



West Mercia
Youth Justice Service

Together, preventing offending and improving lives

Our Annual Plan 2025-26



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Introduction from Gareth Boulton, Chair of our Board

The wellbeing of children will continue to be at the heart of everything that the youth justice service does in West Mercia during 2025/26.

Having started on a new direction for the service in 2024/25, this year's annual plan seeks to deliver continuity of focus and mission for the YJS. It will continue building on the themes, approaches, and improvements that the service has delivered in the last year for young people, coupled with the need to evolve the service to fit an ever-changing environment.

The annual plan for this year reflects a service that is continuing to embed its Child First approach. The voices of children and victims are increasingly used to shape and co-produce services. This is helping to make those services more effective and is already delivering better outcomes for both young people and the wider communities in West Mercia. There is more to do however, and the annual plan this year reflects the progress made to date, alongside the commitment and belief that even more can and will be achieved.

The operating environment for youth justice is changing. Constituent partners within the sector, such as local authorities, police and health bodies are all subject to significant programmes of national reform on top of the rapid pace at which other parts of society change. The youth justice service will need to strike a balance in the coming



Gareth Boulton

Chair of West Mercia Youth Justice Service Strategic Management Board
Chief Executive Officer,
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner



year of being cognisant of these issues and responding to them, whilst remaining focused on the central and consistent mission of doing the very best for children and local communities. The support and engagement of partners in the system will be important to that approach.

In a changing world, one constant is the passion and skill of the service's staff. Spending time with the YJS team and seeing first hand their drive, determination, patience, compassion and creativity in addressing complex problems is genuinely inspiring. On behalf of the Management Board, I have every faith in them continuing to respond positively to all the challenges that will inevitably occur in delivery of the annual plan in 2025/26.

Who are We?

At West Mercia Youth Justice Service, we believe that every child deserves the chance of a positive future. Our work is about more than systems and processes. It's about people, potential, and positive change. It's about seeing beyond the offence to give everyone affected support, guidance, and opportunities.

We support children, young people and their victims who have encountered the justice system, helping repair the harm and create a positive future for themselves and those affected by their actions.

We take a child-first approach rooted in restorative justice, education, and strong partnerships. We place the needs, rights, and potential of every child and victim at the heart of our work. By building positive identities, empowering families, and promoting early support and diversion, we help young people move away from offending and towards brighter, safer futures.

We See Children as Children

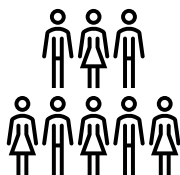


We place the needs, rights, and potential of every child and victim at the heart of what we do. Our work is child-focused, developmentally informed, and responsive to social and structural challenges.



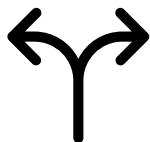
We Build Positive Futures Through Identity

We help children develop a strong, pro-social identity by recognising their strengths and supporting their journey away from offending. Through constructive relationships and future-focused interventions, we empower them to contribute positively to their communities.



We Collaborate with Children and Their Families

Change works best when it's done together. We actively involve children, their family and victims in decision-making, ensuring they are heard, respected, and included every step of the way.



We Promote Diversion and Prevention

We believe childhood should be free from the weight of the justice system. We focus on early support, minimal intervention, and diversion wherever possible- reducing stigma and giving children the best chance to thrive.

We are unique. Our footprint matches our police force; we work across 2868 square miles, with colleagues from four local authorities, two Fire and Rescue Services, two Integrated Care Boards, and two Probation Delivery Units. Our four counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin include populated urban areas and sparsely populated rural areas; there are multiple areas of deprivation and affluence.

Executive Summary

Our priorities for the forthcoming year are based on the needs of our children and victims and our commitment to continuous improvement.

In our area



Most children have access to safe and suitable accommodation.



Most school-aged children are engaged in suitable education, training or employment (ETE) at the end of their time working with us.



Around 20% of our children have an identified special educational need or disability; in Q3 and Q4 they all had a formal support plan.



There has been an increase in children getting help and support for their mental health and substance misuse needs.

