26 are:

- Continuing to divert children from the formal justice system.
- Reducing over-representation of minority groups.
- Improving education outcomes.
- Earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs for children at risk of school exclusion.
- Increasing public awareness and confidence in work undertaken by children to repair the harm from their offence.

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

2. Introduction, vision, strategy, and local context

Foreword

This document is the Youth Justice Strategic Plan for the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service (DCYJS) for 2025/26. It sets out the key priorities and targets for the service for the next 12 months as required by the Crime & Disorder Act 1998. This Plan adheres to the Youth Justice Board's document 'Youth Justice Plans: Guidance for Youth Justice Services'.

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

The Youth Justice Strategic Plan:

- summarises the DCYJS structure, governance and partnership arrangements.
- outlines the resources available to the DCYJS.
- reviews achievements and developments during 2024/25.
- identifies emerging issues and describes the partnership's priorities.
- sets out our priorities and actions for improving youth justice outcomes this year.

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

Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service Statement of Purpose

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

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

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

Who We Are and What We Do

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

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

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

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

We contact all victims of crimes committed by the children we work with. We offer those victims the chance to take part in restorative justice processes so we can help to repair the harm they have experienced.

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

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

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

Local Context

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

Dorset Council covers a large geographical, predominantly rural area with market towns and a larger urban area in Weymouth and Portland. Dorset Council has a population of about 385,000 (Dorset Council 'State of Population' 2023).

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole together form a conurbation with a population of 404,500 (ONS 2023 mid-year estimates).

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

The following table provides comparative demographic information about young people in both local authorities at the start of 2025. Fuller versions of this data, including data source information can be found in Appendix 3:

COMPARATIVE DATA FOR 10–17 YEAR-OLDS

(10-17 yrs.)	BCP	DORSET
Number of Children	35,208	33,694
Male (%) Female (%) ¹	51 49	51 49
Pupils eligible for FSM (%)	20.5	22
Pupils with SEN Support (%)	14.3	14.6
Pupils with an EHCP (%) ²	5.2	6.7
Pupils from black and ethnic backgrounds (%) ³	15.9	5.6
Children living in poverty after housing costs (%) ⁴	25	25.7

SAFEGUARDING

(10-17 yrs.)	BCP	DORSET
Number of Children in Need	531	562
Male (%)	58	50.5
Female (%)	42	48.9
Indeterminate(%)	0	0.4
Number of children with a child protection plan	203	100
Number of children in care	376	315
Male (%)	58.7	59.7
Female (%)	41.0	40.3
Indeterminate(%)	0.3	0

Number of children at risk of exploitation

Significant	18	12
Moderate	41	30
Emerging	35	20

Although the two local authorities differ in geographical size and demography, they have similar population sizes for 10-17 year-olds. Dorset Council has slightly higher rates of children eligible for free school meals and slightly higher rates of children identified as having special educational needs and disabilities. 1,110 children aged 10-17 in the BCP Council area (3.2%) have an allocated social worker, compared to 977 children in the Dorset Council area (2.9%).

The proportion of 10-17 year-olds identifying as being from non-white ethnicities is higher in BCP Council (15.9%) than in Dorset Council (5.6%).

3. Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements

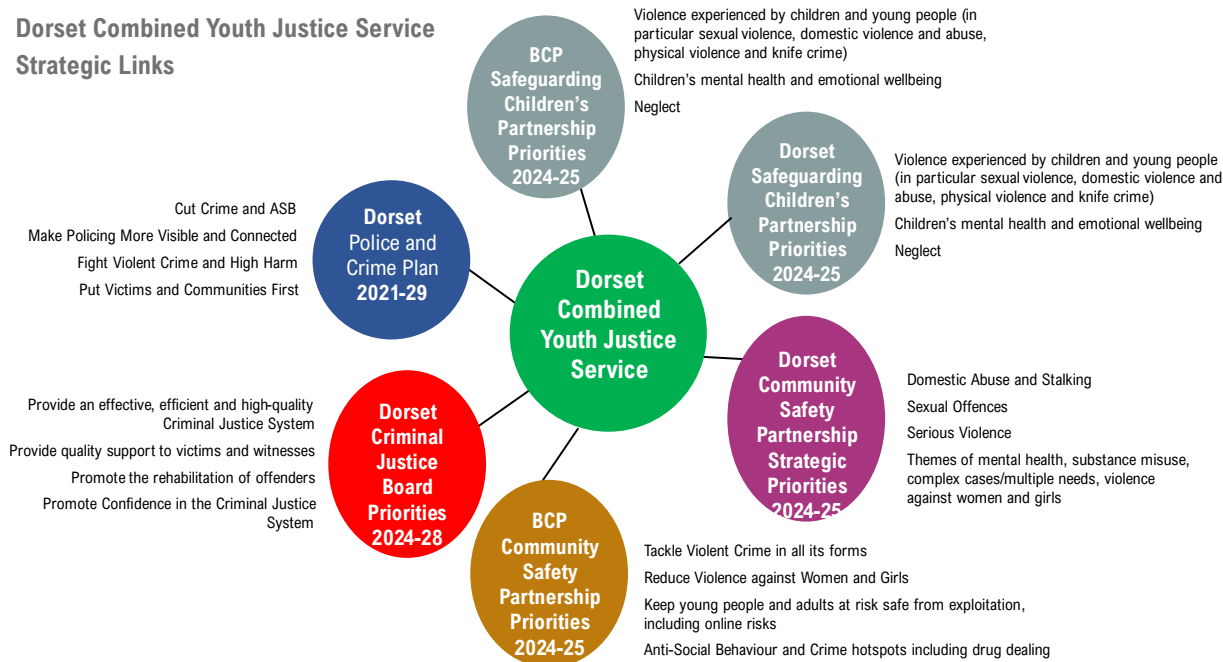
The work of the Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service is managed strategically by a Partnership Board. The Partnership Board consists of senior representatives of the statutory partner organisations, together with other relevant local partners.

Membership:

- Dorset Council (chair)
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (vice-chair)
- Dorset Police

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

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



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

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

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

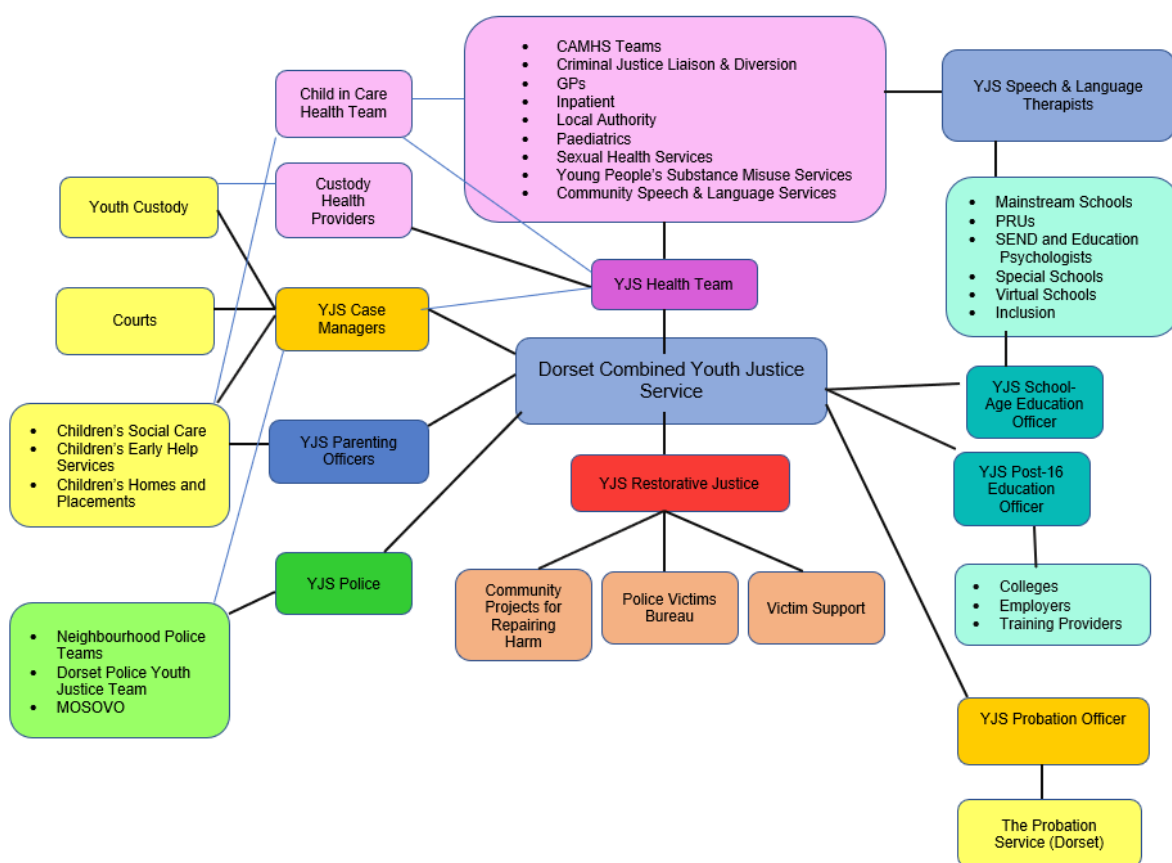
The Partnership Board also provides oversight and governance for local multi-agency protocols in respect of the criminalisation of children in care and the detention of children in police custody. The DCYJS Manager chairs multi-agency operational groups for each protocol and reports on progress to the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

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

Appendix One includes the structure chart for DCYJS and structure charts showing where the YJS sits in each local authority.

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

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



4. UPDATE ON THE PREVIOUS YEAR

4.1. Progress on priorities in last year's plan

Our strategic priorities for 2024-25 are listed below with a brief summary of progress made:

Continue to reduce the rate of children entering the justice system:

- There was a 1.9% reduction in the rate of first-time entrants in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. There has been a 42% reduction in the rate of first-time entrants since 2019/20.
- Use of local authority workers, YJS workers, a Restorative Justice Practitioner and a Speech and Language Therapist to divert children from the justice system, under the Ministry of Justice 'Turnaround' programme.
- Consolidating the use of the police crime disposal option 'Outcome 22' for children with low level offences, as an alternative to a formal justice outcome.
- Transition plan implemented into the new Turnaround arrangements for 2025/26.
- Creation and implementation of the 'Re-Engage' programme, a two-year scheme from summer 2024 to offer speech and language assessments and support for children at risk of school exclusion.

Continue to address over-representation of minority groups in the youth justice system:

- Local children from minority ethnicities are not over-represented in the youth justice system in terms of overall numbers, although there is evidence that children from these groups are more likely to reach the court order stage of the justice system.
- There has been a reduction in recent years in the proportion of black and mixed heritage boys among local children receiving custodial sentences.
- Dorset Police report annually to the YJS Partnership Board on the local use of stop and search and of strip search for children.
- The DCYJS Head of Service represents DCYJS and other local YJS Managers in the Local Criminal Justice Boards' 'Wessex Disproportionality Group'.
- YJS performance data reporting is broken down by disadvantaged groups to check for any over-representation.
- Data analysis has shown that children in care are over-represented amongst children in the local youth justice system. The YJS Partnership Board initiated work in 2024 to improve multi-agency support for children in care in the justice system, and to prevent other children in care from entering the justice system.
- Analysis of YJS Speech and Language assessments, explained later in this document, has improved understanding and responses to children's specific communication needs.
- The 2024 thematic case audit focused on YJS work with girls.

Reduce extra-familial harm and serious violence:

- There has been a reduction in both local authorities in the number of children entering the justice system for an offence of violence against the person.
- DCYJS has contributed to Serious Violence Duty activities in both local authorities, including needs assessment and action planning, to support the multi-agency response to youth violence.
- Actions have been implemented from the 2023 case audit of YJS work with children who committed weapon offences.
- A quarterly 'weapon-related offending' group has been established for YJS practitioners and managers, to share good practice and learning, with inputs from colleagues in Dorset Police. A similar group for Harmful Sexual Behaviour continues to operate.
- The YJS health team has provided support to YJS and other colleagues working with children identified as requiring 'risk support', including Enhanced Case Management trauma formulations led by the DCYJS Psychologist and SAVRY assessments (Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth).
- DCYJS managers and practitioners have participated in partnership work in each local authority to develop and consolidate arrangements for addressing extra-familial harm,

including active contributions to Dorset Council's weekly Extra-Familial Harm panels and BCP Council's fortnightly Missing, Exploited and Trafficked panel.

- The YJS Head of Service has met regularly with senior colleagues from Dorset Police and the Crown Prosecution Service to try to speed up outstanding investigations into alleged violent and sexual offences by children. Progress in this important area remains slow.

Improve education outcomes for children in the youth justice system:

- Funding has been secured to continue the Discover You project at Upton Country Park. The project supports children and young people who are not in employment, education or training. Young people have accessed online learning, gained AQA awards, worked with the Ranger on conservation volunteering activities, engaged in career planning, designed and built animal habitats, bird feeders and play resources for younger children.
- The use of AQA awards to certificate learning by young people during YJS activities has been expanded.
- A weekly ETE Allocations meeting has been established, to prioritise work and to help ensure that support is provided to children without suitable education.

Continue to improve the quality of YJS practice:

- The YJB's new 'Prevention and Diversion' assessment tool has been implemented, with a series of team workshops to improve the quality of YJS assessments and plans with children.
- 'Child First' practice has been embedded through the workshops on assessment and planning, and by aligning individuals' appraisal objectives with the 4 tenets of Child First practice.
- Plans to develop the use of feedback from young people who transfer from the YJS to Probation have been delayed by the continuing vacancy for the seconded Probation Officer post in the YJS.
- The team has developed more options for children to repair the harm caused by weapon and drug offences.

4.2. Performance

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

DCYJS was also inspected in February 2025 as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on 'Out of Court Disposals'. Informal feedback was provided after the inspection, identifying examples of good practice which may be included in the national report in the summer of 2025.

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

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

The YJB publish quarterly performance data for youth justice services, compiled nationally, in relation to these three indicators. The information reported below is drawn from the data published in March 2025 for the period ending December 2024.

First Time Entrants

A 'First Time Entrant' is a child receiving a formal criminal justice outcome for the first time. A Youth Caution, a Youth Conditional Caution or a court outcome count as a formal criminal justice outcome. There are also options for diverting children from the justice system, by using informal justice outcomes, which do not make the child a First Time Entrant.

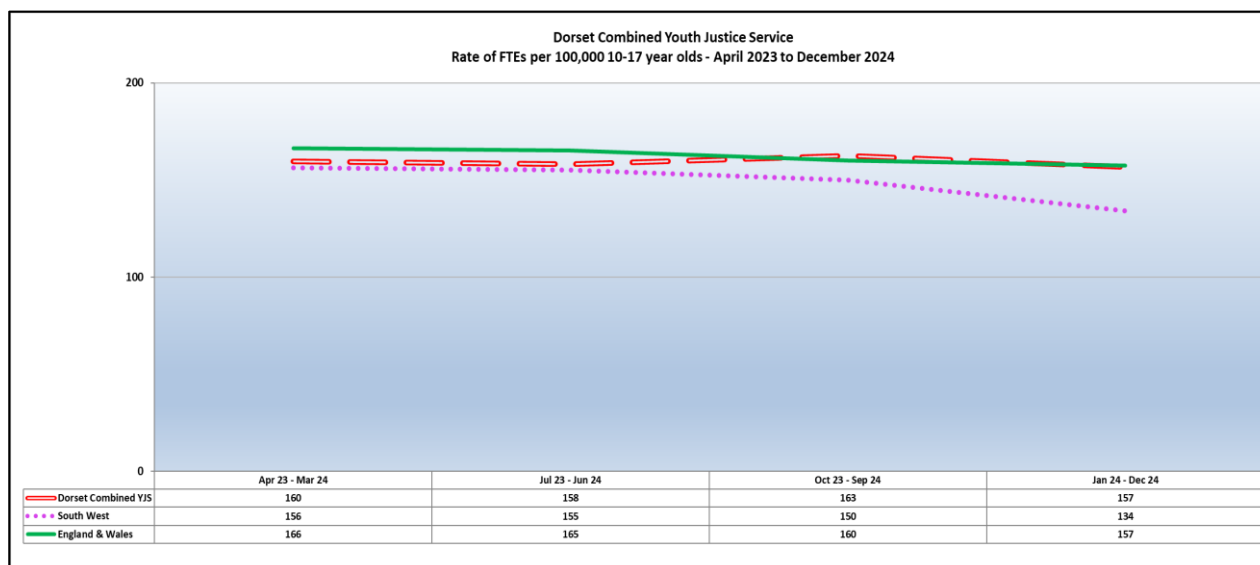
Dorset Police, DCYJS and other children's services work closely together to decide the appropriate outcome for a child who has committed a criminal offence. Whenever possible we seek to use an informal option which does not criminalise the child. It is recognised that receiving a formal justice outcome is in itself detrimental for children. Verbal feedback from HMI Probation, after their inspection of our work with children on Out of Court Disposals, noted that *"There is a clear focus and shared commitment across the partnership both strategically and operationally to divert children from the criminal justice system wherever this is possible"*.

National Performance Data

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

In the past, DCYJS consistently had a higher rate of First Time Entrants than the national and regional averages. It is pleasing to note that there has been a consistent and sustained reduction in local First Time Entrants, with DCYJS now having a lower rate than the national average.

The following chart shows the last four quarters of national First Time Entrants data, with a consistent rate of around 160 First Time Entrants per 100,000 10-17 year-olds. This compares to a rate of 234 First Time Entrants per 100,000 10-17 year-olds in the year to December 2022.



Local Performance Data

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

Year	BCP First Time Entrants	Dorset First Time Entrants	Total DCYJS First Time Entrants	% Difference from previous year
2019-20	104	78	182	
2020-21	78	48	126	-30.8%
2021-22	77	47	124	-1.6%
2022-23	79	39	118	-4.8%
2023-24	52	56	108	-8.5%
2024-25	57	49	106	-1.9%

There was a notable reduction in First Time Entrants in BCP in 2023-24, which was sustained in 2024-25.

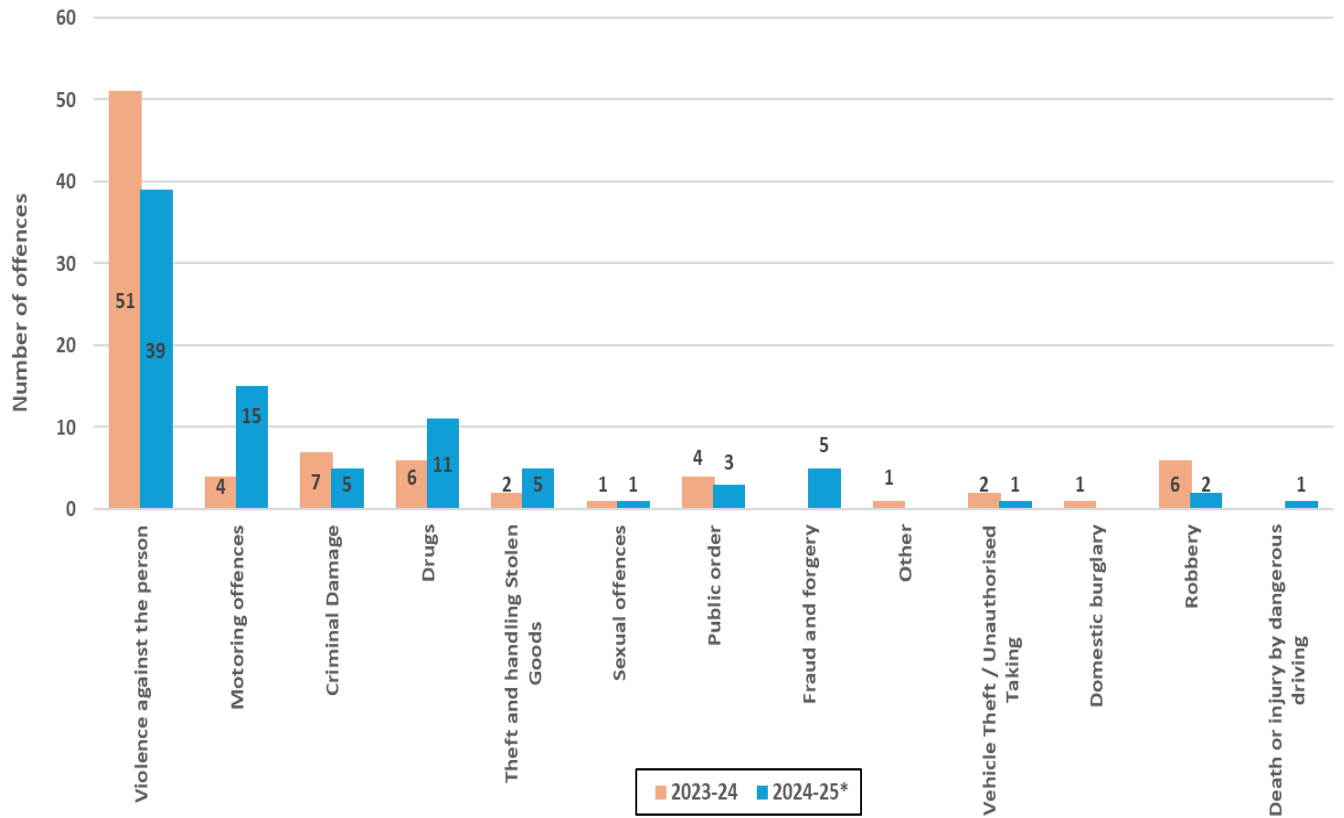
The increase in Dorset First-Time Entrants in 2023-24 reflected a marked increase in April and May 2023 relating to older offences which could have been dealt with during the previous year. It is pleasing to see the number of Dorset children entering the justice system dropping again in 2024-25.

