

The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending. October 2025

Report: [The effectiveness of diverting children from the CJS: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending](#)

Response from: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Supporting children to stay out of the criminal justice system is one of the most important responsibilities we share as leaders in policing, justice and providing local support services. This latest HMIP/HMICFRS inspection into “*The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending*” provides a clear and honest assessment of what is working nationally, and where urgent improvements are needed to protect vulnerable children, reduce reoffending and keep our communities safe. Too often, children who come into contact with the police are already facing significant challenges such as trauma, exploitation, mental health challenges, or instability at home. Early, effective diversion can be life-changing, but it relies on strong partnership working, timely interventions, and consistent decision making across all agencies.

Key observations and concerns

- Inconsistency and fragmentation: this report rightly highlights the ‘postcode lottery’ in the current system for out of court disposals (OOCs) in terms of access and outcomes. The report highlights that decision making in policing on OOCs lacks sufficient clarity and detailed evidence base behind how outcomes are reached making accountability and transparency difficult. In more serious cases, we see that the NPCC child gravity matrix isn’t being used consistently when making disposal decisions.
- Partnership and resourcing pressures: we know that effective diversion is reliant on strong partnership working, yet the report identifies the pressure felt across agencies in terms of being stretched and under resourced leading to delays or support not being available at a time when children need it the most. The report also indicates that youth justice partnerships boards often lack clear data on the volume and effectiveness of OOCs in force areas which limits the ability for strategic planning. We are also acutely aware of the short-term funding pressures experienced by our local providers and the impact this has on longer term planning for sustainable interventions.
- Safeguarding and risk: this inspection identified that safeguarding was not consistently prioritised, and that children who offended and child victims were not always referred to children’s services. We also see that the quality of the risk assessments undertaken varied substantially, with some showing limited recognition of a child’s vulnerabilities such as trauma or neurodiversity, or the risks they posed to others was not sufficiently reviewed and mitigated.

Recommendations for improvement

- Strengthen governance and oversight: through improving the data capture by Youth Justice Boards, this will give a more accurate reflection on the use of OOCs enabling the evaluation of outcomes and ensure equitable decision making across force areas.

- Improve multi-agency collaboration and resourcing: working to ensure that interventions are tailored to the child's needs, and not just the offence, including factors such as mental health, neurodiversity and risk, are key to a child centred approach and effective long term outcome.
- Enhanced decision making: by ensuring that all officers issuing youth OOCs are trained to consistently use the NPCC child gravity matrix will ensure compliance and the recording of evidence based decision making. This is even more important when joint decision making takes place with youth justice partners, making clear the transparency and accountability.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I am deeply committed to ensuring that children across HIOW are diverted from the criminal justice system wherever safe and appropriate, and in a way that meets their needs while also protecting our communities.

My commitment is clear, every child deserves a chance to turn their life around, and our system must be robust, joined-up and compassionate enough to make that possible.

Donna Jones
Police and Crime Commissioner, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Response from: Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Constabulary (HIOWC) has made significant progress over the past decade in adopting a Child-Centred Policing (CCP) approach. Protecting children from harm is central to the force's delivery plan and vision, reflected in its three priorities: putting victims first, relentlessly pursuing criminals, and delivering exceptional local policing.

Officers and staff are trained to apply a trauma-informed approach in all interactions with children and young people. CCP also promotes early engagement and intervention, in partnership with other agencies, to support children at risk of offending.

In 2021, HIOWC introduced its Child-Centred Policing Strategy, which has been refreshed for 2025. Oversight of this approach is provided by the Vulnerability Board, chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable.

Through CCP there has been a strong emphasis on a fair system for all, with effective use of out of court resolutions to divert children away from the criminal justice system whilst ensuring victims are always at the centre of the decision making.

HIOWC recognise that nationally there has been limited structure and insight into how Out of Court Resolutions (OOCR) for children are used with concerns about consistency, therefore the constabulary has established formal data sharing arrangements with the Youth Justice Services across Hampshire & the Isle of Wight. A combined review of performance within quarterly meetings is essential to enable continuous review of effectiveness but also to allow insight into the number of children diverted from the system and to assess the impact of any diversionary activity. This work links into the national collection of data regarding children managed by the Youth Justice System (YJS).

Furthermore, HIOWC share key information with the Youth Justice Board regarding youth racial disparity and there is a pan Hampshire scrutiny panel held on a quarterly basis to share information

between partners and with the OPCC and review outcomes. The focus is making the right decision to ensure each child receives the support they need.

It was also identified within the inspection report that there was an inconsistency in the application of outcomes. The Force Incident & Crime Auditors run a programme of outcome audits, including for Outcome 20 (further action resulting from a crime report to be undertaken by another agency) and Outcome 21 (formal action against the suspect is not in the public interest). The latest audit reviewed whether Outcome 20 was being misused for serious offences, following Home Office feedback and HMICFRS findings. Of the cases examined, 73.9% were correctly applied. Learning from this audit has been shared across the force via updated Outcome 20 guidance.

While Youth Offending Team (YOT) officers rarely use Outcome 20, the Chief Inspector is conducting dip sampling to understand its use and reasons. Additional scrutiny is also being applied to Outcome 21, particularly for crime types such as domestic abuse.

A further finding of the inspection was the lack of use of the NPCC gravity matrix, HIOWC hold 4 Joint Decision-Making Panels (JDMPs) per week with partners to discuss child cases and make decisions about outcomes, the gravity is always used in the decision making. There has also been further scrutiny of this through dip sampling with more in-depth and independent consideration of how the gravity score has been applied and to understand if there are gaps or issues with its application.

HIOWC are exploring an outcome app for officers, supported by a mandatory one-hour training session on OOCR and the gravity score matrix. The JDMP process has strong oversight; decisions outside policy are reviewed by the YOT inspector, who also dip-samples JDMP decisions and can override them if necessary.

Under the force CCP approach, a YOT officer engages with the child and an appropriate adult (AA) for all OOCRs. An AA must be present when a community resolution (CR) is agreed and issued. The force is also reviewing how other forces use Body Worn Video for CRs to assess if mandating this would be good practice.

Child safeguarding remains central to the constabulary's approach. A PPN1 risk assessment is considered for all youth CR outcomes. Dip sampling of CRs and cautions ensure safeguarding opportunities are not missed, with YOT working closely with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs. Good practice is reinforced through training and force-wide communications

Sam De Reya
Deputy Chief Constable, Hampshire and Isle of Wight

Recommendations:

Recommendation 11: Chief Constables should improve how out-of-court disposals are managed by:

- Working with YJSs to establish formal data-sharing arrangements to ensure timely and consistent access to information on all types of out-of-court disposal
- Ensuring decisions about the use of crime Outcomes 20 and 21 are consistent and appropriate and reflect revised NPCC guidance
- Ensuring that police always use the NPCC child gravity matrix guidance when making decisions relating to outcomes for children and that the rationales for those decisions are always recorded.
- Ensuring that joint decisions with the youth justice service about out-of-court disposals are made at the appropriate level of seniority.

- Ensuring that children's legal rights are met before issuing a community resolution; this includes the need to caution and make sure that an appropriate adult is present
- Ensuring that safeguarding referrals are made when appropriate.

OPCC response: I will work with my Chief Constable to ensure that the concerns this recommendation are addressing, are implemented and that I am assured of the activity being undertaken. I will continue to scrutinise how the force manages OOCs, ensuring they are fair, consistent, and delivering the best outcomes.