This has resulted in lower numbers of children entering the criminal justice system in West Mercia than the England and Wales and YOT Family average. Similarly, the number of our children in custody and the reoffending rates of our children are below the England and Wales and YOT Family averages.

Our year-on-year comparisons show slight increases in our rates of first-time entrants and reoffending. This drives our priorities for 2025-26.

Our Priorities



Governance, Leadership and Partnership Arrangements

Governance

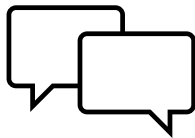
Our uniqueness requires distinct governance arrangements. We are hosted by the Office of the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) on behalf of the four Local Authorities within West Mercia and the WMYJS partnership.



We are accountable to the WMYJS Strategic Management Board, who, in turn, are accountable to the four Local Authorities for the commissioning and delivery of youth justice services. Our Management Board has primary membership of senior representatives from the statutory agencies (Local Authorities, Police, Probation and Integrated Care Boards).

Our Board meets quarterly and monitors our performance and quality through regular reporting. In September 2024, the Terms of Reference for our Management Board were updated and in March 2025, the governance structure was further refined ([Annexure 1](#)).

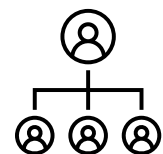
Board Development



In June 2024, we welcomed Gareth Boulton, OPCC Chief Executive as Chair of the YJS Board. During the year, our Board have prioritised hearing the voice of children. The opening agenda item for every Board meeting is *Child-first: The Voice of the Children working with WMYJS*. Over the last year, our Board has heard from our children around their restorative justice activities, their connection to local voluntary organisations, their views on the outside of one of our buildings, how important providing opportunities are through creative arts and how for some children, specialised programmes can make a long-lasting difference. Hosting our Board meetings across West Mercia in our office bases has improved connectivity between our Board and service.

Leadership

Our Head of Service has dual accountability to the Deputy Chief Executive of the OPCC and the Chair of the Management Board. They line manage six Team Managers who lead operational delivery of youth justice services through multi-disciplinary teams including seconded Substance Misuse Workers, Probation Officers and Health Workers ([see Annexure 2](#)). In March 2024, West Mercia Police provided a YJS Police Sergeant on a six-month secondment. Our Sergeant forms part of our leadership team and oversees the work of the five seconded Police Officers.





Partnerships

We are an active partner across multiple local justice strategic partnerships and partnerships related to vulnerable children and families. We seek to maximise these to improve outcomes for justice-involved children and victims; our service aligns its priorities with partnership strategies and resulting priorities.

The Integrated Care Strategy: Good Health and Wellbeing for Everyone 2023-2033 ([Annexure 3](#)) shows how our work connects to the wider

Integrated Care System including improving health outcomes, reducing health inequalities and improving social and economic development. West Mercia Police and the OPCC are members of the partnership that oversees this.

In each of the four local authority areas, we are a member of relevant groups under the Safeguarding Children Partnerships including the children and young peoples' strategic partnerships or equivalent, and the early help partnerships. Connectivity with these groups enables change for justice-involved children. We are members of the Corporate Parenting Boards, SEND meetings and MASH partnership groups.

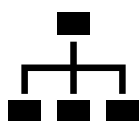
Our Head of Service attends the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships at the unitary or top tier authority level and their relevant subgroups, including reducing re-offending groups. We are an active member of the West Mercia Criminal Justice Board, the West Mercia Crime Reduction Board, the PCCs Victim and Witness Board and the MAPPA Strategic Management Board.

Operationally, we are active participants within the Channel Panels established as part of the Prevent Strategy, the Serious and Organised Crime Joint Agency Groups and the Child Exploitation Operational Groups.

In 25/26 we will

- improve the response to children who may be at risk of radicalisation (Prevent Duty); and
- update our response to children who display sexually harmful behaviours, including work with Police around MAPPA eligible children.

Structure



Our service comprises four multi-agency service delivery teams, aligned to the Local Authority areas, and two centralised teams who provide specialist support across West Mercia ([Annexure 2](#)). In 24/25 the centralised teams expanded to include a Restorative Justice Lead and an Administration Lead. In the coming year we will work with the OPCC Treasurer to ensure our staffing structure reflects the profile and needs of our children and victims.