Information about the ethnicity and gender of First Time Entrants is included later in this document, in section 5.1 on 'Over-Representation'.

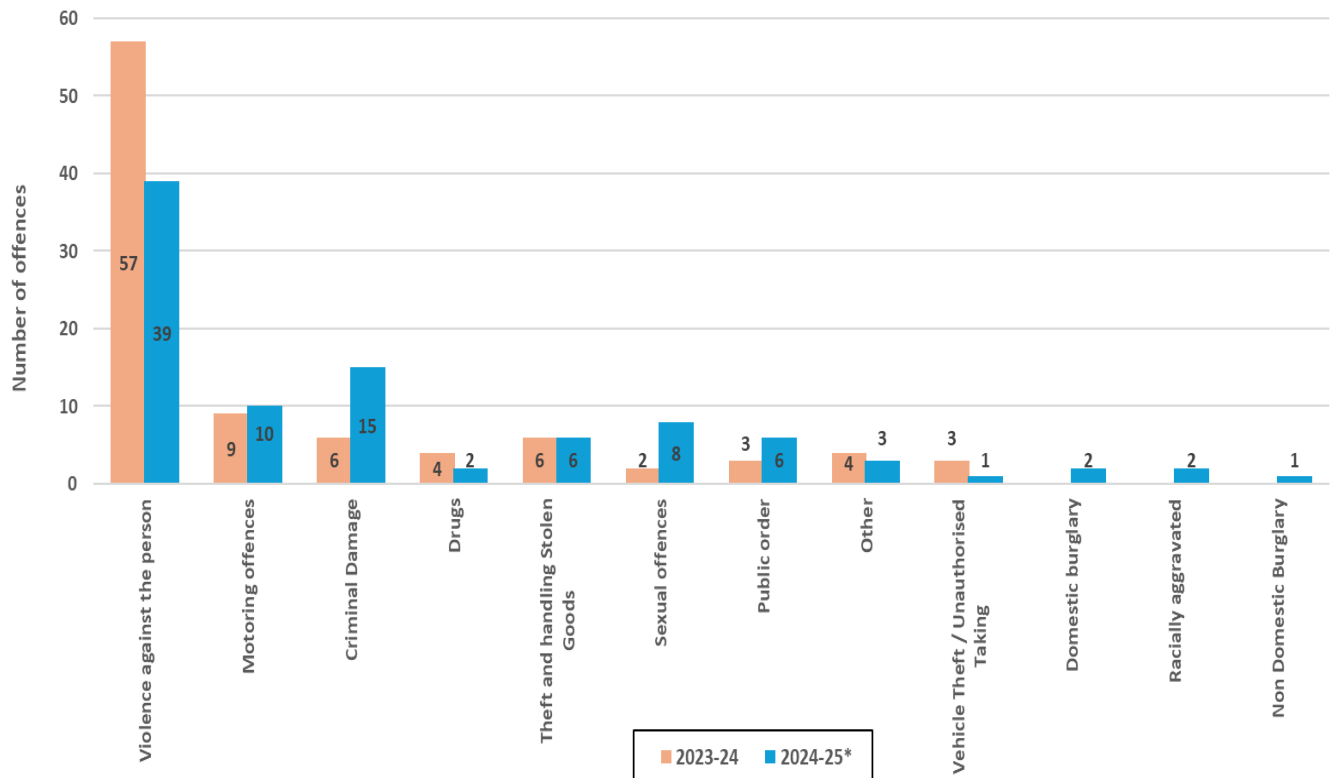
Offences Leading to Children Entering the Justice System

Decisions about whether to offer a diversion option, instead of a caution or court appearance, depend to some extent on the nature of the offence committed by the child. The following charts shows the offences which led to children in each local authority becoming First Time Entrants during the past year:

Offences resulting in BCP Children becoming First Time Entrants
Comparison of 2023/4 and 2024/5* (to end of Feb 25)



Offences resulting in Dorset Children becoming First Time Entrants
Comparison of 2023/4 and 2024/5* (to end of Feb 25)



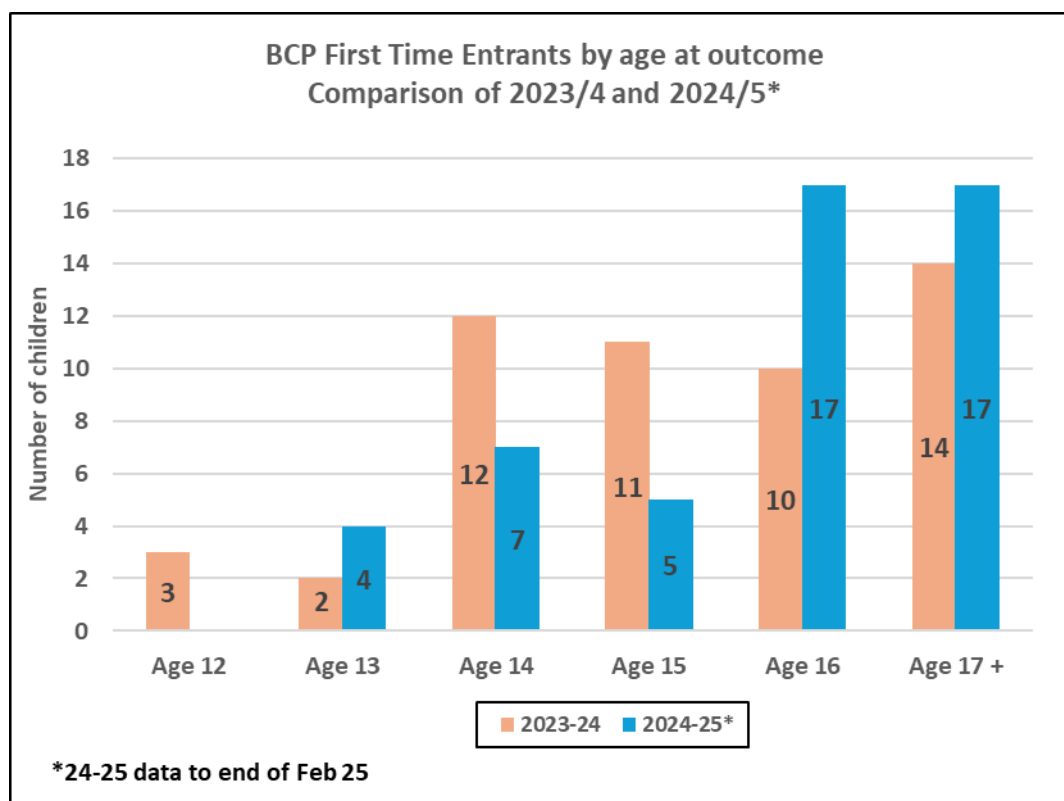
Offences involving possession or use of a weapon, or assaults on emergency workers, are included in the 'Violence against the Person' category and in almost all cases result in a caution or court disposal. Diversion options for these offence types are only considered in exceptional circumstances. There has been a reduction in both local authorities in the number of Violence against the Person resulting in a child entering the justice system.

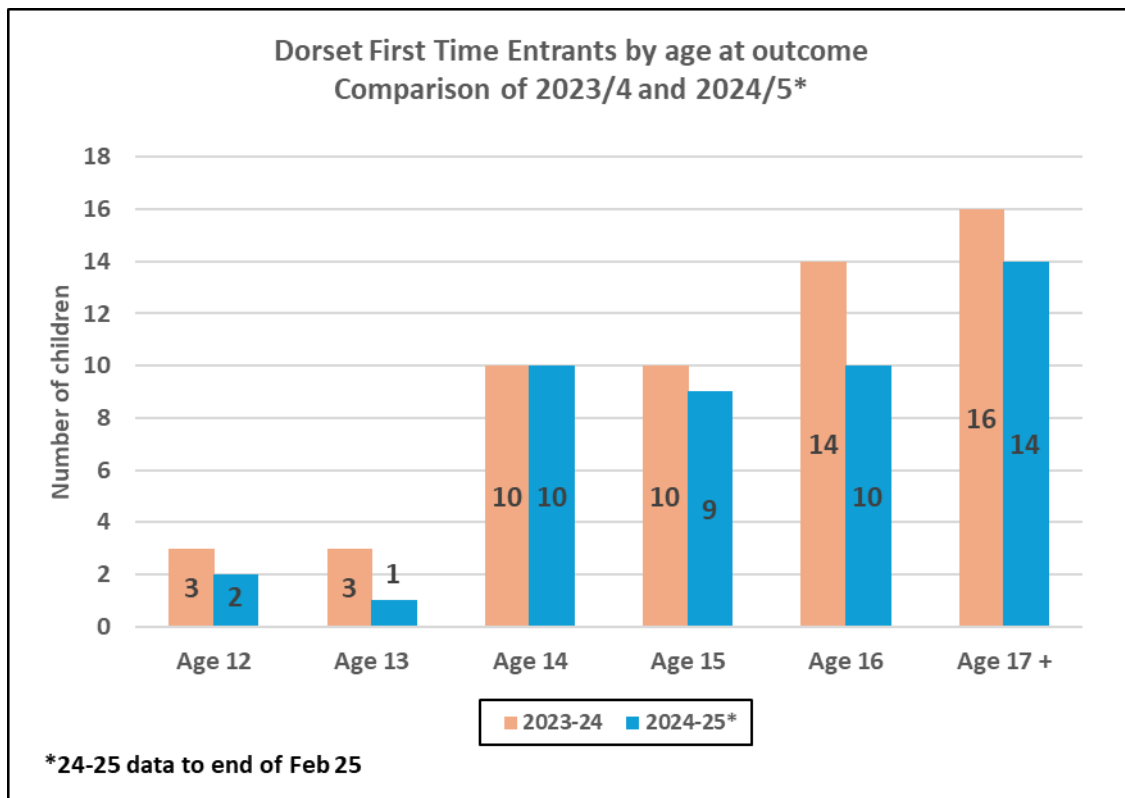
Some children are counted as entering the justice system for motoring offences which result in a court appearance for points to be added to the young person's driver's licence. Speed awareness courses are only available to people aged 18+, which means that a 17 year-old who commits a speeding offence is taken to court to be fined. In our view, such behaviour should not be viewed as criminal activity which counts as entering the justice system. DCYJS and Dorset Police are working locally and regionally, with support from the Youth Justice Board, to agree diversion options for young people with motoring offences.

Age of Children Entering the Justice System

Previous analysis has shown that children who enter the justice system before the age of 14 are likely to have complex needs and may go on to commit further, more serious offences. During 2023-24, a total of 11 children under the age of 14 entered the justice system across our two local authorities. This year, 2024-25, saw a total of 8 children under the age of 14 who entered the justice system, indicating a reassuring reduction in young First-Time Entrants.

The following charts show the ages of First-Time Entrants in each local authority in the past two years. The age of First-Time Entrants in the BCP Council area has risen in 2024-25:



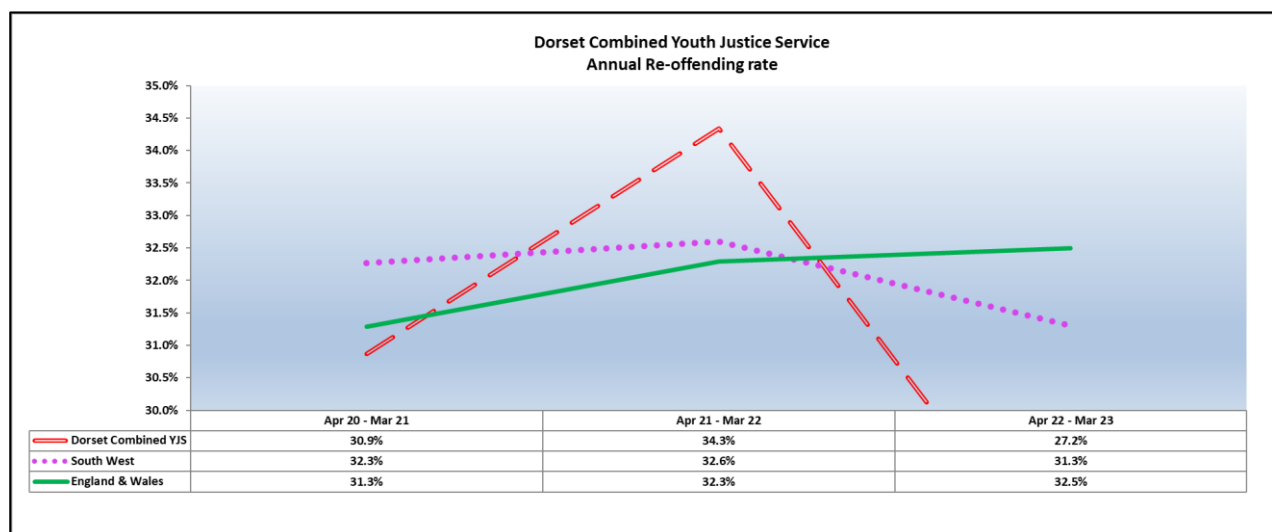


Rate of Proven Reoffending

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

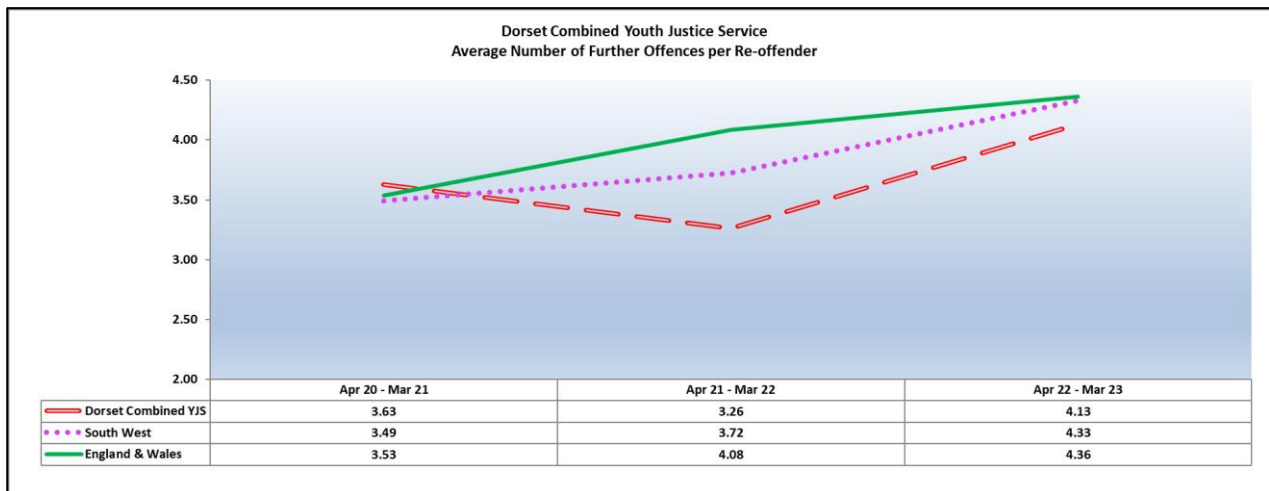
Reoffending data is necessarily delayed in order to allow time to see if the child is reconvicted and for that later outcome to be recorded. The following data therefore relates to children with whom the service worked up to March 2023.

Reoffending rate (Reoffenders/Number in cohort)



The binary reoffending rate for the most recent year, to March 2023, shows a significant reduction on previous years, with DCYJS performance exceeding the regional and national averages.

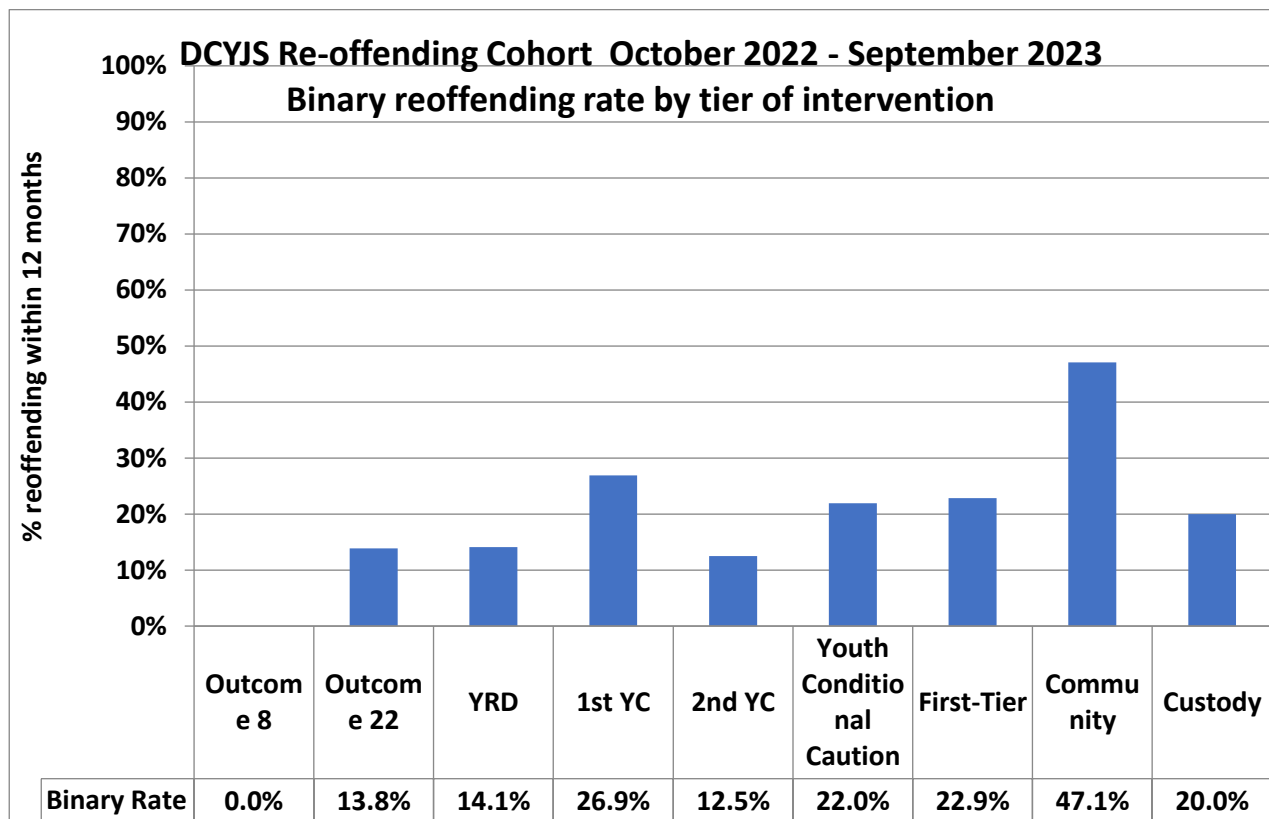
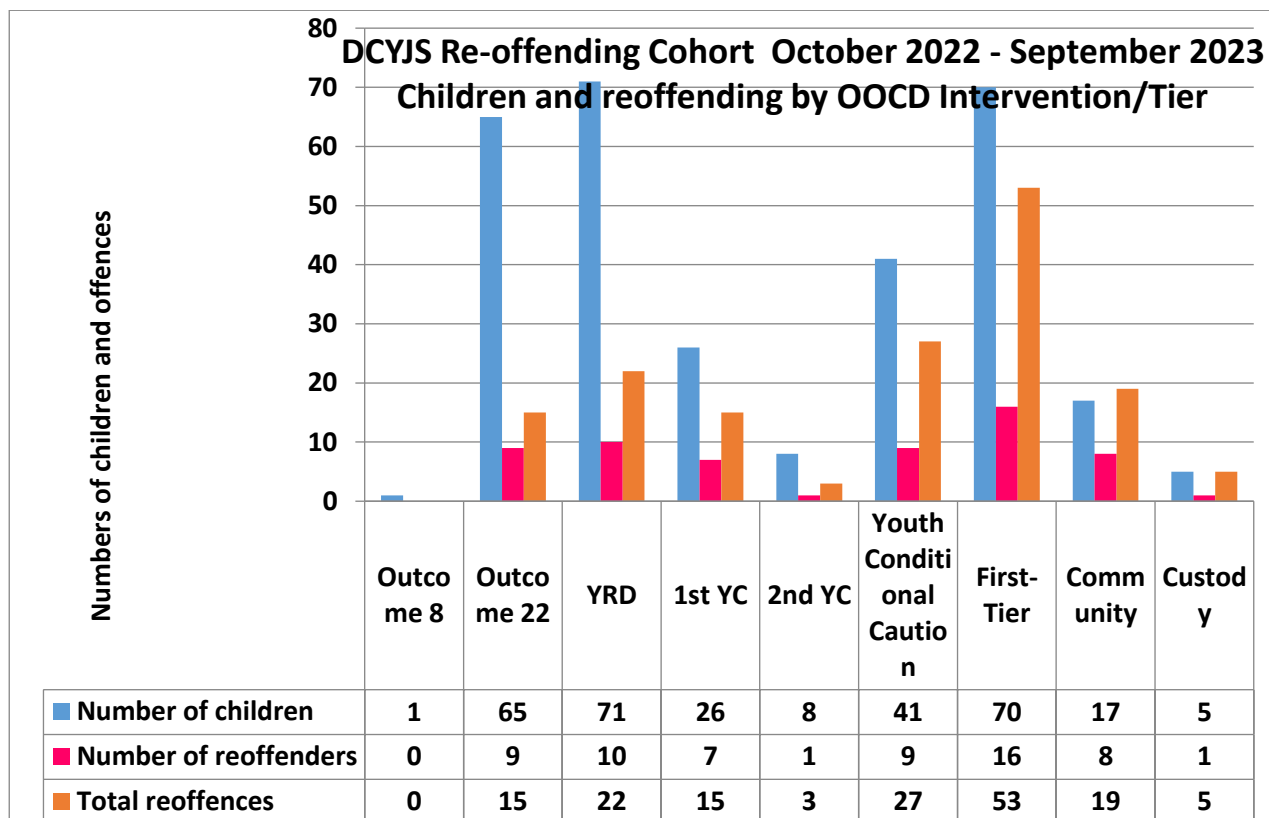
Reoffences/Reoffenders



There has been an increase in the average number of offences per reoffender, but DCYJS has remained below the regional and national averages for this measure.

Local data, stored on the DCYJS case management system, can also be scrutinised to show information about reoffending. Our most recent analysis looked at children on the DCYJS caseload between October 2022 and September 2023, giving us a more detailed understanding of reoffending by local children

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



The local reoffending data also shows that:

- 15 and 16 year-olds are more likely to reoffend than other age groups.

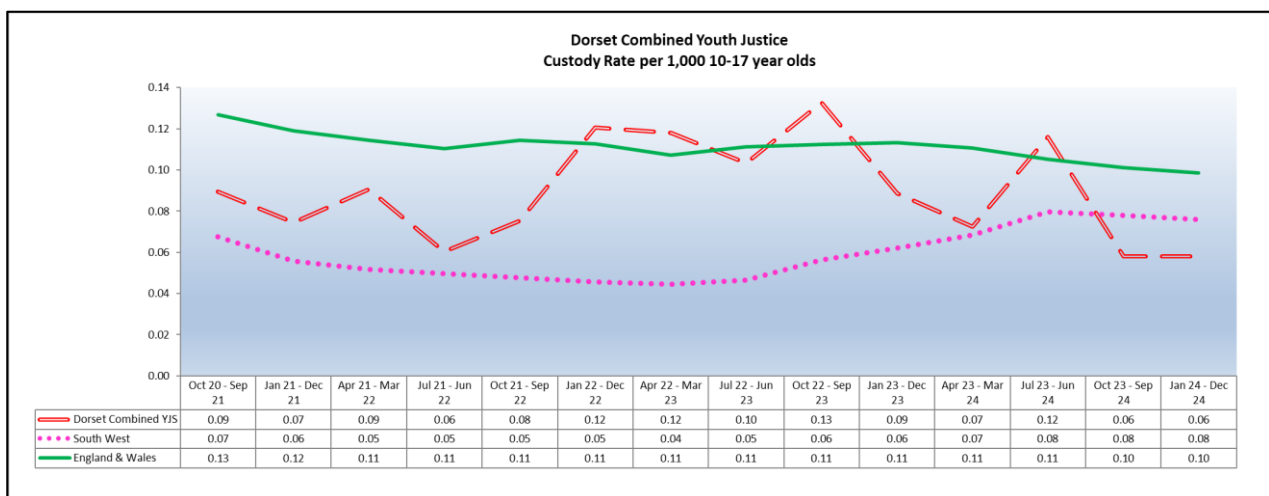
- Boys are more likely to reoffend than girls.
- Black and mixed heritage children show a higher reoffending rate than white children, but the numbers of black and mixed heritage children are low, meaning each child has a greater impact on the percentage rates.
- Children in the BCP Council area had a higher reoffending rate than children in the Dorset Council area.
- Children who were currently in care were more likely to reoffend than children who had never been in care.
- Children who committed burglary, robbery, thefts or vehicle thefts had higher rates of reoffending than children who committed other types of offence.
- 38% of reoffenders committed less serious further offences, 39% committed offences of the same seriousness and 23% committed more serious offences.

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

Use of Custodial Sentences

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

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



During the most recent period on the above chart, January 2024 – December 2024, a total of 6 children and young people received custodial sentences (4 from BCP Council, 2 from Dorset Council).

The trauma-informed approach to youth justice work encourages us to ask “what happened to you?” rather than “what’s wrong with you?”. In this context, it is interesting to look at some of the common experiences of these 6 children and young people.

One of these young people was not known to DCYJS. He entered a Not Guilty plea as a child but was tried, convicted and sentenced after he turned 18. We do not therefore hold information about his past experiences and needs.

Analysis of the other 5 children and young people who received custodial sentences in 2024 shows that:

- All 5 were male.
- 4 of the 5 defined their ethnicity as White British, one identified as Mixed Heritage.
- At the time of sentence, 1 was aged 18, 2 were aged 17, and 2 were aged 16.
- All 5 were a Child in Care or a Care Experienced Young Person.
- All 5 had been identified as being at risk of harm from criminal exploitation. 4 of the 5 had been referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and the other was assessed as being at significant risk of extra-familial harm.
- All 5 were identified as having Speech, Language and Communication Needs, following assessment by the DCYJS Speech and Language Therapist.
- All 5 had been permanently excluded from school.
- 4 out of 5 had an Education, Health and Care Plan.
- All 5 had had past contact with CAMHS, with a common experience of childhood trauma, and evidence of neurodiversity amongst some of these children.

The pattern of being a Child in Care, having experienced child exploitation, having been excluded from school, having speech, language and communication needs, and health needs related to past trauma and neurodiversity, shows the need for effective multi-agency working. DCYJS works closely with other children's services to provide community sentences which have the confidence of our local courts so that custodial sentences are only used as a last resort, for the most serious or persistent offending.

Section 6.1 of this document provides further analysis of the over-representation of Children in Care in the local youth justice system, and actions being taken.

[New Youth Justice Key Performance Indicators](#)

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

- Accommodation – the percentage of children in suitable accommodation.
- Education, training and employment (ETE) – the percentage of children attending a suitable ETE arrangement.
- SEND – the percentage of children with SEND who are in suitable ETE with a current, formal learning plan in place.
- Mental healthcare and emotional wellbeing – the percentage of children identified as needing an intervention to improve their mental health or emotional wellbeing and the percentage being offered and attending interventions.
- Substance Use – the percentage of children identified as needing an intervention to address substance misuse and the percentage being offered and attending interventions.
- Out of Court Disposals – the percentage of out of court disposals that are completed or not completed.
- Management Board attendance – the attendance of senior representatives from partner agencies and if partners contribute data from their services to identify ethnic and racial disproportionality.
- Wider services – the percentage of YJS children who are currently on an Early Help plan, on a Child Protection Plan, classified as a Child in Need or a Child in Care.
- Serious Violence – the rates of children convicted for a serious violence offence on the YJS caseload.
- Victims – the percentage of victims who consent to be contacted by the YJS; of those, the percentage who are engaged with about restorative justice opportunities, asked their views prior to out of court disposal decision-making and planning for statutory court orders, provided with information about the progress of the child's case (when requested) and provided with information on appropriate support services (when requested).

The new KPIs have required significant additional work to adapt recording systems and to adjust recording practices. The consistency, accuracy and usefulness of this data remains a work in progress. The YJB stated in March 2025 that the data collected nationally in 2023/24 and 2024/25 is 'low quality and cannot be used for analysis, reporting, and decision-making'. It is hoped that the extra activity associated with these additional measures will eventually prove to be useful.

4.3. Risks and issues

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

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

Issue/risk facing DCYJS	Actions being taken in response
Delays in the youth justice system, often arising from prolonged police investigations, make it harder to work effectively with children to prevent future offending and harder to provide timely support to victims and to engage them in Restorative Justice.	Monitoring instances of children released under investigation or on bail, to consider voluntary support options for the child during the investigation period. Work with Dorset Police and the CPS to prioritise, progress and resolve investigations for children on a case-by-case basis.
Funding and resources – real terms reductions since DCYJS was formed in 2015, no budget uplift to fund annual staff pay awards, uncertainty about future funding.	The combined service, working across two local authorities, provides resilience and savings of scale which has enabled the service to maintain high practice standards in the context of reducing resources. Some staffing reductions were required in 2024-25. Further reductions may be needed in 2025-26 if budgets remain frozen.
Permanent exclusions from school, and difficulties finding suitable alternative provision.	Re-Engage project to provide Speech and Language assessments and support to schools for children at risk of school exclusion before contact with the youth justice system.
Additional data recording and reporting requirements for the YJB KPIs and the Turnaround programme coinciding with a reduction in the YJS staffing resource for performance data.	Revisit staffing capacity for performance data, ensure efficient and accurate data recording procedures.
The YJS is likely to be required to vacate its current office premises in Bournemouth and its reparation/child contact premises in Dorchester during 2025. This could affect the work that can be done with children and the quality of joint work by team members.	YJS managers are seeking assurance from local authority facilities managers in BCP and Dorset that suitable alternative accommodation will be located.

5. PLANS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

5.1. 'Child First' practice

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

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

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

The Child First approach has four tenets, listed below.

The ABCD of Child First practice	Examples of how DCYJS implements this in our work
As children: recognise how children are developmentally different from adults and require different support.	<i>DCYJS uses Speech and Language assessments and trauma formulations to help identify each child's communication needs and developmental stage and the appropriate support for the child.</i>
Building pro-social identity: promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop a pro-social identity, focusing on positive child outcomes rather than just trying to manage offending.	<i>DCYJS work with Upton Country Park to provide the 'Discover You' project, aimed at building children's skills, confidence and employability. Positive outcomes from the project include a child who has become a volunteer with Upton Country Park. A new Youth Justice Activities Coordinator joined us in February 2025 to develop our positive activities and build a stronger child voice into our service design and delivery.</i>
Collaborating with children: involve children meaningfully to encourage their investment, engagement and social inclusion.	<i>Children are actively involved in developing the plans for our work with them, as part of the DCYJS commitment to working restoratively. Case records are written 'to the child' to be more inclusive and to help shift the worker's perspective. Training for the team is currently focusing on how to collaborate with children to agree their intervention plan.</i>
Diverting from stigma: promote supportive diversion from the criminal justice system where possible, or minimising stigma within it, as we know that stigma causes further offending	<i>The 'Turnaround' programme has helped us to embed the use of Outcome 22 to divert children from formal justice outcomes. YJS Speech and Language assessments are written on Dorset HealthCare documentation, without reference to the YJS, to avoid stigmatising the child.</i>

Appraisals objectives for YJS practitioners and managers for 2025/26 were structured around the four tenets of Child First practice, to help embed these principles in our day-to-day work.

The strategic priorities in the DCYJS Youth Justice Plan for 2025/26 are aligned with the Child First principles, reflecting work to strengthen the local implementation of the four tenets of Child First practice.

Voice of the child

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

The team's Speech and Language Therapists complete assessments so that we can adapt our work to each child's communication needs. The Speech and Language Therapists also provide advice to colleagues in the YJS about how to work with each child. The following example illustrates how this can work in practice:

A YJS case manager had been struggling to engage a child who has communication needs. The case manager asked the Speech and Language Therapist for suggestions about alternative ways of working with the child. They agreed to try a session with a video clip and a cartooning exercise, to shift from language-based interventions to something more visual. The new approach was successful, as shown in this extract from the child's case record:

You watched a TikTok video of an incident where two men were arguing and one man goes to grab a bottle, the video cuts off before the you see the bottle being used. Your mum was present and consented to you watching the video. You drew a comic strip of the video and spoke about the behaviour, why it happened, what was happening, body language and what you think the consequences were of the behaviour.

You engaged well in this session, you previously were not talking to me nor were you showing an interest in the work we were doing, however, this particular style of work seemed to help you engage you in the session, you asked questions and actively took part drawing the comic strip, rewatching the video to make sure you were remembering it correctly and when I said that we were finished, you were surprised. It is positive you took such an active role in your session, you appeared to enjoy this and wanted all your sessions to be like this.

Another child had struggled to express how they experience life as someone with autism. Their case manager asked them to write about it, encouraging them to have confidence in expressing themselves. The child produced a striking and insightful description of their perspective which they read out to their parents and the case manager. Their account was subsequently edited to create this poem:

I'm Paradoxical

Autism is like a lonely boat at sea, navigating on its own;
Autism faces challenges in social interactions,
Communication, and sensory processing.
Daily routines can be demanding,
and sensitivity to sensory stimuli may lead to overwhelming experiences.

ADHD is depressing,
it's a mix of everything.
You will fit in everywhere, but nowhere.
You are extremely arrogant, but very much aware of your own faults

Capable of everything, yet not motivated to do a thing
Witty and charismatic, but have a low tolerance for BS people.
Great with advice but follow none of it.
You're most likely a genius but have trouble handling your emotions.

You are an extrovert, who needs a lot of personal space.
You love being different but hate being misunderstood.
Have brilliant ideas, but lack the patience to follow through with them.
You have more interests than anyone you know, but will get bored of every one of them.
You easily understand the thoughts of others, but find it hard to translate your own.

Surprisingly compassionate, but seemingly very cold.
We make it look fun, but it's really not.
People judge me before knowing me
My disabilities are hidden
so people just think I'm acting that way
which makes me more angry.

I'm paradoxical,
I like to be happy
But I think about sad things all the time
I don't really like myself
But I love the person I have become
I say I don't care
But I care too much - Deep into my bones

I crave attention
Yet, I reject everything that comes my way
I healed people
But I broke my own heart trying to fix them
I love to listen
But never tell them what's inside me.

Autism is part of who I am,
not a barrier to who I can become.
I may be as mysterious as the ocean,
but within the depths of my mind,
waves of brilliance and success
continuously ebb and flow.

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

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

Examples of recent comments from service users include:

Working with C is really helpful and I feel like a weight has been lifted.

We have talked about quite a lot, I really like J. She just listens, sometimes when I have had workers before it feels like a job, with J I feel like she actually cares. She calls me to check in on me and she keeps my mum updated too.

It has been really eye-opening. My original thought was that social services was a bad thing but it has changed my view because it has been supportive. It has been good for her because her worker is an open-minded person and has not judged her. It has been relaxed and here to help her rather than to make her feel bad

I met with you at your panel meeting today, thank you for allowing me to attend, it was good to put a face to your name. You told me that the style of your panel suited you and you felt comfortable with panel members being in the room and you coming in with your parents. You also said that the panel members asked if you would like to write your contract, you said they could but you told them what to write. This is good to hear that your voice has been captured. You and your parents told me that L has been great with you. She has helped you to understand the process, helped you to think about the impact your behaviour had on the victim and your parents too. You said that you liked L and you trusted her.

Each year the YJS undertakes a case audit on a priority area of YJS work. In 2024 the audit focused on our work with girls. As part of the audit, we talked with some of the children and parents in the audit sample.

One of the themes to emerge from the audit was the impact of delays in the justice system. One girl commented that:

Work with YJS was good, but it would have been more helpful before when I actually needed it. I had already made loads of changes myself. The gap was too long, it was two years between the offence and the matter going to court.

5.2. Resources and Services

The funding contributions to the DCYJS partnership budget are listed in Appendix Two, showing the figures for 2024/25. Indicative budget contributions for 2025/26 from local partners have been agreed. Local authority contributions will remain frozen at the 2022/23 levels, with no uplift to meet the cost of annual pay awards. The Youth Justice Grant allocation for DCYJS in 2025/26 has not yet been announced, although the YJB shared information in late March 2025 to indicate that the national Youth Justice Grant will be increased by 1.46%.

All local authority staff in DCYJS are employed by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council. Other DCYJS staff are employed by Dorset Police, the Probation Service (Dorset) and Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust. A DCYJS Structure Chart is included in Appendix One, showing the posts provided through our partnership resources. DCYJS has a strong multi-agency and multi-disciplinary identity, meeting the staffing requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998).

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

During 2024/25 short-term funding was also provided through the Ministry of Justice Turnaround programme, to enable additional work with children on the cusp of the youth justice system. Funding was also received from the Home Office Immediate Justice pilot scheme, to augment work with children who received Out of Court Disposals for offences which caused harm to local communities. The Ministry of Justice has announced that funding will be provided in 2025/26 to continue Turnaround work, albeit the funding has been reduced from £182,595 in 2024/25 to £123,184 in 2025/26.

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

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

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

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

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

5.3. YJS Partnership Board Development

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

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

The YJS Partnership Board has an established cycle of performance review, strategic oversight and forward planning. During the past year, the Board's activities have included scrutiny of the local use of stop-search and strip-search of children, decisions on the future delivery of diversion

activities after the initial Turnaround programme, and action to address the over-representation of Children in Care in our youth justice system.

The YJS Partnership Board's plans for 2025-26 include increased oversight of our work with victims, to ensure we are compliant with the new youth justice inspection criteria.