Our health partnership contribution remains under review, with the aim of creating a single service specification by December 2025. We currently have a Speech and Language seconded (0.2 FTE) and arrangements for priority consultations with psychologists in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Under the national allocation formula, the Probation Service contribute two posts to our service, a Probation Officer and a Probation Service Officer. The Probation Officer covers Worcestershire, and we are waiting a start date for our Probation Service Officer who will cover the remaining area. Seconded Police Officers are employed in each local authority area and are now line managed by a dedicated YJS Police Sergeant.

We are compliant with the minimum staffing requirements outlined in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. There are six social work qualified members of staff employed by our service.

Workforce Development

We understand the skills and knowledge required by our workforce to effectively address the needs of justice-involved children and victims. We work with key partners including statutory agencies, community organisations, and relevant groups to provide evidence-based training, professional development opportunities, support, and other resources to enhance the skills and knowledge of our workforce.



Throughout 24-25 our “Service-Learning Log” captured the learning from internal reviews, external reviews, feedback and learning through partnership arrangements. This has enabled us to prioritise our development actions and inform future planning for workforce development. As a result, in the coming year we will deliver training on assessment skills, PREVENT awareness, professional curiosity, risk management and MAPPA.

Financial Resources



Our service has a complex budget structure comprising partner agency cash, seconded staff and in-kind contributions and the Youth Justice (YOT) Grant from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. See [Annexure 4](#) for provisional contributions for 2025/26.

The YJB Youth Justice (YOT) Grant is used for the provision of youth justice services with the aim of reducing the number of children entering the youth justice system, reducing the reoffending rates of children; and improving the safety, wellbeing and outcomes for children in the youth justice system. The grant forms part of our overall pooled partnership budget.

In 25/26 we will receive funding via the MOJ Turnaround Grant which will contribute to the costs of our Prevention Offer which we developed in 24/25.

The grant, partner contributions and available resources will be used to deliver youth justice services across West Mercia, to implement the development plan against the priorities identified for 25-26, to sustain and improve the current performance against the current four national outcome measures and ten Key Performance Indicators.

We outsource the provision of Appropriate Adults for children in Police custody. In September 2024, we commenced a joint contractual arrangement with West Mercia Police. Child Action Northwest (CANW) is now the sole provider of Appropriate Adults for children and vulnerable adults across West Mercia. We hold joint quarterly contract monitoring and compliance meetings.



In 24/25 we made considerable progress against our priorities. (Annexure 5)

The logo for Morse Youth is located in the bottom right corner. It features the word "MORSE" in a bold, sans-serif font, with a stylized road graphic integrated into the letter "S". Below "MORSE" is the word "YOUTH" in a similar bold, sans-serif font. The entire logo is in a dark blue color.

In January 2025, we commenced a twelve-month pilot with St Giles who have employed 2 FTE St Giles Lived Experience Case Workers; one covers Shropshire/Telford and the other Hereford and Worcester. The Case Workers are embedded within our service and provide child-focused mentoring support for children who are connected to violence (committed an offence, at risk of committing a violent offence, victim of a violent offence) using their own experiences and offering intervention during reachable/teachable moments.



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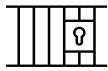
We have developed our early intervention offer (our Prevention Offer) which complements existing provision. Proactively we offer prevention support to all children following an arrest. We were able to present this model to the MOJ which has resulted in the reinstatement of Turnaround Grant funding from 1 April 2025.

Performance over the Previous Year

Our annual performance report is contained in [Annexure 6](#). In summation the key performance measures which show how well the youth justice system is working for children in West Mercia illustrates:



The rate of children entering the criminal justice system (First Time Entrants, FTE) is below the England and Wales and YOT Family average, although there has been a slight increase on the rate from the previous year.