5.4. Workforce Development

The YJS is committed to good practice, using staff supervision, peer support, team workshops and external training courses to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence of our workers. Informal feedback from HMI Probation, after their recent inspection of our work with children on Out of Court Disposals, noted that *"Staff are highly motivated and build strong relationships with children and families, as reflected in the feedback received from children, parents, and carers. YJS staff are skilled, knowledgeable, and feel well supported. There is a strong capacity for reflection at all levels of the service."*

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

Team members will continue to attend training and development activities in these approaches in 2025/26. A Motivational Interviewing Development Group was established in 2024, facilitated by an expert external trainer. This will continue in 2025/26.

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

During 2024/25 a quarterly YJS Weapons Offences Practitioner's Group was established. This initiative derived partly from a YJS multi-agency case audit in 2023 of our work with children who have committed offences involving weapons.

The YJB mandated the use, from April 2024, of the 'Prevention and Diversion' assessment tool for children receiving Out of Court Disposals. The YJS has held workshops with line managers and case managers throughout 2024/25 to support the implementation of this new assessment tool. This gave us an opportunity to embed Child First principles in working collaboratively with children during the assessment and planning phase.

Volunteers play an important role in the work of the YJS, especially as Referral Order community panel members. We appreciate their engagement during 2024/25 in several training sessions aimed at aligning our Referral Order panel meetings with Child First practice.

In addition to the core training courses, the service's development plans for 2025/26 require staff training in the following areas:

- Prevention and Diversion Assessment tool – improve the plans that are devised with children, with a focus on collaborative planning and exit planning.
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour – train the team's HSB workers in 'Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour'; commission an external consultant to run a session with the team's HSB workers on working with denial.
- Revise the training for new volunteers to emphasise Child First practice.

DCYJS also supports individual career progression plans for team members. Plans for 2025/26 include:

- a Youth Justice Worker continuing with his social work qualification through the Social Work Apprenticeship with BCP Council and Solent University.

- a Youth Justice Worker studying for the Level 5 Youth Justice Practitioner Apprenticeship.
- a Youth Justice Officer working towards her Practice Educator qualification.

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

5.5. Evidence-based practice, innovation and evaluation

Evidence shows that the key determinant for positive change is a pro-social relationship with a trusted adult. The primary focus for effective practice in DCYJS is therefore the quality of workers' relationships with children, alongside positive relationships within the team and with other professionals. The approach also builds on previous feedback from young people on the DCYJS caseload about what was most important to them in their experience of the service. The whole service training in 'Working Restoratively' in January 2024 was aimed at supporting this key aspect of our evidence-based work.

Employment and training support for 16-17 year-olds

The service has continued to focus on improving young people's employment and training prospects.

DCYJS partners with Upton Country Park to provide the 'Discover You' project. The project aims to improve young people's self-esteem, practical skills and employability, to increase their chances of accessing employment and training.

21 young people attended the project between September 2024 and March 2025. Some of the positive outcomes for these young people included:

- Access to online learning within different subject areas e.g. Food Hygiene, First Aid, Health & Safety in the workplace, Manual Handling, Customer Service, Fire Safety and Barista Training.
- AQA Certificated Learning –most young people complete around 5-10 awards, depending on how long they attend and what they engage in. Awards include Team Building, Employment and Training, Practical Tasks, Communication Skills.
- Work Experience options around Upton Country Park within the Welcome Centre and Café.
- Conservation Volunteering Activities – Working with the Ranger onsite to complete practical activities around the site like planting trees, taking out hedgerows, coppicing, painting, creating woodwork items, putting stag beetle loggers (different things available at different times of the year).
- Team Building – different opportunities like den building and orienteering.
- Life skills – budgeting/managing money, dealing with bills, communication skills.
- ETE and Careers – Careers Information Advice and Guidance – Career Action Planning, CV work, Applications for College and Jobs, Interview Skills.
- Other Support towards qualifications - CSCS Practice, Maths and English Assessments, and working towards exam readiness..
- Completing practical tasks for Upton Country Park, e.g. animal habitat, bird feeders, designing and building play resources for school/nursery groups, redesigning a bird screen and creating art work and bird facts to go on the completed bird screen.
- Raising money for charity by making items to sell at Upton Country Park, eg Halloween items, Christmas items, nature-themed items and outdoor objects such as planters, bird boxes, bug hotels, bird feeders.
- Development into mentoring opportunities for young people who continue to volunteer at Upton Country Park after attending the Discover You project.

The Discover You project received Lottery Heritage funding until March 2024. Other funding was used in 2024/25, including a contribution from the Immediate Justice pilot scheme. We are seeking funding to continue and develop the project in 2025/26.



Animal Habitat built by children on the Discover You project

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner also continued to provide funding for young people to work with training providers to gain their 'CSCS' card to increase their chances of work in the construction sector.

[Early identification of speech and language needs for children at risk of school exclusion](#)

Our local Youth Justice Partnership's strategic priorities include reducing school exclusions, to prevent offending, and meeting the speech, language and communication needs of children who may enter the youth justice system. The DCYJS Partnership Board allocated funding for a two-year project, known as 'Re-Engage', to identify and support the speech, language and communication needs of children at risk of school exclusion.

The Re-Engage project commenced in summer 2024, working with schools to focus on children in Key Stage 3 who are at risk of permanent exclusion and whose behaviour indicates a risk of future offending. The project is staffed by a Speech and Language Therapist and a Speech and Language Associate Practitioner. Their roles are to assess the communication needs of children who are at risk of school exclusion and to support schools to respond to the child's specific needs. Training sessions are also offered to schools as part of their staff development.

At the end of February 2025, halfway through the school year, 50 children had been referred to the project, from 18 schools across the Dorset and BCP Council areas. Assessments had been completed for 30 children. The results showed that 76% of these children had communication needs which had not previously been identified. 33% of the assessments indicated that the child had significant communication needs, with a diagnosis of Developmental Language Disorder.

Evaluation of the project will include 'before and after' data on the child's attendance, behaviour incidents and exclusions, as well as feedback from schools, children and parents/carers.

5.6. Standards for work with children in the youth justice system

All Youth Justice Services are required to comply with the Youth Justice Board's 'Standards for work with children in the youth justice system' (2019). The Youth Justice Board oversees a programme of self-assessments to monitor compliance.

The last YJB self-assessment exercise took place in 2023, when all services were directed to audit their work under 'Standard 2: Work in Court'. The YJB provided an audit tool, comprising 22 questions. The DCYJS self-assessment rated our work in court as Good, with most of the audit questions being rated Good or Outstanding.

The positive outcome from our audit of court work reflects the strong partnership between DCYJS and our local youth courts. The chair of the Dorset Magistrates Youth Panel sits on the DCYJS Partnership Board, enabling other partners to hear the views of magistrates.

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

5.7. Response to inspections, reviews and audits.

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

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

Dorset Police and DCYJS were jointly inspected in February 2025 as part of a national thematic inspection of work with children on Out of Court Disposals. This thematic inspection is being conducted by HMI Probation and HMI Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services. The report will be published in summer 2025. Informal feedback from the inspectorates after our inspection visit recognised strong partnership working between Dorset Police and DCYJS. The inspectorates identified examples of good practice in our work and gave us some helpful advice on areas for development which will be included in our plans for 2025/26.

In September 2024, HMI Probation published a national thematic report, 'The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service'. Although this report focused on the work of the Probation Service, there was some consideration of transition arrangements from youth justice to Probation. One of the report recommendations was for HM Prison and Probation Service to "ensure that any barriers to staff requesting or accessing information from partner agencies, including youth justice services, are addressed". Locally, DCYJS and the Probation Service in Dorset put steps in place, in 2023, to support Probation Officers to request relevant information from DCYJS when working with a young adult who was previously known to the YJS.

DCYJS contributed to a Child Safeguarding Practice Review in Dorset, relating to the accidental death of a child on a railway line, which was published in May 2024. Learning from this review was identified and actioned in 2023.

There have been no new local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) involving the YJS in the past year. A local multi-agency learning review took place in BCP Council in 2024 relating to a 20 year-old care experienced young person who took her own life, in the context of domestic abuse. A Domestic Homicide Review is also being completed. This young person had been known to DCYJS before she turned 18. No changes to YJS practice have been identified in these reviews.

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

DCYJS undertakes thematic case audits, linked to the service's priorities. The focus in 2024 was on our work with girls. Areas for improvement in our practice arising from this audit included work with boys on healthy, safe behaviour in relationships, and work with girls and boys to help them explore their online identity and activity. The theme for our case audit in 2025 has not yet been confirmed but is likely to link to our work on the over-representation of Children in Care.

6. Local and National Priorities for 2025/26

This section of the Plan reviews issues of local and national priority for youth justice which contribute to our service priorities for 2025/26.

6.1. Over-representation

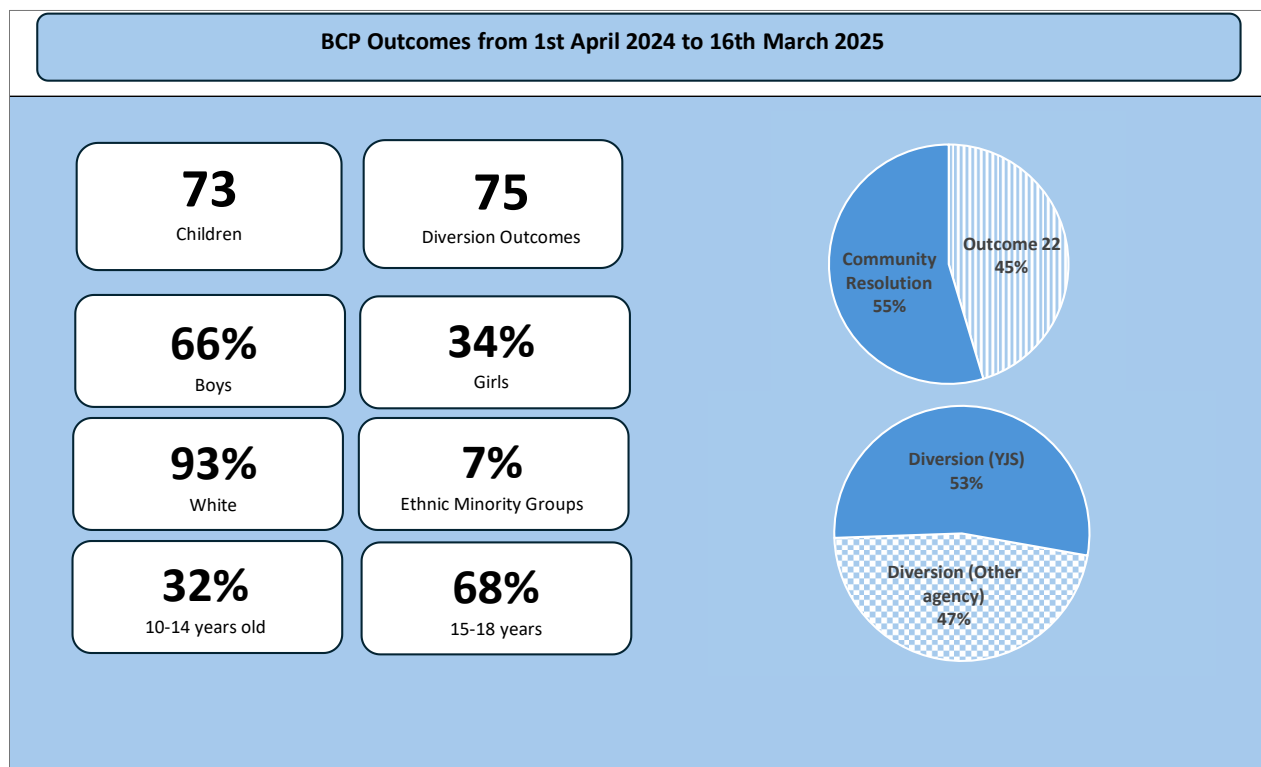
National data shows that some groups of children, such as those with diverse ethnic heritage, children in care and children with Special Educational Needs are over-represented in the youth justice system. DCYJS monitors caseload information for children from minority and disadvantaged groups.

Ethnic Disparity

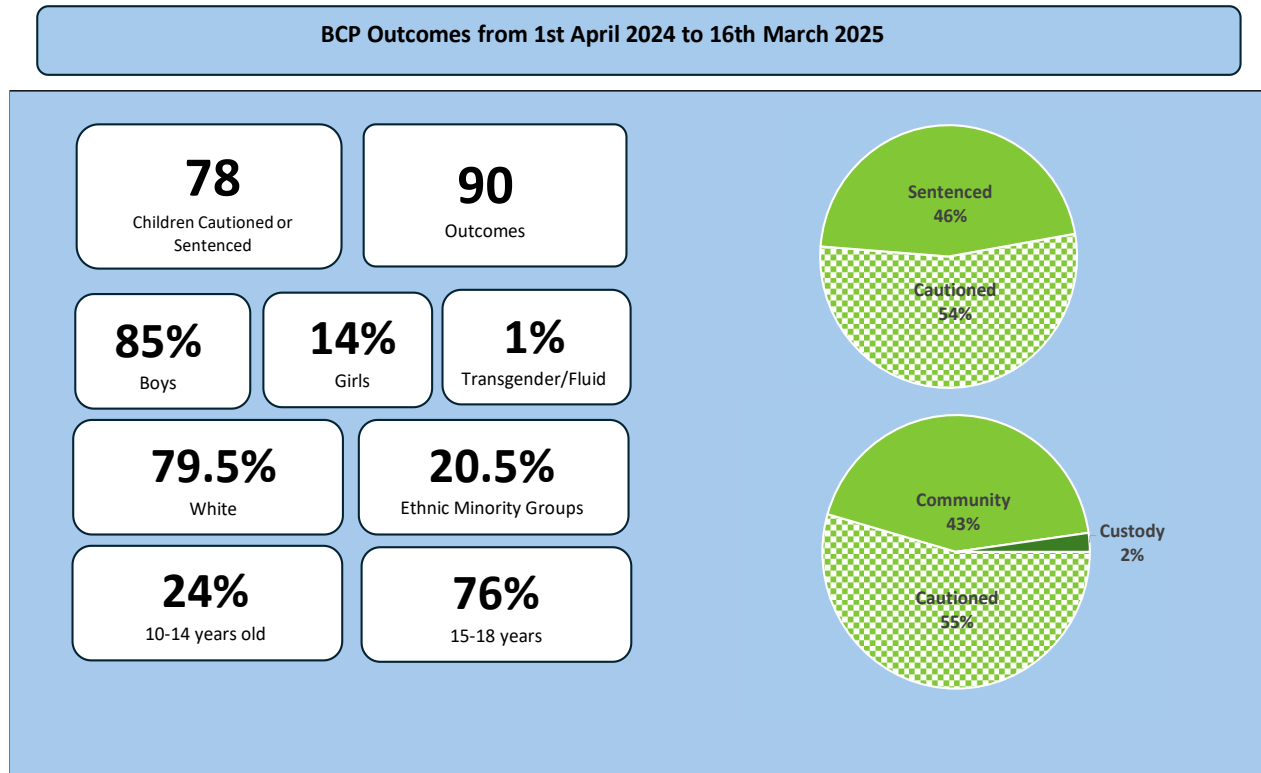
Data from the January 2024 School Census shows that 15.9% of 10-17 year-olds at schools in the BCP Council area identify as not having a white ethnicity. The equivalent figure for schools in the Dorset Council area is 5.6%. This data helps us compare the rate of children on our caseload from different ethnicities with proportions in the local population.

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

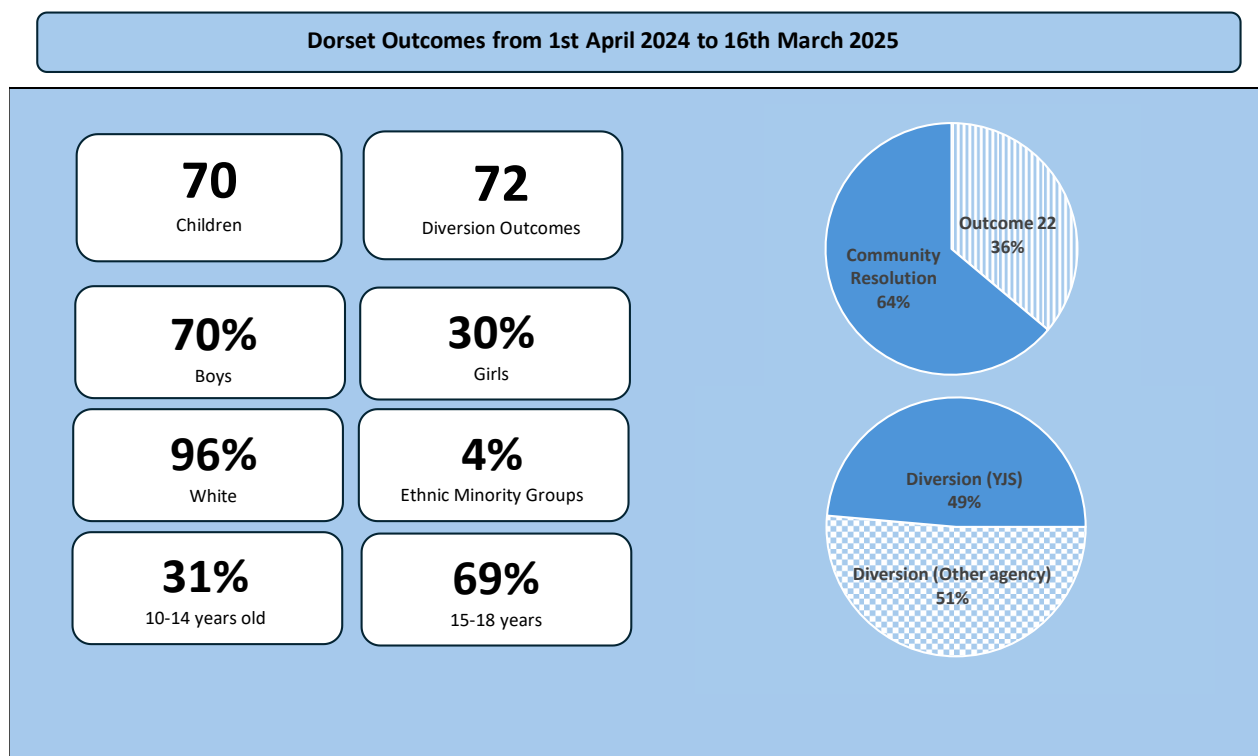
BCP Council children who were diverted from the justice system in 2024/25



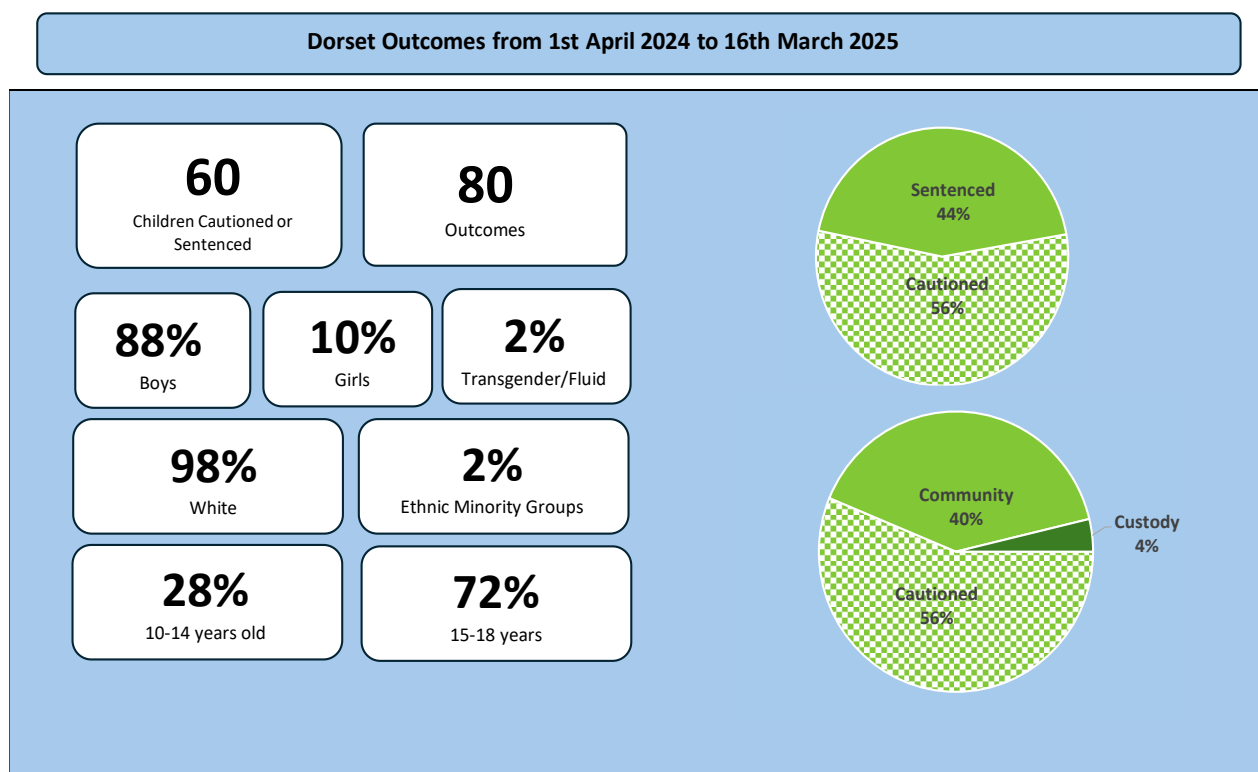
BCP Council children who were cautioned or sentenced in 2024/25



Dorset Council children who were diverted from the justice system in 2024/25



Dorset Council children who were cautioned or sentenced in 2024/25

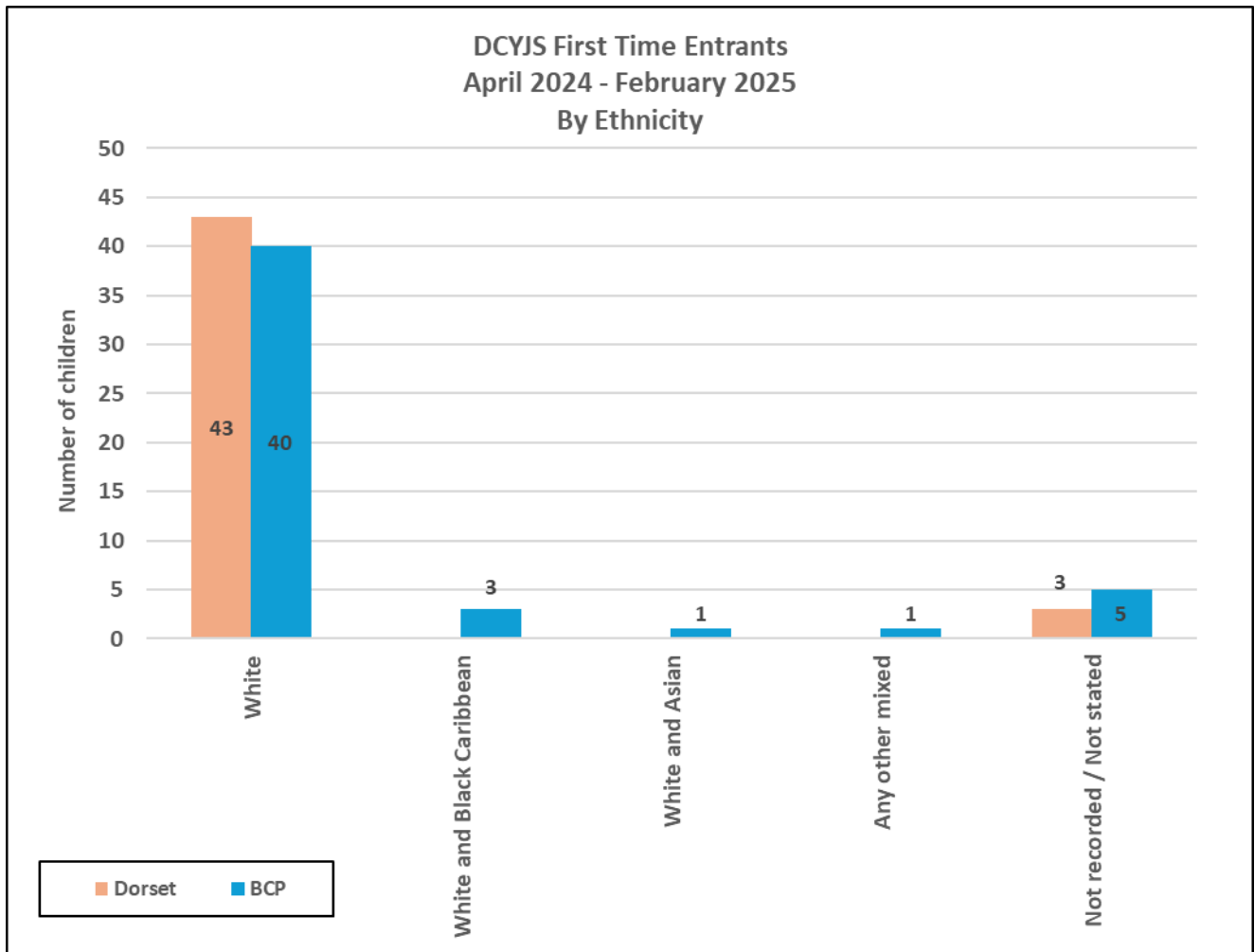


Comparison of these charts shows that:

- There is a notably higher proportion of girls among the children diverted from the justice system compared to the proportion of girls in the groups who were cautioned or sentenced.

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

Last year's Youth Justice Plan noted that we had not seen over-representation of minority ethnicities among children entering the justice system. This has remained the case in 2024-25 for the overall area, as shown in the following chart:



The explanation for no ethnicity being recorded for 8 of the total 96 first-time entrants is that some children are fined or discharged at court, for offences such as motoring, and have no contact with DCYJS.

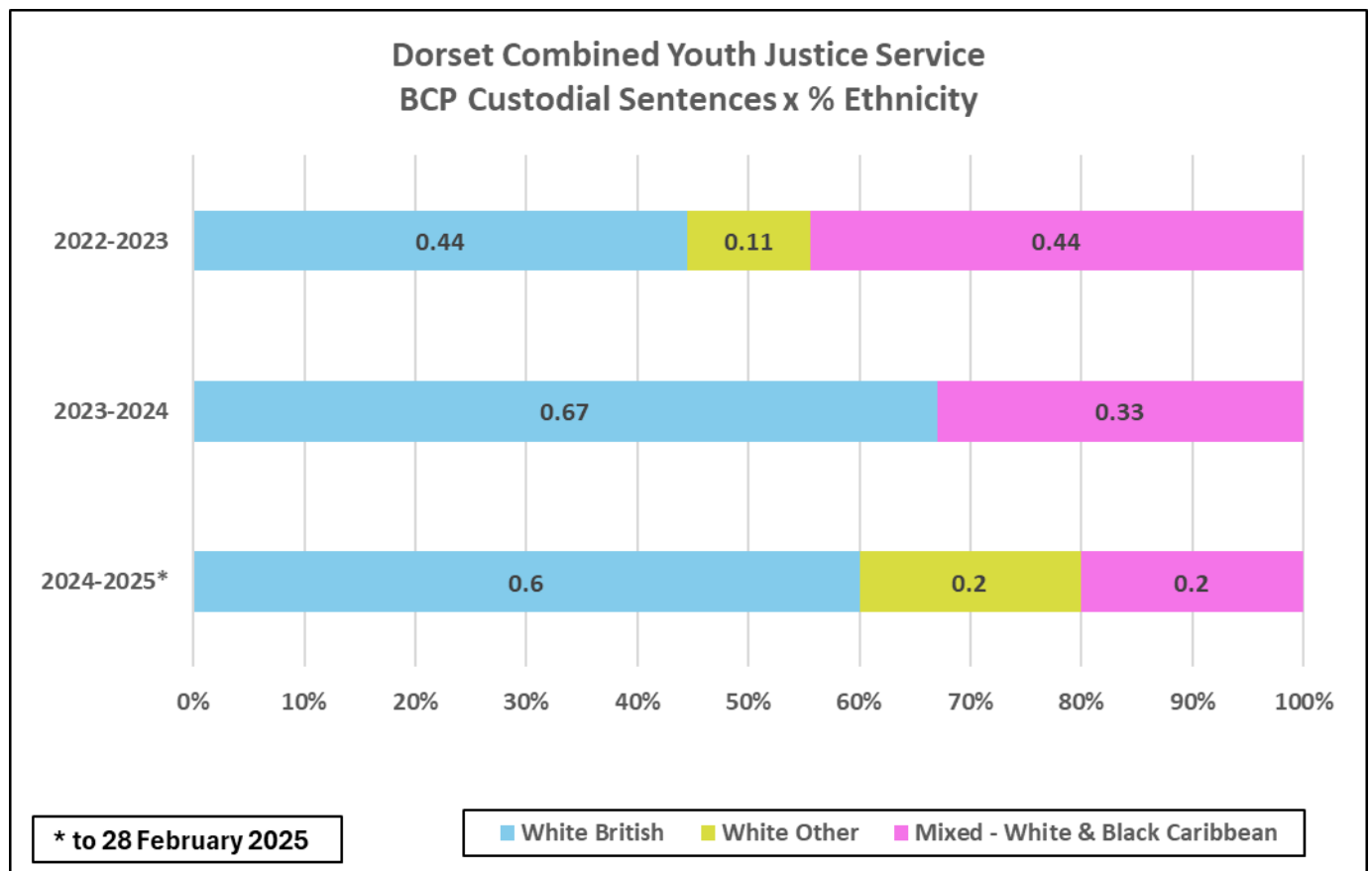
43 of the 46 first-time entrants in Dorset defined themselves as having white ethnicity. The other 3 have no ethnicity recorded.

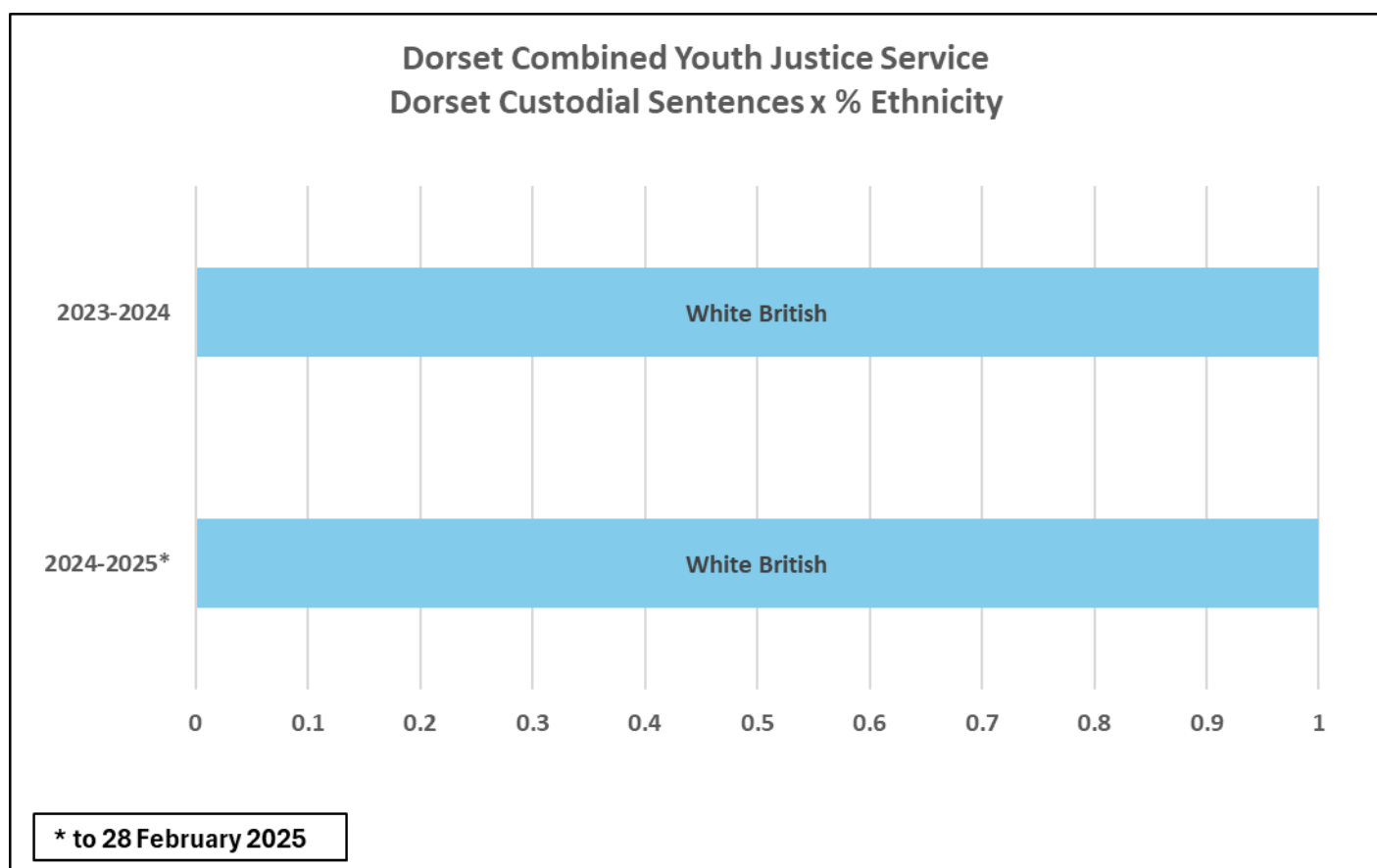
5 out of 50 first-time entrants in BCP did not define themselves as having white ethnicity. At 10%, this is below the School Census rate of 15.9%.

Although we do not see over-representation among first-time entrants, we also track how far children 'progress' into the youth justice system.

The charts showing the numbers of children cautioned or sentenced in 2024/25 indicate that children from ethnic minority groups in the BCP Council area are over-represented amongst those receiving a caution or court order. More analysis is needed to understand the reasons for this over-representation, noting that DCYJS and Dorset Police also work with Dorset Council children, where children from ethnic minority groups are not over-represented.

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





Amongst the BCP Council children who have been sentenced to custody, there has been previous evidence of over-representation of children who do not identify as white, although this has been reducing in recent years.

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

Gender

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

At a national and local level there is evidence that boys are significantly over-represented among children in custody. Locally, no girls have been remanded or sentenced to custody in the past 8 years.

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

It is recognised that girls can have different needs and experiences from boys, requiring differentiated responses from YJS workers. Worker allocation decisions are taken carefully to be sensitive to each girl's needs. During 2024-25 a thematic case audit was undertaken to review our work with girls and to identify areas for improvement, as mentioned in section 5.7.

Children in Care

Local data shows that Children in Care are over-represented in our youth justice system. Analysis commissioned by the YJS Partnership Board for its meeting in October 2024 included the following observations and findings:

- In the previous 2.5 years, approximately 11% of children on the YJS caseload were or had been Children in Care.
- 13.75% of 'First-Time Entrants' over that period were Children in Care.
- The proportion of Children in Care on the YJS caseload between April 2024 and September 2024 was higher amongst children who had received court orders (29.6%), compared to children who had received a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution (14%) and children who had received a diversion outcome (7%).
- 'Violence against the person' offences were more common for Children in Care than for children who had never been in care.
- There were 20 Children in Care on the DCYJS caseload in September 2024. All 20 were born male and identified as male.
- 15 of the 20 had been placed out of their home area at some point.
- 20 out of 20 had experienced school exclusions and multiple education placements.
- 15 out of 20 had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 20 out of 20 had had contact with CAMHS and/or paediatric services, though these services struggled to sustain their engagement with the child.
- 5 out of 20 had significant physical health conditions or injuries.
- 19 out of 20 were reported as using drugs and/or alcohol. The average age of first use of cannabis was 11 in BCP and 12 in Dorset.
- 14 out of 20 had been assessed as being at risk of experiencing Extra-Familial Harm.

The YJS Partnership Board has requested actions in response to these findings, to look for opportunities for earlier intervention with Children in Care who are at risk of entering the justice system and to review the effectiveness of current multi-agency work with Children in Care who are known to the YJS. A multi-agency 'task and finish' group is working on these issues. This activity will be one of the YJS Partnership's priorities for 2025/26.

SEND

DCYJS caseload information shows that children in the local youth justice system are likely to have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. In February 2025, 24.6% of school-age children on the caseload had an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 10.8% had the status of 'SEN Support'. This means that 35% of school-age children were identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, compared to about 20% in the local populations for their age group. It should be noted that the YJS was still collecting SEND information for some of these children, and there are others who are likely to have unidentified needs, meaning that the figure of 35% is probably an under-estimate of the level of SEND. These concerns fit with evidence collected by the DCYJS Speech and Language Therapists, showing high levels of communication needs amongst children in our local youth justice system and indicating the need for YJS workers to adapt their work to the needs of each child.

6.2. Prevention

The rate of children entering the justice system is influenced by the effectiveness of local prevention and diversion activities. 'Prevention' refers to work with children who have been identified as being at risk of going on to commit offences in future if they do not receive additional help. 'Diversion' describes the response to children who have committed an offence but who can be diverted from the justice system.

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

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

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

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

6.3. Diversion

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

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

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

During 2024/25 a total of 146 children received diversion options for a criminal offence, instead of a formal justice outcome. 74 of them received interventions from the Youth Justice Service. 72 received interventions from other services, principally the police Safer Schools and Communities Team or the local authority Turnaround workers.

During 2022/23 the Ministry of Justice announced a new programme, 'Turnaround', aimed at 'children on the cusp of the youth justice system'. Locally we used this programme to divert children from the justice system and to reduce our rate of First Time Entrants. Instead of potentially receiving a Youth Caution, children are considered for an informal response which is recorded by the Police as 'Outcome 22' (No Further Police Action but with support provided to the child).

Turnaround funding was used to employ targeted youth workers in each local authority and a part-time Speech and Language Therapist. Each child on the Turnaround programme was allocated to one of the local authority Turnaround workers who worked with the child and their family to agree a support plan to help them avoid further offending. Since Christmas 2024, this work has transferred to the YJS. The Turnaround Speech and Language Therapist assesses the child's communication needs and provides advice for the child, their family and professionals about the child's individual needs and how best to respond to them.

The local Turnaround programme is overseen by the Youth Justice Service Partnership Board. The Ministry of Justice require Youth Justice Services to submit quarterly data returns. Data up to the end of December 2024 showed that a total of 101 children had completed a Turnaround intervention, with another 21 currently receiving support through the Turnaround programme.

Funding for the Turnaround programme has been confirmed for 2025/26, albeit at a reduced level. The Turnaround eligibility criteria will be amended for 2025/26, to include Children in Care and children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan. Up till March 2025 children in these categories had been excluded from the Turnaround programme; these children were still given access to diversion outcomes, working with the YJS, but this activity could not be included in the Turnaround data returns.

6.4. Education, Training and Employment

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

In February 2025, 24.6% of school-age children on the caseload had an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further 11% had the status of 'SEN Support'. There are also likely to be other children whose additional needs have not been identified or who would have been categorised as needing SEN Support if they were on roll at a mainstream school.

In recent years DCYJS has worked with local authority colleagues to improve the accuracy of the recording and reporting of school exclusions experienced by children on the caseload. In February 2025, 13 out of 65 school-age children on the caseload had been permanently excluded from school in the past 2.5 academic years, and another 26 children had experienced at least one fixed-term exclusion during that period. In total, 60% of school-age children had experienced a permanent or fixed-term exclusion during the past 2.5 academic years, with some of them experiencing multiple exclusions.

Improving education provision and outcomes for children in the youth justice system remains one of our strategic priorities.