The number of children in custody, as measured by the rate of custody per 1,000 population is below the England and Wales and YOT Family average, although there has been a marginal increase on the rate from the previous year; and



Reoffending rates in West Mercia are below the England and Wales and YOT Family average, whilst there has been a slight increase on previous twelve months there has been a decrease in the number of children reoffending.

In 24/25, we adapted internal processes to enable more accurate data recording. The key performance indicators relating to the needs of justice-involved children in West Mercia and the extent to which their needs have been met shows that:



Most children have access to safe and suitable accommodation.



Most school-aged children are engaged in suitable education, training or employment (ETE) provision at the end of their intervention but around a third of children above school-age were not in suitable education, training or employment at the end of their intervention.



Approximately 20% of children have an identified special educational need or disability; in Q3 and Q4 all these children had a formal plan in place to support them.



There has been an increase in children getting help and support for their mental health needs.



There was an increase in the numbers of children who received targeted support in relation to their substance misuse needs including access to specialist treatment.



90% of children successfully completed their diversionary intervention programme.

Risks and Issues

We hold a centralised risk register which is tabled at quarterly Management Board meetings for oversight, review, and action.

During 24/25 we benefitted from specialist recruitment support through the West Mercia Police Staff Recruitment Coordinator. This enabled us to recruit to our vacancies more quickly and through an arrangement facilitated by our Chair, we were able to use external vetting. This significantly reduced the length of time it took for new recruits to join our service.

The risks and issues for 25/26 are:

<i>Current Risks and Issues</i>	<i>Actions Being Taken to Address Risks and Issues</i>
The emotional and mental health needs of children not adequately met due to no health workers deployed directly in YJS	<p>There are arrangements to access CAMHS in all areas</p> <p>Information, Advice and Guidance provided to children by staff</p> <p>Regular supervision of staff to escalate response to individual needs.</p> <p>Review of health provision – looking at the requirement and consistency across West Mercia area</p>
Inability to meet data reporting requirements due to any unforeseen absence of the information officer.	<p>Utilise the CACI contract to train nominated staff to be able to meet data reporting requirements.</p> <p>Utilise CACI contract technical support for expert system advice</p>

Plan for the Forthcoming Year

We are committed to continuous improvement. Our Plan on a Page ([Annexure 7](#)) outlines how we will address our key priorities.



Child First

In March 24, we updated our Child-First Principles. Child-First West Mercia means:

We See Children as Children



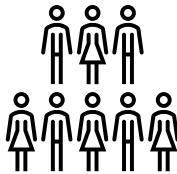
We place the needs, rights, and potential of every child and victim at the heart of what we do. Our work is child-focused, developmentally informed, and responsive to social and structural challenges.

We Build Positive Futures Through Identity



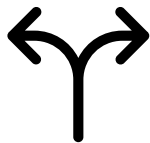
We help children develop a strong, pro-social identity by recognising their strengths and supporting their journey away from offending. Through constructive relationships and future-focused interventions, we empower them to contribute positively to their communities.

We Collaborate With Children and Their Families



Change works best when it's done together. We actively involve children, their family and victims in decision-making, ensuring they are heard, respected, and included every step of the way.

We Promote Diversion and Prevention



We believe childhood should be free from the weight of the justice system. We focus on early support, minimal intervention, and diversion wherever possible- reducing stigma and giving children the best chance to thrive.

We hear the voice of children through the self-assessment tool; End of Order Questionnaire and the "Tell Us" Procedure which captures children's comments, compliments and complaints.

Our comments, compliments and complaints procedure is called "Tell Us". Responses to "Tell Us" are made via a form, a dedicated phone number, a dedicated email address or via our website. Responses received are fed through to the leadership team, or if they are a complaint handled under our complaints procedure.

We use self-assessment questionnaires with all children at the start, end, and review stages of their intervention. We ask for specific feedback from children through an end of order questionnaire (EoOQ) which are reviewed by their worker when completed.

Responses are collated locally on a quarterly basis and used by the leadership team to inform service development.

Development of our Child-First approach is led by our Child-First Champions. This dedicated group has commenced reviewing the End of Order Questionnaires and the Screening Tools currently in use.