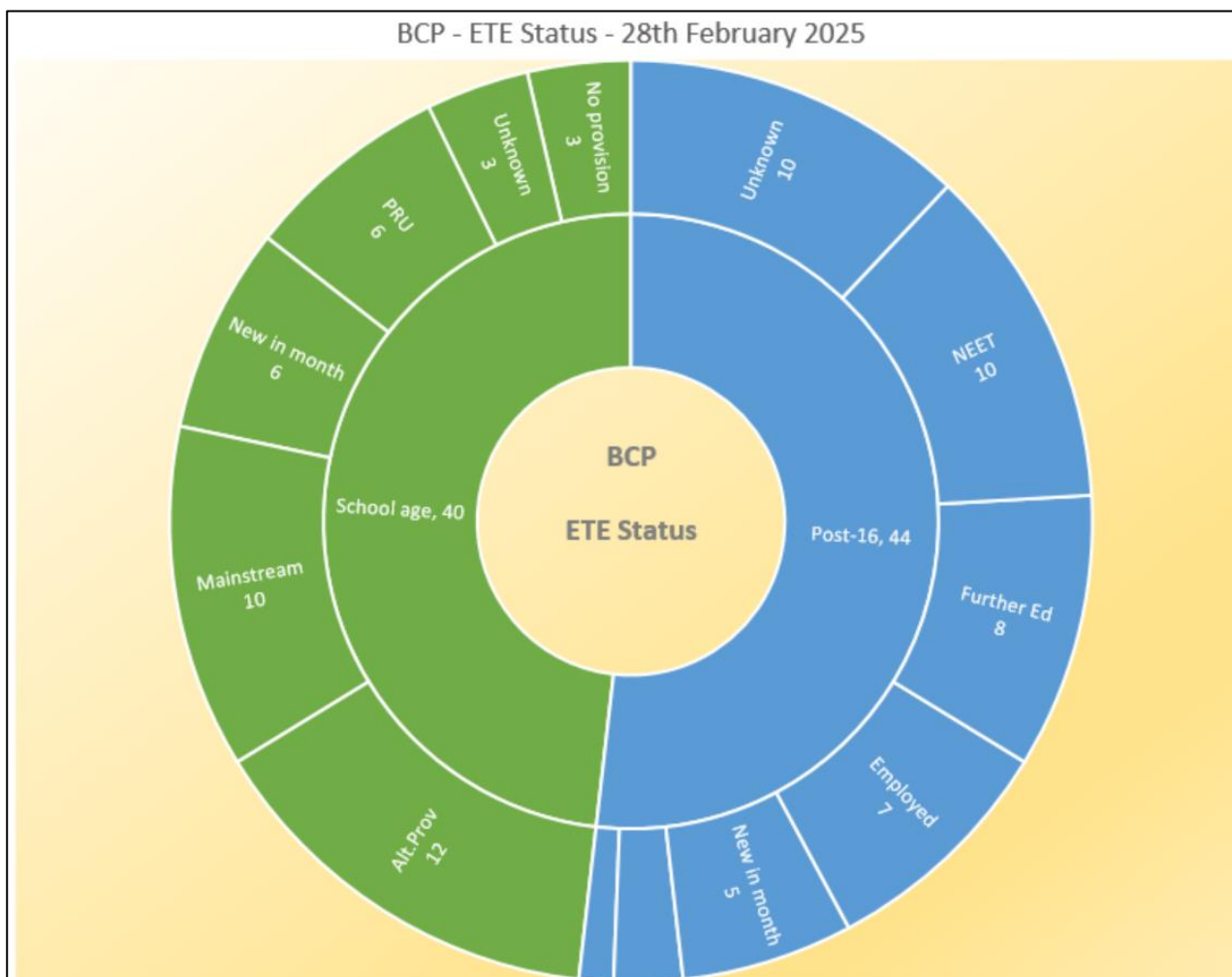
Each local authority's Director of Education is a member of the DCYJS Partnership Board. The headteacher of the BCP Council Virtual School and College is also a member of the DCYJS Partnership Board.

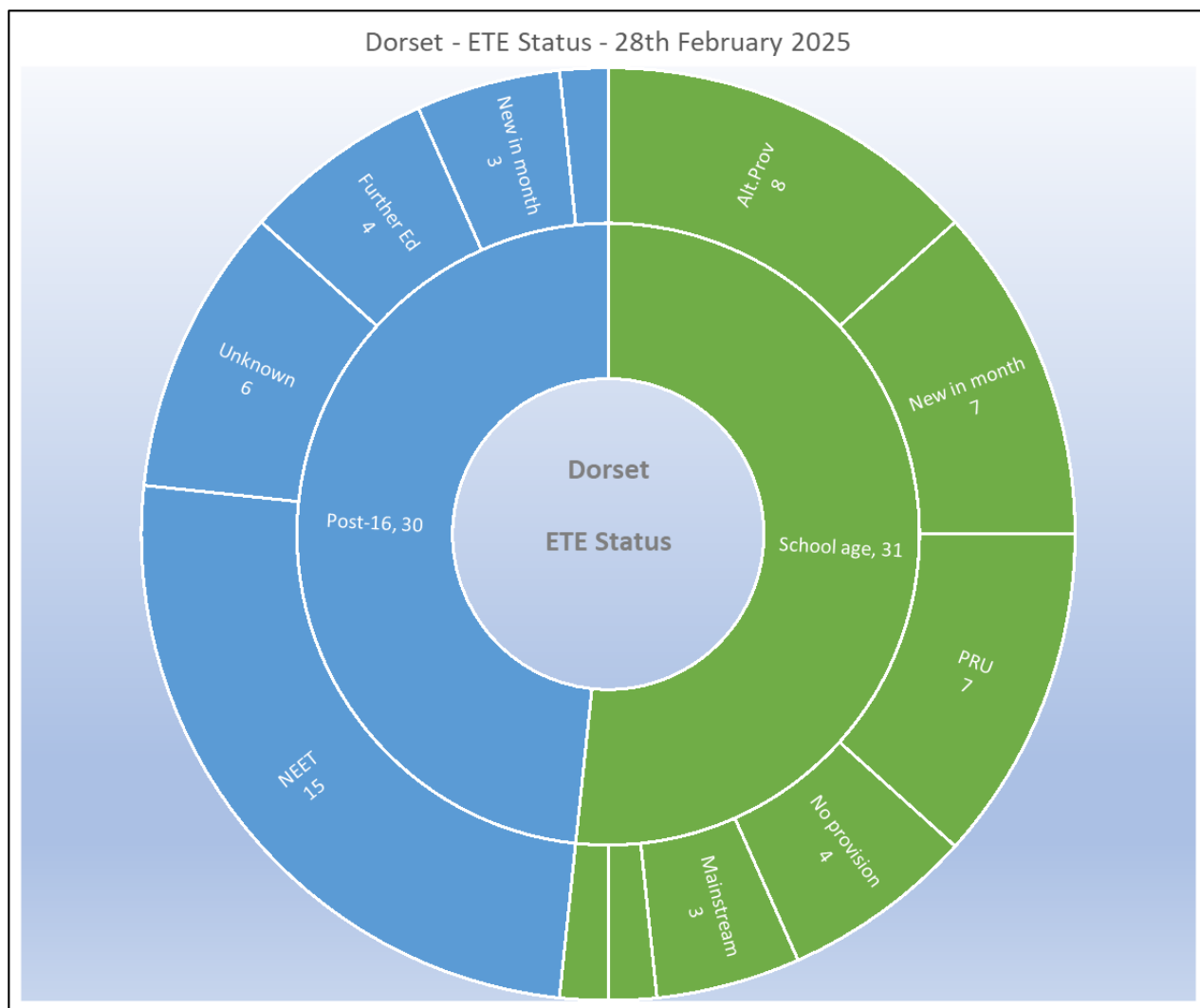
DCYJS employs two Education Officers, one focusing on school-age children and one supporting the post-16 age group. They provide advice to DCYJS case managers and work directly with young people to understand their needs and to support their attendance and engagement. They

also work with schools and local authorities to increase the suitability of provision, maintaining strong links with colleagues in the local authority Virtual Schools, the SEND teams and Inclusion services.

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

The following charts show the education status of BCP and Dorset children on the YJS caseload at the end of February 2025:





These charts show the high numbers of school-age children who are not in mainstream school, and of those in the post-16 age group who are not in suitable employment or training. The service also monitors more detailed information, such as the number of hours offered and attended for each child, the social care and SEND status of these young people, to enable a focused response by our education specialists, working alongside relevant local authority colleagues.

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

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

The numbers of young people who not in employment, education or training (NEET) or in employment without training reflects the limited opportunities for YJS young people, who can lack the necessary attainment levels to access the available provision. Actions taken in 2024/25 to address this gap include:

- The 'Discover You' project, run jointly with Upton Country Park, to increase young people's readiness for post-16 training and employment options.

- Funding provided by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for young people to train for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS card).
- Increased use of AQA awards to certificate learning from activities undertaken during young people's contact with DCYJS.

Securing the funding to continue the Discover You project will be a priority for 2025-26.

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

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

The health professionals in the YJS work directly with children and provide consultation and advice to YJS colleagues and other professionals. The YJS nurses meet regularly with colleagues in the Child in Care health team and the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion Service to ensure the integration of healthcare support for children in the youth justice system.

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

A YJS nurse is allocated to all children who are remanded or sentenced to custody. The aim is to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of health care for the child as they move into custody, during the custodial period and as part of their post-release planning. The YJS nurses liaise with the healthcare provider in the custodial establishment. There have been some instances over the past year of delays in accessing prescribed medication for children in custody. The YJS nurses are tenacious and proactive in ensuring that the custody healthcare provider has all the necessary information to prescribe the correct medication for the child. The YJS health team will continue to strengthen links with custody healthcare providers in 2025/26.

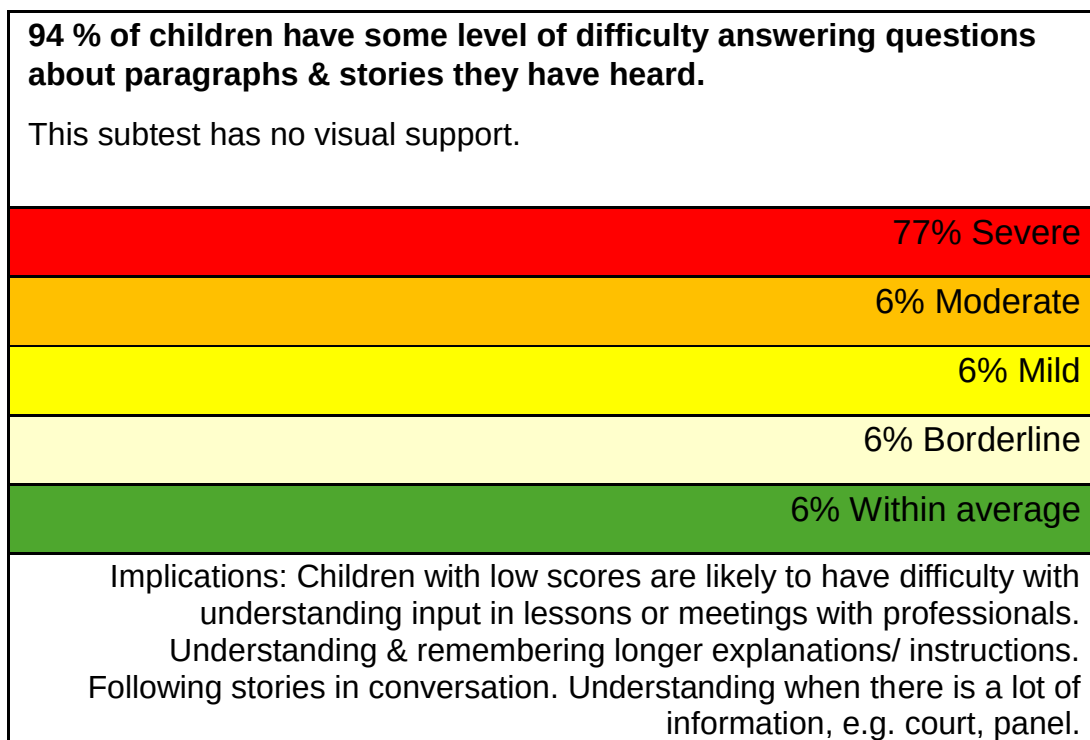
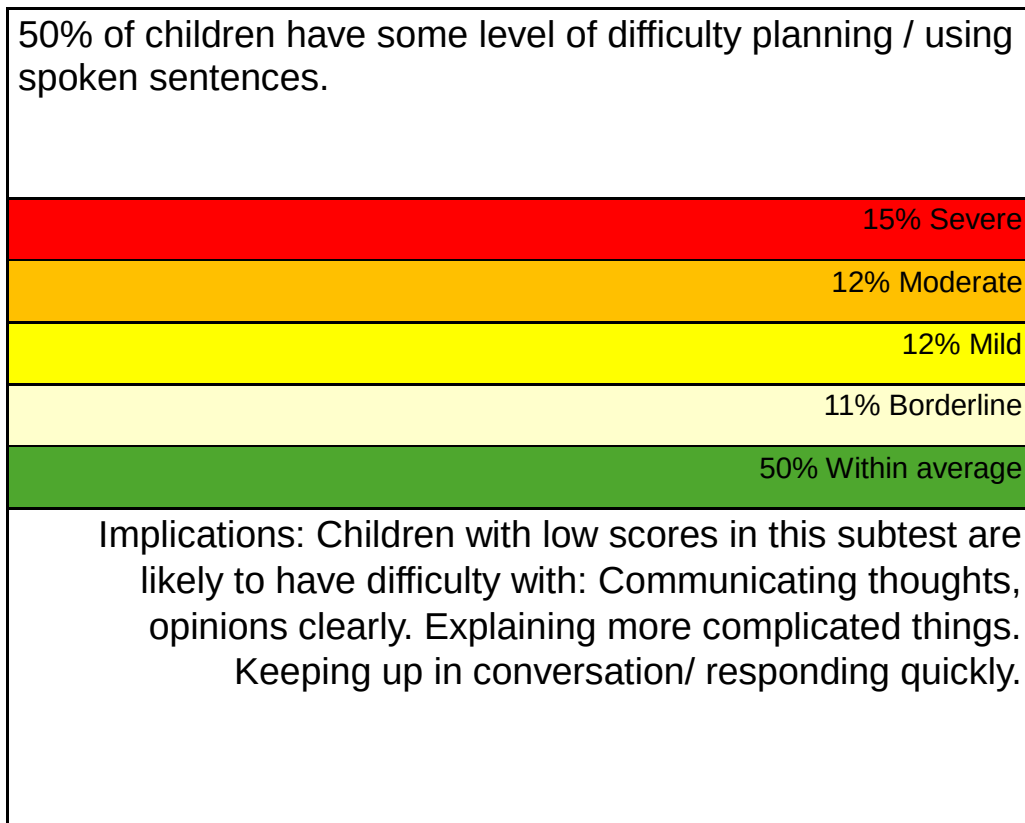
Access to ADHD assessments continue to vary according to the child's home area. If a child also has mental health needs requiring CAMHS support, an ADHD assessment can be accessed via CAMHS throughout the county. Paediatricians can provide ADHD assessments for children who are not open to CAMHS. In the west of the county paediatricians provide ADHD assessments for all children, but paediatricians in the east of the county only provide ADHD assessments for children under the age of 16. Children who are 16 or 17 in the east of the county, and not open to CAMHS, are therefore unable to access an ADHD assessment. YJS Nurses and managers have continued to flag this issue with NHS managers and commissioners. Although this service gap remains, the NHS Dorset representative on the YJS Partnership Board has given assurance that plans are being developed to resolve this issue.

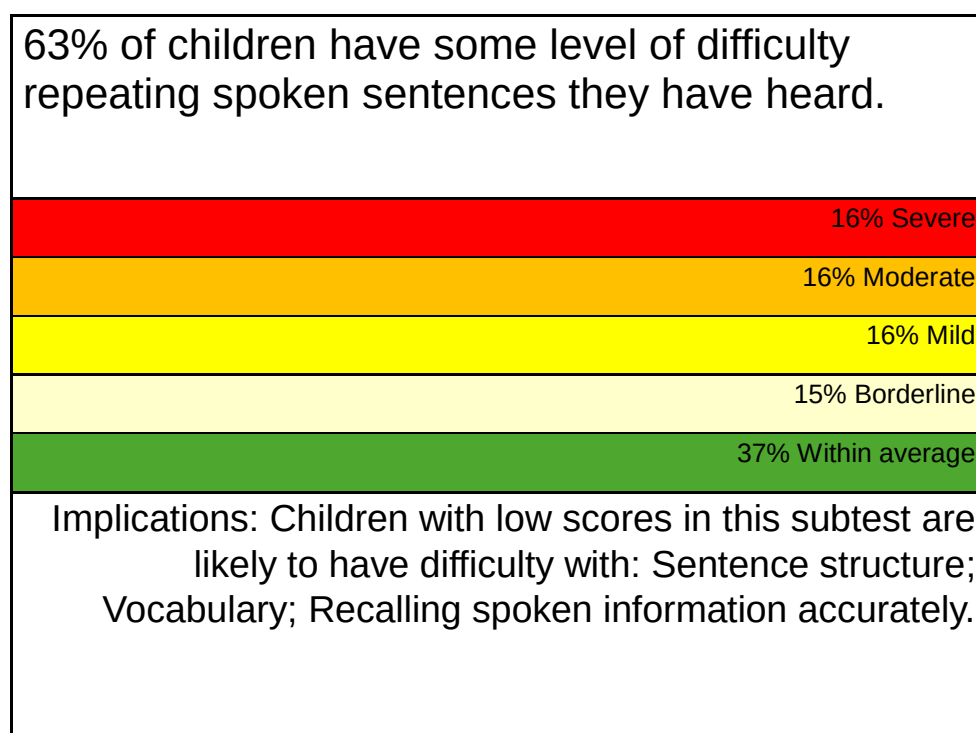
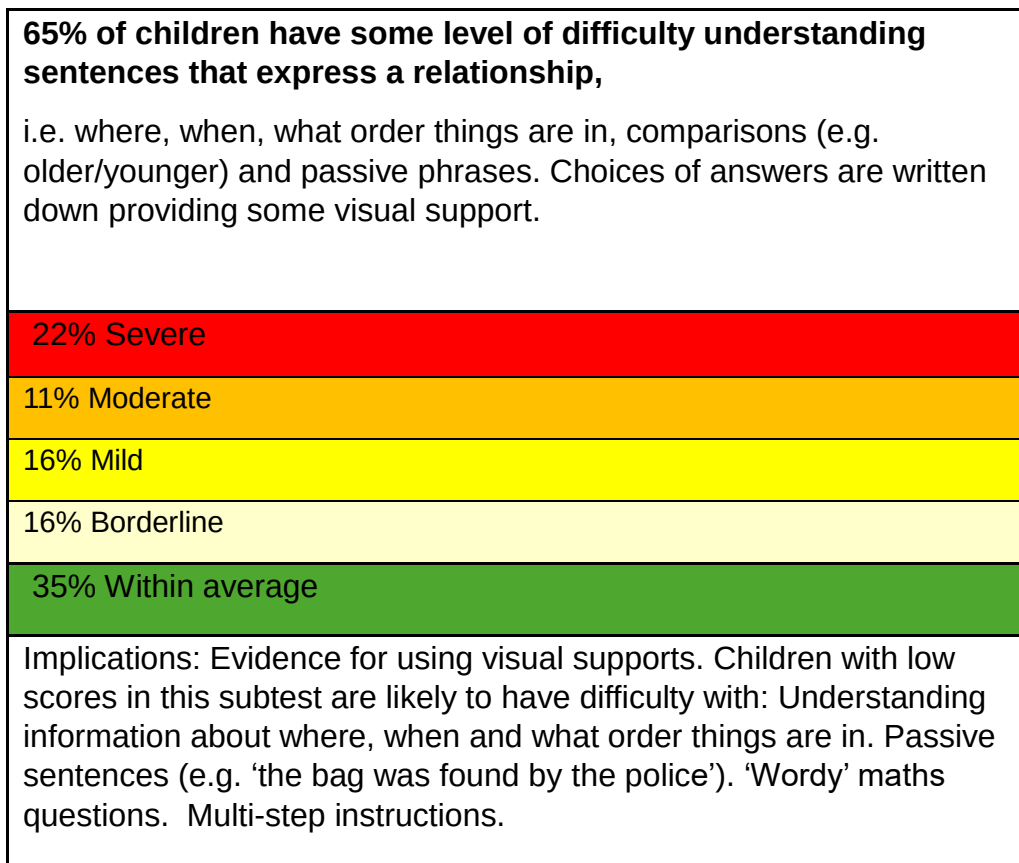
Speech and Language Therapists have been based in the YJS since 2018. Data has been reported in previous Youth Justice Plans to show that over 80% of children in contact with the justice system locally have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

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

During 2024/25, the YJS Speech and Language team collated and analysed the results of all assessments of children known to the YJS in recent years.

A total of 202 assessments had been completed by February 2025, providing a robust sample size. The following charts show the aggregated results for each sub-test in the CELF assessment:





The data shows that children who are open to the YJS have particular difficulties in understanding spoken language. 94% did not reach the expected level in the 'Understanding Spoken Paragraphs' sub-test (it is worth noting that this test is carried out in a safe environment by a skilled practitioner. A child's communication abilities will deteriorate in more stressful situations).

The receptive language skills of children in the justice system tend not to be as strong as their expressive language skills. Adults may not realise that the child does not understand or cannot retain what the adult is talking about. These children may have the ability to mask their language difficulties and to use behaviour to prevent adults from finding things hard partially explains why it is so rare for a child's communication needs to have been identified before they enter the youth justice system. Other systemic factors such as services finding it difficult to engage families, disrupted education and reduction in early identification strategies will also have contributed to the difficulties in children having their SLCN identified in a timely manner.

There are important implications from this data analysis for the YJS and for other professionals about how they communicate and interact with children in the justice system. Workers in the YJS are shifting their practice to make greater use of visuals and activities, reducing the use of language-based interventions. It will be a YJS priority in 2025/26 to extend and consolidate these changes, and to support other services in the justice system to consider adjusting their communication styles.

6.6. Restorative Justice and Victims

Alongside the 'Child First' approach, Restorative Justice is a core principle underpinning the work of DCYJS. In January 2024 all YJS team members participated in training in 'Working Restoratively'. The course included a focus on how restorative work fits with and supports a trauma-informed, child first approach.

Whenever DCYJS work with a child whose offence harmed a victim, the DCYJS Restorative Justice Practitioners contact the victim to find out about the impact of the offence and to explain the opportunities for Restorative Justice activities. These contacts help us to meet our obligations under the Victims Code.

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

The DCYJS Restorative Justice Practitioners previously received occasional negative feedback from victims about the decision-making process and outcomes for children who receive Out of Court Disposals (OOCs). Managers from DCYJS and Dorset Police met in March 2024 to review these concerns and to amend the processes for keeping victims informed and considering their views in the decision-making process.

HMI Probation and HMI Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services reviewed victim engagement in February 2025 as part of their inspection of local work with children who received OOCs. The inspectors responded positively to our new arrangements, commenting in their informal feedback that *"The capturing of the victims' wishes by police officers is a strength and inspectors noted the quality of this practice. This also ensures that opportunities for restorative justice can be considered at the earliest stage supporting the overall approach of the YJS in terms of its commitment to restorative justice. The victim agreed to contact from the YJS in almost every case"*.

During the past year the YJS Restorative Justice Practitioners have facilitated successful Restorative Justice Conferences, bringing together the child with the person harmed by the child's offence. The following example illustrates the positive impact that participants can experience from Restorative Justice.

A Restorative Justice Conference was held at a local library. Both parties wanted to explain their actions. The child felt the school had not understood the reason he had been carrying a knife (for self-harm). The headteacher wanted the child to understand the reasons why he had received a permanent exclusion. He also wanted to pass on good wishes from a number of staff members who remembered the child fondly and wanted to know that he was settled and had been able to 'move on'.

At the end of the Restorative Justice Conference, the team's RJ Practitioner spoke with the headteacher to check if the process was what he had expected and if it had achieved what he had wanted. The headteacher said that 'I will take back to the school and the Trust that if the opportunity arises to do an RJ conference it should be grabbed at with both hands. It was everything I hoped for. I feel we should not have to do this through the Youth Justice Service but should set up a way of doing this ourselves for all pupils who have been excluded'.

Another aspect of the team's Restorative Justice work is undertaking 'repairing the harm' activities with children, to help them make amends for their offence. Examples include making wooden planters or bird boxes to be sold for charities chosen by the victim. Other children work on community projects supported by the service or on conservation activities.

During 2024/25 the YJS reparation team successfully held stalls, to sell items made by children, at venues including County Hall in Dorchester, a BCP Council Children's Services event and Moordown Community Centre. The stalls help us both to raise money for charities chosen by victims and to raise the profile of the good work being completed by children working with the YJS.



Stall at County Hall in Dorchester

Over the past two years, the service has strengthened joint work between case managers, restorative justice workers and our reparation supervisor, to tailor each activity to the needs of the child and the wishes of the victim. The aim is to increase the child's sense of doing something constructive and meaningful to repair the harm caused.

Not all offences have a direct victim. During 2024/25 the YJS worked to develop restorative responses for offences like weapon possession and drugs possession.

Recent Youth Justice Plans have reported on progress in developing a restorative response for children who commit offences against police officers and other emergency workers. This approach was extended in 2024/25 to include a reparation project at Bournemouth Hospital, alongside ongoing work with the YJS Police Officers who can meet with young people to help them understand the human impact of offences against emergency workers.

Priorities for 2025/26 will include strengthening links with local communities for restorative and reparative activities, establishing reparative activities at Dorset County Hospital and preparing for the new Youth Justice inspection standards for work with victims.

6.7. Serious Violence and Extra-Familial Harm

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

During 2023 the YJS completed a case audit to review its work with children who commit offences with weapons. The focus on weapon offences reflected evidence of an increase in these offences in both local authority areas. The audit included the views of children, parents and YJS practitioners and led to changes in our risk planning and interventions for children who committed weapon offences. Work in response to the findings from that audit continued in 2024/25.

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

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2021 introduced a Serious Violence Duty for specified authorities, including youth justice services, to work together to share data and knowledge, allowing them to target their interventions to prevent serious violence. The specified authorities in Dorset and BCP agreed to use our two Community Safety Partnerships to lead this work. DCYJS contributed to the Serious Violence Needs Assessment in each local authority, and to the subsequent action planning. In 2024 the Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner appointed a 'Head of Violence Reduction and Prevention'. The post holder has joined the YJS Partnership Board and works actively with YJS managers and practitioners to ensure that the YJS is integrated into local initiatives to reduce and prevent violence.

One of the obstacles to effective work with children who have committed serious violence offences is the length of time that can elapse between the offence and the child appearing in court. This is a priority area for the DCYJS Partnership Board, with the aim of reducing delays and of mitigating their impact by offering voluntary YJS contact with young people while their alleged offences are under investigation. The YJS Head of Service has also raised this issue with the Dorset Criminal Justice Board, to add performance monitoring for the time between the offence and the charging decision to the Board's performance information.

The YJS Head of Service is also working with the local MAPPA Responsible Authorities to review MAPPA involvement and risk management while a MAPPA-eligible child or adult is under investigation or going through an extended court process.

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

Although it is rare for children to become radicalised or involved in violent extremism, the harms from such behaviours are significant for individuals and for the community. The YJS Head of

Service is a standing member of the 'Channel Panel' in each local authority. The YJS also engages actively as a member of the local Prevent Partnership.

6.8. Policing and Detention of children in police custody

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

In 2023 Dorset Police published its 'Child Centred Policing Strategy 2023-25' which "sets out Dorset Police's commitment to provide children and young people with a first-class policing response that is child-centred and part of an integrated and effective partnership approach. This means we will put the voices and needs of children and young people at the heart of the services we deliver to make them safer".

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

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

Data on child arrests is also reported to the YJS Partnership Board. The following table shows the child arrests in Bournemouth, Weymouth and Poole during 2024/25.

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

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

The number of child arrests in Dorset has declined in the past 4 years, from a total of 501 arrests in 2021/22 to a total of 306 arrests in the past 12 months.

Although there has been less progress in reducing the duration of child detentions, the overall reduction in arrest numbers means that arrests tend to reflect more complex cases, potentially requiring longer detention periods.

Dorset Police have changed their approach to custody arrivals during the evening to reduce the numbers that are detained overnight. The following table shows both the reduction in child

arrests and the significant reduction in the numbers being detained overnight (a 47% reduction over the past 4 years):

Year	Average number of child arrests per month	Total annual overnight detentions	
2021/22	42	242	
2022/23	36	182	
2023/24	32	150	
2024/25	26	128	

The Child Custody Detentions group previously identified a number of factors which can prolong a child's detention in police custody, including the availability of Appropriate Adults (AAs) and the time of day when the child arrives in the custody suite. The timeliness of Appropriate Adult attendance has improved since 2021, when the service was commissioned externally from 'The Appropriate Adult Service' (TAAS). The average response time for an AA from TAAS for a child in a Dorset custody suite was 57 minutes in the period July 2024-December 2024. This is a deterioration from past performance by TAAS, reflecting intermittent shortages of available Appropriate Adults. TAAS have committed to recruiting additional AAs to reduce the average arrival times.

When the police remand a child, ie charge them with an offence and refuse to grant the child bail, there is a legal requirement (under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984) to transfer the child to local authority accommodation until their appearance at the next available court. A child arrested on a warrant or for breaching bail must remain in police custody. In recent years, BCP Council and Dorset Council operated a joint arrangement whereby a foster carer was on standby each night to accommodate a child in this situation. Usage of this foster placement was very low, partly reflecting the very few remands of children in police custody. The standby foster carer arrangement was ended in April 2024, with each local authority making alternative arrangements.

The Child Custody Detentions group reviews every instance of a child being remanded, to check that the procedures and decision-making were correctly applied. The table on the previous page shows that there were only 8 instances of a child being remanded in 2024/25.

6.9. Transitions to Probation

The seconded Probation Officer post in DCYJS has been vacant since September 2024. The Probation Officer plays an important role in supporting transitions for young people who are moving from the YJS to Probation. In the period up to September 2024 we made progress to improve the transition arrangements, including the following changes:

- New process for Probation to request YJS information for young adults committing new offences who were previously known to YJS. 125 requests for information were made under this process during 2023.
- Extending the transition process for young people transferring from YJS to Probation, with additional joint meetings.
- Training session delivered by the YJS Speech and Language Therapist to Probation staff to help them respond to the communication needs of young adults.
- YJS attendance at MAPPA Level 2 or 3 meetings for new cases aged 18-21 when the YJS previously supervised the young person.

While the Probation Officer post has been vacant, there has been regular dialogue between the lead managers in the YJS and Probation for transition arrangements. Recruitment to the vacant post was delayed by staffing problems in the Probation Service, but the recruitment process commenced in March 2025.

The planned activity for 2024/25, to develop our methods for gathering feedback from young people about their experience of the transition process, has been delayed until the new Probation Officer has joined the YJS. We will also seek the views of practitioners in the YJS and Probation, to identify further opportunities for improvement.

6.10. Remands

There were 7 episodes of children being remanded in custody during 2024/25, the same number as the previous year.

Children who are remanded in custody gain 'child in care' status if they are not already a child in care. 3 of the 7 children were already a child in care before being remanded into custody.

One of the children was remanded in custody for one night, before being bailed the next day.

Another child was remanded into custody for 7 weeks, before making a successful bail application, supported by the YJS. This child was later convicted at trial and sentenced to custody.

Three children were remanded in custody for 5 weeks as co-defendants for the same offences before the CPS discontinued the charges against them due to insufficient evidence. The YJS is making enquiries about whether there is any review process in the CPS or police when a child is remanded into custody without sufficient evidence to go to trial.

The remaining two children are both care experienced young people who were remanded into custody shortly before their 18th birthday and remained on remand as young adults at the end of March 2025.

There were also 3 instances of children being remanded into the care of the local authority during 2024/25. Two of these children were already a child in care; the other child remained living at home with family during the remand period.

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

In November 2023, HMI Probation published a thematic inspection report on work with children subject to remand in youth detention. One of the recommendations from this report was for the YJS to help colleagues in Children's Social Care to understand the practice and procedure requirements for children who are remanded in custody. A YJS Practice Manager produced written guidance in 2024 about remand procedures to help social workers and social work managers when they work with children on remand.

6.11. Custodial Sentences and Resettlement

Six local children received custodial sentences during 2024/25 (the same number as the previous year). Information about custodial sentences and analysis of the young people is included in section 4.2 of this document. Information about the support for the health needs and education needs of children in custody is included in sections 6.4 and 6.5.

In recent years very few children have been released from custody before their 18th birthday. With low numbers going into custody, and some not being released before becoming adults, the approach to resettlement for each child is planned individually.

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

'Release on Temporary Licence' (ROTL) is an option for children nearing the end of their time in custody. Day releases for specific purposes are agreed, for children with good behaviour records in custody, to help prepare them for release. DCYJS worked with a secure establishment in 2024 to confirm ROTL plans for a child who was approaching his release date. DCYJS managers attended briefings in March 2025 about new ROTL arrangements which are being piloted in 5 child custodial establishments.

6.12. Working with Families

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

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

Plans for 2025/26 include development of the YJS Parent Forums and building links with other services and provisions in the local authorities, such as the Family Hubs.

6.13. DCYJS Priorities and Plans for 2025/26

The following table shows the priorities and plans for DCYJS in 2025/26. This is a dynamic plan which will continue to be updated, recognising that other priorities will arise during the year.

DCYJS Partnership Priority	Area for Development	Partners and Staff Providing Support	Benefits
Earlier identification of speech, language and communication needs for children at risk of school exclusion	Continue to provide and develop the Re-Engage project to identify and support the communication needs of children at risk of school exclusion	Dorset HealthCare BCP Council and Dorset Council education services Schools and PRUs DCYJS SALTs and Head of Service	Reduction in school exclusions and future offending
Diverting children from the formal justice	Work with Dorset Police to develop	Dorset Police DCYJS HoS and Team	Avoid first-time entrants for motoring

system	alternative non-court options for motoring offences	Managers	offences such as speeding
Diverting children from the formal justice system	Take action in response to the 'areas for improvement' identified in the thematic inspection of work in Dorset with children on OOCs	DCYJS practitioners and managers Dorset Police BCP Council Dorset Council Dorset HealthCare Trust	Improved practice to strengthen confidence in diversion options
Reducing Serious Violence and Extra-Familial Harm	Regular dialogue and scrutiny meetings between Police CPS and YJS to track and progress delayed investigations	Dorset Police CPS DCYJS managers	Improved timeliness for offences reaching court.
Reducing Serious Violence and Extra-Familial Harm	YJS Nurses to provide one-to-one First Aid sessions to children for responses to weapon injuries	YJS health team Dorset HealthCare Trust	Children are better able to respond in an emergency, and they have increased awareness of the potential harm from weapons.
Reducing over-representation	Investigate and agree actions in response to black or mixed heritage children being over-represented amongst children on court orders	DCYJS practitioners and managers	Reduce the proportions of black or mixed heritage children amongst children on court orders
Reducing over-representation	Multi-agency task and finish group to agree and implement actions to reduce the over-representation of children in care in the justice system and to report on progress to the YJS Board	DCYJS managers and practitioners BCP Council Child in Care services Dorset Council Child in Care services Dorset HealthCare and NHS Dorset Child in Care health leads Dorset Police	Earlier identification to prevent children in care entering the justice system. Improved multi-agency support for children in care who are in the justice system.
Improving education outcomes	Secure funding to continue the Discover You programme	DCYJS funding partners DCYJS HoS DCYJS Education Officers	Improving young people's readiness for post-16 ETE options
Improving health outcomes – mental health	Improve YJS data recording and analysis of children's mental health needs and access to suitable support	DCYJS Dorset HealthCare	Assurance that children with mental health needs are receiving suitable support
Improving health outcomes – substance use	Review and develop joint working between YJS and young people's substance use treatment services	DCYJS With You Reach Public Health commissioners	Assurance that children with substance use needs are receiving suitable support

DCYJS practice improvement	Develop the team's use of collaborative planning, including exit planning, with children and families	DCYJS managers and practitioners	Working in partnership with children and families will strengthen their capacity to sustain positive changes without professional support
DCYJS practice improvement	Increase feedback from young people and practitioners about the transition from YJS to Probation	Probation DCYJS managers and practitioners	Identify and apply improvements to the transition process
DCYJS practice improvement	Develop the use of activities and visual resources for work with children in response to the evidence about difficulty processing and retaining spoken language	DCYJS practitioners and managers, supported by the DCYJS SALTs	Workers are better able to engage children in YJS interventions
DCYJS practice improvement	Build team members' knowledge and confidence to work with children on the impact of their online experiences and identity	DCYJS practitioners and managers	Better understanding of and support for children's online safety and reduced harm arising from online activity.
Child voice	Establish new methods to hear from children and engage them in our service development	DCYJS managers and DCYJS Activity Coordinator	Improved experiences and outcomes for children working with the YJS
Restorative Justice	Review current RJ and victim work in context of the new inspection criteria, including increased Board oversight of this activity	DCYJS Head of Service and the RJ manager	Meeting the new inspection standards for victim work will help to ensure the quality of our work with victims
Increasing public awareness and confidence in work undertaken by children to repair the harm from their offence	Increase the number of community projects, stalls and donations to charities	DCYJS RJ manager and RJ team	Enhanced victim satisfaction and increased public confidence
Custody and remand	Strengthen joint working with custody health and education providers, and community health and education services	Dorset Council and BCP Council Children's Social Care and Virtual School Dorset HealthCare DCYJS managers and practitioners	Improved health and education support and outcomes for children in custody and on release

7. Sign off, submission and approval

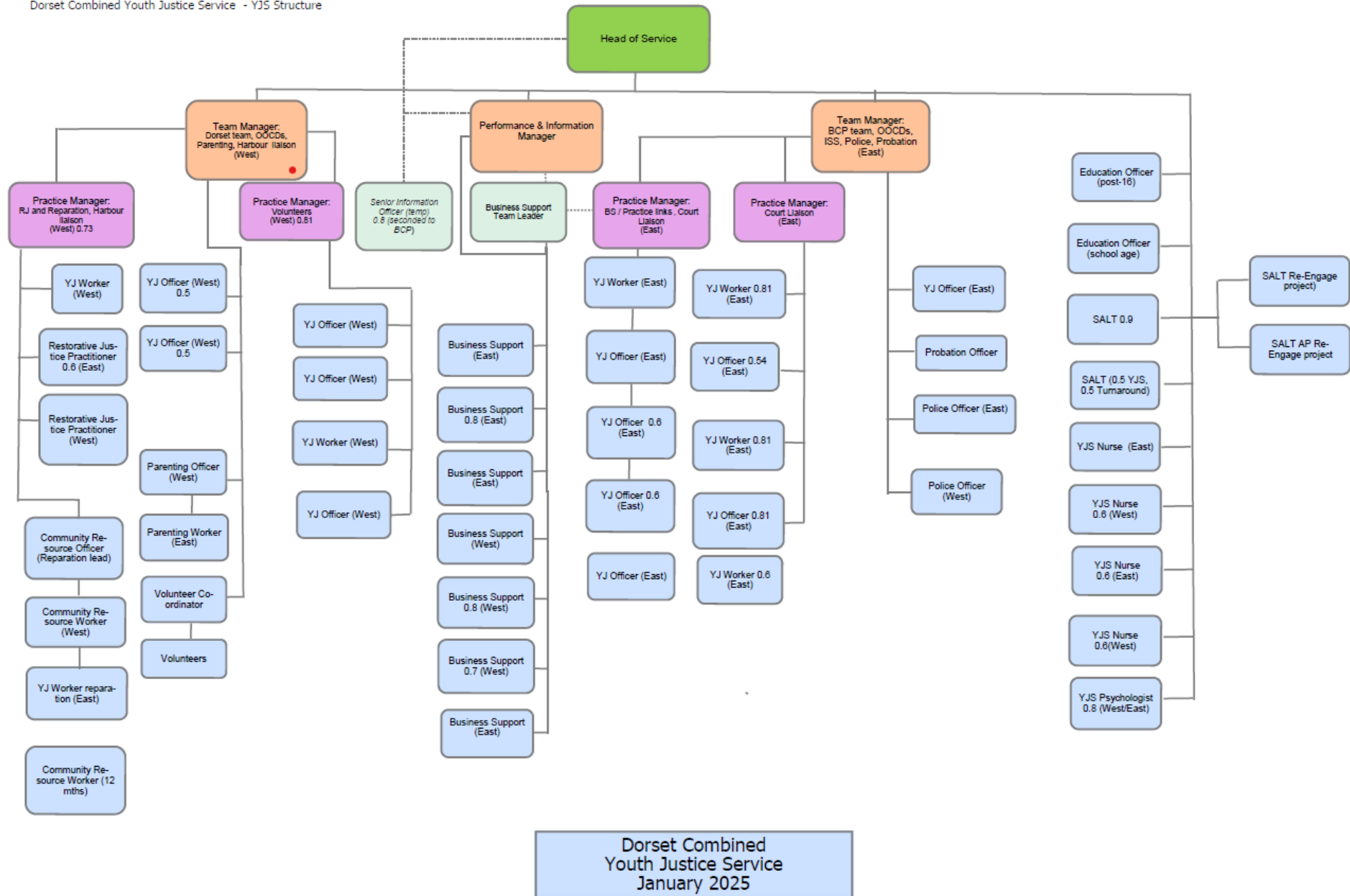
This Youth Justice Plan has been approved by the YJS Partnership Board in April 2023.