In 25/26 the Child-First Champions will be

- Implementing the updated EoOQ and Screening Tools.
- Leading children's participation in service development activities.
- Embedding the use of ICT in capturing the voice of children and victims to make capturing and analysis easier.
- Working with children and parents to update the service feedback procedure, including responding to Compliments and Complaints.
- Developing a service-wide collaboration strategy incorporating recommendations from the Child First Collaboration Research Report.
- Working alongside Willowdene and justice-involved women and girls to improve service provision for girls.
- Continuing to review service policies and procedures reflecting Child-first principles, new legislation (Working Together 2023) and evidence-based practice; aligning and prioritising policy reviews with learning from quality assurance activity and national policy.
- Designing a tool to enable working with children and victims to more closely match reparation placements with children's interests and victim's needs.
- Rolling out the updated induction and training for OoCD panel members to include child first/child centred policing and trauma informed approaches.
- Working with partners to create a directory of projects, activities and services available for children and victims; including awareness of third sector organisations working in local communities.

Standards for children

In October 2023, we completed the National Standard 2 – At Court Self-Assessment. The self-assessment evidenced our strengths. Our reporting practice is mostly good; we consistently provide high quality reports, which are child focussed, support desistance and contain the child's views following an up-to-date YJB approved assessment evidencing engagement with parents and carers.



We have progressed in the six areas which were assessed as inadequate.

An Action Plan was developed, outstanding actions from this plan that will be completed in 25/26 including implementing a Disproportionality Strategy and centrally collating Magistrates feedback to inform service development.

Service Development

Progress Against Inspection Action Plan

The outstanding actions from our Inspection Action Plan will be completed in 25/26. We will be

1. Implementing a simplified QA framework which includes sufficient focus on diversity, inclusion and meeting individual needs; ensuring changing circumstances in planning is effective and the involvement of other agencies and alignment of plans.
2. Continuing to review of service policies and procedures to reflect Child-first principles, new legislation (Working Together 2023) and evidence-based practice; aligning policy reviews with learning from quality assurance activity and national policy.
3. Finalising the review of health resources deployed across the service and work with partners to secure appropriate health provision for all children within WMYJS.
4. Embedding the internal scrutiny process for OoCD which complements the existing external scrutiny process.
5. Finalising the review of housing policies/protocols for vulnerable children to ensure they prioritise children coming out of custody.

Response to Learning: Serious Incident and Learning Exercises

Learning aids our continuous improvement; we capture our learning and associated actions in the Service-Learning Log. This central reference point informs our service development activities including our workforce development needs. We participate in learning activities with partners across the four local authority areas, regularly participating in multi-agency case file audits as part of local safeguarding arrangements.

In November 2024, we participated in a rapid review due to the death of a child who was working with us. Our child who was living out-of-area was the victim of a serious violence offence. Other children were involved in this incident. We are implementing the identified learnings from this.

In February 2025, we participated in a multi-agency case file audit in Telford. The audit considered the multi-agency practice with children and young people where the risk of serious violence was an issue. Six children were chosen for consideration in the audit due to their connection to an incident, where a 20-year-old man was stabbed and suffered serious injuries. Two of the children are currently on remand having been charged with attempted murder. The service expects the findings from the audit to be published in June 2025 and will implement the learning from this.

National Priority Areas

We will continue to work within local partnerships to address national priority areas.

Children from groups which are over-represented



We collate and monitor information around children in our area who may be over-represented in the youth justice system, including Black and Mixed heritage children, children known to social care services, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. In 24/25 we started to gather information around the exclusion rates for justice-involved children.

In 25/26 we will

- Further refine performance data to help understand children from groups which are over-represented.

- Implement a Disproportionality Strategy.
- Work alongside Willowdene and justice-involved women and girls to improve youth justice service provision for girls.

Policing

We have a close working relationship with West Mercia Police. We benefit from in-time sharing of information which enables swift support for justice-involved children. West Mercia Police second five Police Officers to our service; these Police Officers provide coordination between local policing colleagues and the youth justice service.