In accordance with 'Regulation 4 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000', Youth Justice Plans must be approved by the full council of the local authority. This Youth Justice Plan is subject to the scrutiny and approval processes of our two local authorities. It will be considered for approval by the full council of Dorset Council on 10/07/2025 and by the full council of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council on 22/07/2025.

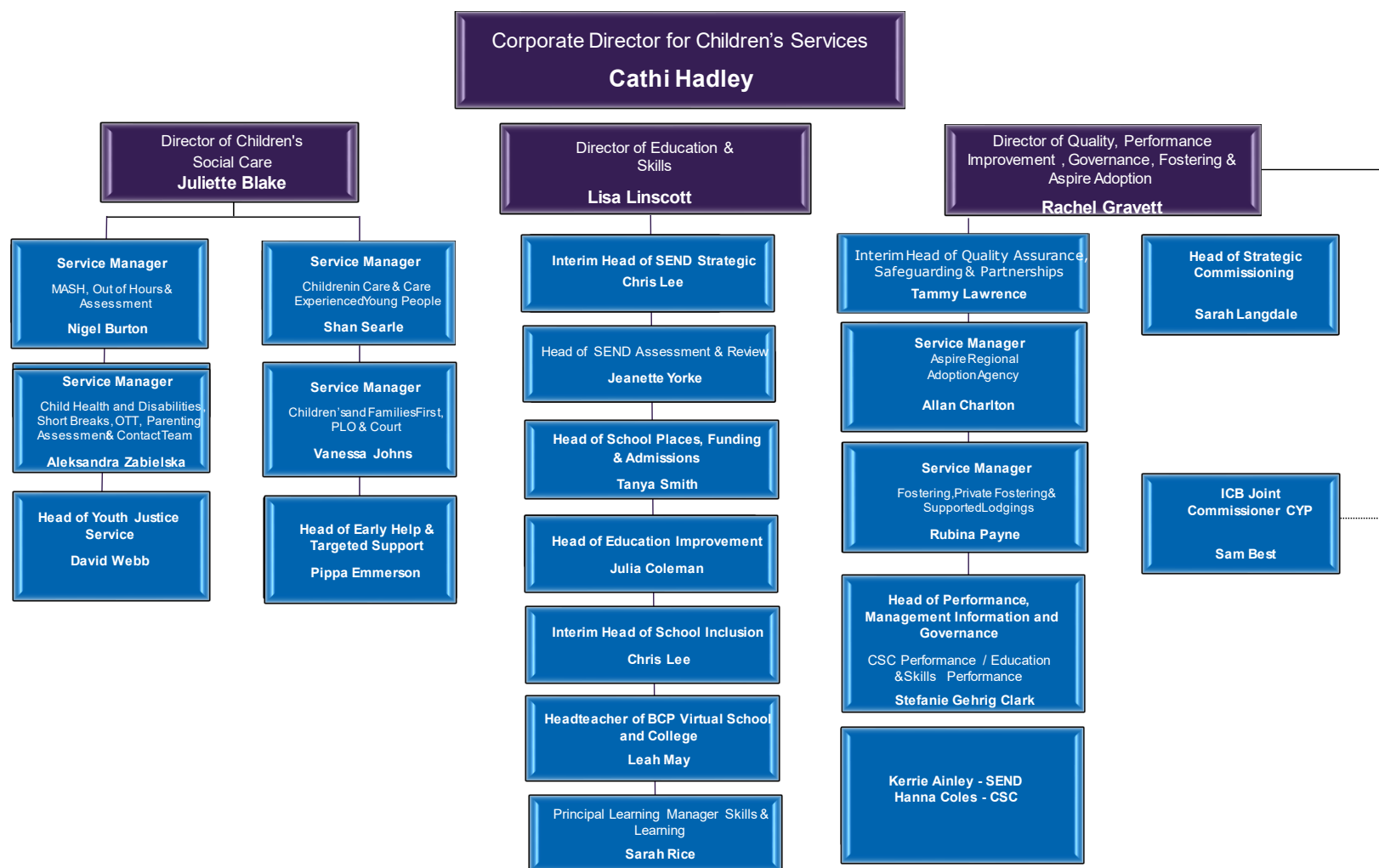
Chair of YJS Board - name	Paul Dempsey
Signature	
Date	

8. Appendix 1 – Service Structure Chart

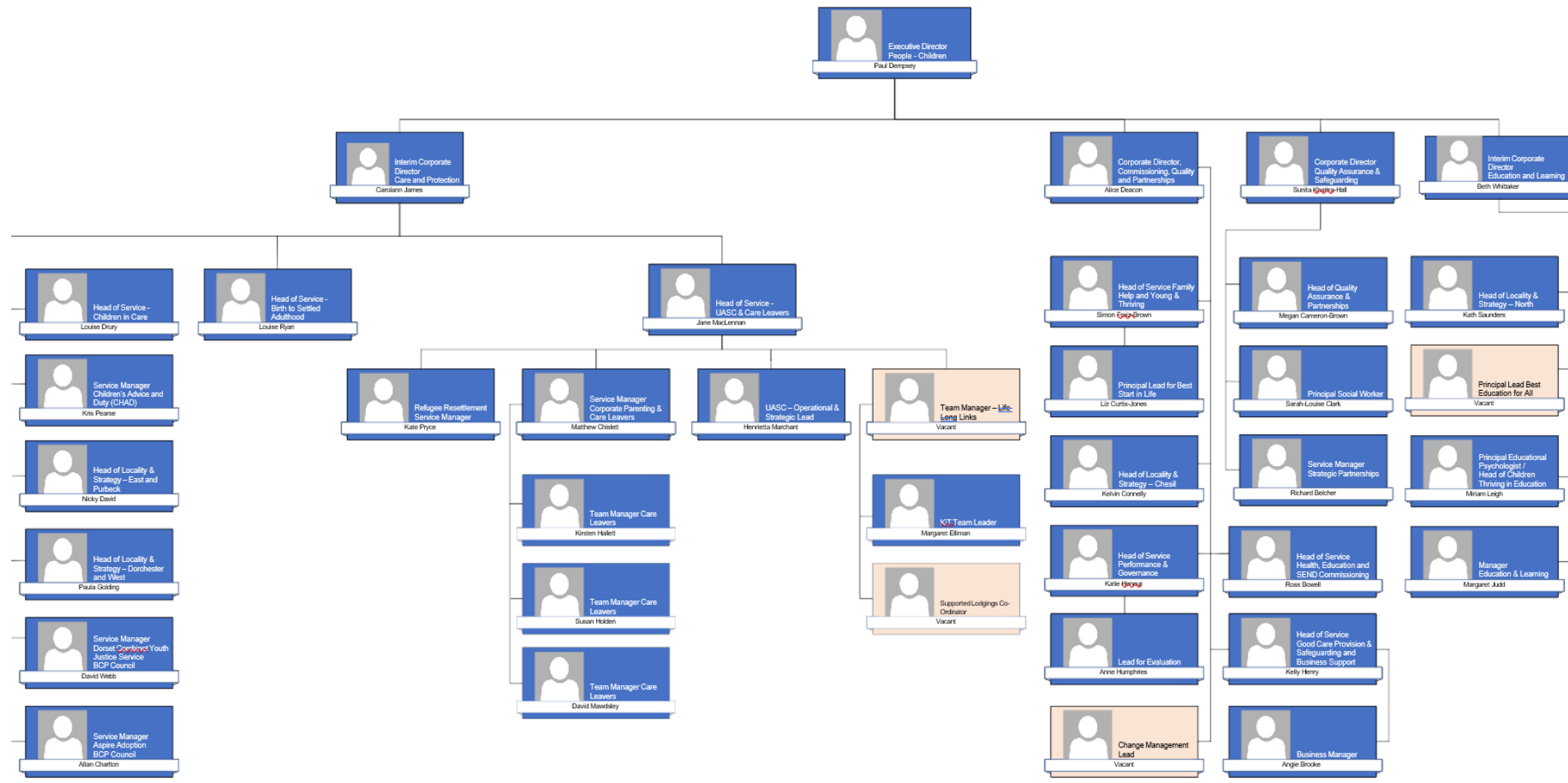
The following structure charts show the staffing structure of Dorset Combined Youth Justice Service and where the service sits in the two local authorities.



BCP Council Children's Services Extended Leadership Team



Dorset Council Children's Services Extended Leadership Team



DCYJS Staff and Volunteers:

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

YJS Staff at 3 March 2025

	Male	Female
White British	9	42
White Irish	1	0
White Other	0	1
Mixed	0	1
Prefer not to say	0	2
	10	46

YJS Volunteers at 3 March 2025

	Male	Female
White British	7	12
White Other	1	1
	8	13

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

9. Appendix 2 – Budget Costs and Contributions 2024/25

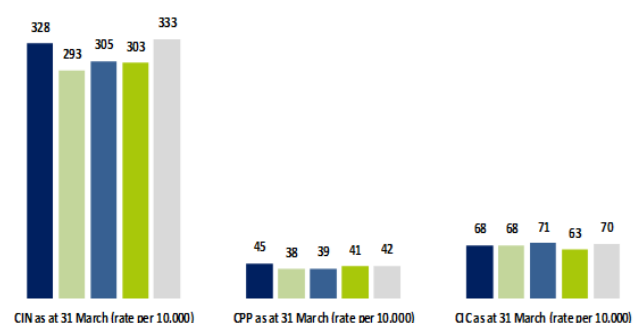
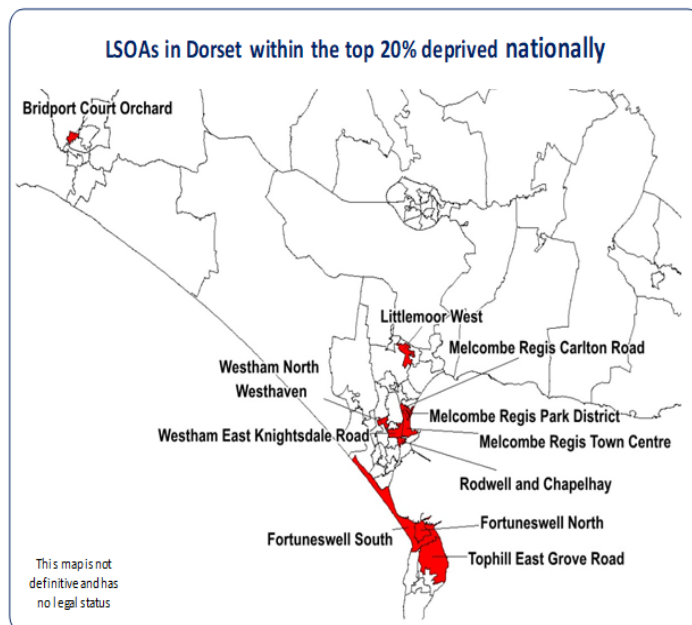
Partner Agency	24/25 Revenue (excluding recharges)	Staff
Dorset Council	£536,164	
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council	£628,622	
Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner	£81,927	2.0 Police Officers
The Probation Service (Dorset)	£5,000	1.0 Probation Officer
NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group	£22,487	2.8 FTE Nurses, 0.8 Psychologist, 1.4 Speech and Language Therapists
Youth Justice Grant	£767,922	
Total	£2,042,122	

Appendix 3 – Local Authority Demographic Information



Population	Age 10-17
Number of Children ¹	33,694
Male ¹	51%
Female ¹	49%
Pupils eligible for Free School Meals ²	22.0%
Pupils with SEN Support ²	14.6%
Pupils with an EHC Plan ²	6.7%
Pupils from Non-white Minority Ethnic groups ³	5.6%
25.7% children living in Poverty after housing costs ⁴	
Safeguarding	Age 10-17
Number of Children in Need ⁵	562
Male ⁵	50.5%
Female ⁵	48.9%
Indeterminate ⁵	0.4%
Number of Children with a Child Protection Plan ⁷	100
Number of Children in Care ⁶	315
Male ⁶	59.7%
Female ⁶	40.3%
Indeterminate ⁵	0%
Number of children and young people at risk of exploitation ⁷	
Significant	12
Moderate	30
Emerging	20

1. Dorset mid-year 2023 population estimates (published July 2024).
2. October 2024 School Census (includes all pupils at a Dorset School aged 10-17: ages as at 31 August 2024).
3. January 2024 School Census (all non-white pupils at a Dorset School, excluding 'Refused' and 'Information not yet obtained').
4. Based on the DWP/HMRC statistics "Children in low income families: local area statistics" (March 2024).
5. From MOSAIC, as at 31 December 2024. Excluding CP and CIC. Gender figures exclude Unknown and Unborn.
6. From MOSAIC, as at 31 December 2024. Gender figures exclude Unknown and Unborn.
7. From MOSAIC as at 31 December 2024.



■ Dorset 2023/24 ■ Stat Neighbours 2023/24 ■ Good+ 2023/24 ** ■ South West 2023/24 ■ England 2023/24

** Good+ Local Authorities are: Cornwall, East Sussex, Norfolk, Shropshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Worcestershire

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole



Population¹: Age 10-17

Number of Children¹ 35,208
Male¹ 51%
Female¹ 49%

Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals² 20.5%
Pupils with SEN Support³ 14.3%
Pupils with an EHC Plan⁴ 5.2%

Pupils from Non-white Minority Ethnic groups⁵ 15.9%

25% children living in poverty after housing costs⁴

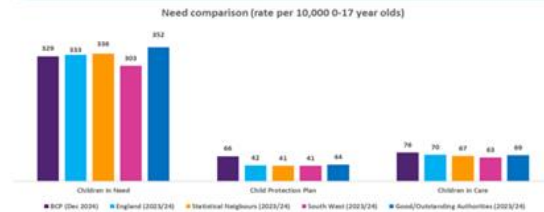
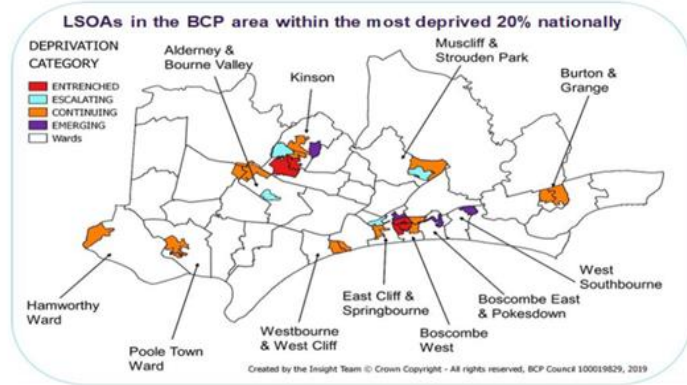
Safeguarding Age 10-17

Number of Children in Need⁵ 531
Male⁵ 58.0%
Female⁵ 42.0%

Number of Children with a Child Protection Plan⁷ 203

Number of Children in Care⁶ 376
Male⁶ 58.7%
Female⁶ 41.0%
Indeterminate⁶ 0.3%

Number of children and young people at risk of exploitation⁸
Suffering⁸ 18
Risk of harm⁸ 41
Potential concerns⁸ 35



1. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole population estimates (published July 2024)
2. October 2024 School Census (includes all pupils at a BCP School aged 10-17. Ages as at 31st August 2024)
3. January 2024 School Census (all non-white pupils at a BCP School, excluding 'Refused' and 'Information not yet obtained')
4. Local Child Poverty Statistics - <https://findchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty-2024-june-2024>
5. From MOSAC, as at 3 February 2023, including CP and CC. Gender figures exclude Unknown and Unknown
6. From MOSAC, as at 3 February 2023. Gender figures exclude Unknown and Unknown
7. From MOSAC, as at 3 February 2023.
8. From MOSAC, as at 31 December 2024.

Common youth justice terms – national glossary

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience. Events in the child's life that can have negative, long lasting impact on the child's health and life outcomes
AIM 2 and 3	Assessment, Intervention and Moving on; an assessment tool and framework for children who have instigated harmful sexual behaviour
ASB	Anti-social behaviour
AssetPlus	Assessment tool to be used for children who have been involved in offending behaviour
CAMHS	Child and adolescent mental health services
CCE	Child Criminal exploitation, where a child is forced, through threats of violence, or manipulated to take part in criminal activity
Children	We define a child as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and civil legislation in England and Wales. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.
Child First	A system wide approach to working with children in the youth justice system. There are four tenets to this approach which should be: developmentally informed, strength based, promote participation, and encourage diversion

Child looked-after, also Child in Care	Child Looked After/Child in Care; where a child is looked after by the local authority
CME	Child Missing Education
Constructive resettlement	The principle of encouraging and supporting a child's positive identity development from pro-offending to pro-social
Contextual safeguarding	An approach to safeguarding children which considers the wider community and peer influences on a child's safety
Community resolution	Community resolution; an informal disposal, administered by the police, for low level offending where there has been an admission of guilt
EHCP	Education and health care plan; a plan outlining the education, health and social care needs of a child with additional needs
ETE	Education, training or employment
EHE	Electively home educated; children who are formally recorded as being educated at home and do not attend school
EOTAS	Education other than at school; children who receive their education away from a mainstream school setting
FTE	First Time Entrant. A child who receives a statutory criminal justice outcome for the first time (youth caution, youth conditional caution, or court disposal)
HMIP	Her Majesty Inspectorate of Probation. An independent arms-length body who inspect Youth Justice services and probation services
HSB	Harmful sexual behaviour, developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour by children, which is harmful to another child or adult, or themselves
JAC	Junior Attendance Centre
MAPPA	Multi agency public protection arrangements
MFH	Missing from Home
NRM	National Referral Mechanism. The national framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery in order to gain help to support and protect them
OOCD	Out-of-court disposal. All recorded disposals where a crime is recorded, an outcome delivered but the matter is not

	sent to court
Outcome 22/21	An informal disposal, available where the child does not admit the offence, but they undertake intervention to build strengths to minimise the possibility of further offending
Over-represented children	Appearing in higher numbers than the local or national average
RHI	Return home Interviews. These are interviews completed after a child has been reported missing
SLCN	Speech, Language and communication needs
STC	Secure training centre
SCH	Secure children's home
Young adult	We define a young adult as someone who is 18 or over. For example, when a young adult is transferring to the adult probation service.
YJS	Youth Justice Service. This is now the preferred title for services working with children in the youth justice system. This reflects the move to a child first approach
YOI	Young offender institution