In 24/25 we benefited from a closer working relationship with senior Police colleagues, including clearer oversight and supervision of Seconded Police Officers. We have worked with Police colleagues to design the Child-First response to children in custody. This is expected to be operational in mid-2025.

In 25/26 we will update our assessment, planning and risk guidance to ensure assessment and plans are future focussed and consider how to keep the child, victim and community safe including work with Police around the role of Seconded Officers as Offender Managers.

Prevention

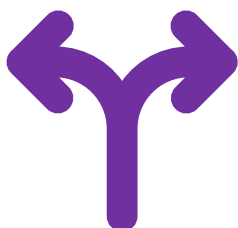


The preventative landscape across West Mercia is complex; preventative services for children are primarily delivered via Children's Social Care Early Help and Police via Intervention and Prevention Officers. In the last year, in response to us losing our Turnaround Grant, we worked closely with our partners to define and develop our preventative offer. We now offer Preventative support via our Proactive, Reactive and Targeted Offers ([Annexure 8](#)).

In 25/26 we will work with

- Partners to improve the response to children who may be at risk of radicalisation (Prevent Duty).
- Strategic leaders to position the service in accordance with reforms associated with the Families First and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships agendas.

Diversion



We deliver diversionary opportunities through our well-established Joint Decision-Making Panel (JDMP) process. The process was updated in 24/25 to be child-first, proportionate and maximise opportunities for diversion; this will be further refined in the coming year through our work with CPS and Police. The Management Board receive a quarterly report relating to diversionary outcomes for children.

In 25/26 we will

- Embed the internal scrutiny process for OocD which complements the existing external scrutiny process.
- Roll out the updated induction and training for OocD panel members to include child first/child centred policing and trauma informed approaches
- Work with CPS and Police to pilot an updated OOC process to inform CPS work on National Protocol/Guidance; ensuring the YJS response to children in court is more proactive and provides additional opportunities to maximise diversion

Education

We employ Youth Justice Officers with an Education, Training and Employment specialism. These officers work in partnership with agencies within their local area to ensure all children known to our service are having their educational needs met. The Education, Training and Employment Officers record each child's educational placement; the hours which they attend, whether they have a Special Education Need or a Disability; and whether they have an EHCP. In the coming year, we will work with education colleagues to collate further contextual information regarding children's education including those who are not receiving their education entitlement, excluded, on part time timetables or electively home educated. We will analyse this data to identify any disproportionality including the care status of the child.

In 24/25 we refined the focus of work of the Education, Training and Employment Officers through development of West Mercia Learning Centre, we will embed this over the coming year to provide a consistent educational offer for all children, measured through the number of children receiving accredited outcomes.



Restorative Approaches and Victims

We have dedicated Victim Liaison Officers who support the victims of children working with our service across both diversionary and court pathways. Over the year, 90% of victims have been contacted by our Victim Liaison Officers.

Victim Satisfaction Surveys are completed at the end of support, in Q3

- 😊 91% of victims were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received
- 😊 91% of victims were kept informed and given the opportunity to engage in restorative justice
- 😊 100% of victims thought their views were taken into consideration
- 😊 100% of victims felt safe and secure throughout the process

In 2024 we successfully recruited a restorative justice lead who is leading the restorative offer and providing oversight of the Victim Liaison Officers and Restorative Justice Officers. The service has played a key role in the PCC Victims and Witnesses Board, hosting and facilitating, with partners, two Restorative Justice Mapping Workshops on behalf of the Board.

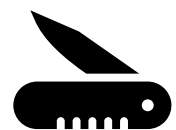
In 25/26 we will

- Develop a service-wide policy and work with partners to develop practice guidance around working with victims who are children including development of a Victim Needs Assessment Tool.
- Work with OPCC, Victim Support and Police in linking the YJS Offer with the development of the West Mercia Victims Hub.
- Undertake a practice review to consider referral order practice, including the Making it Right Approach to panels.
- Upskill all Practitioners to improve their confidence and ability to deliver restorative approaches across all work with children and victims.
- Work with children and victims to more closely match reparation placements with children's interests and victim's needs.
- Standardise the Restorative Justice Officer roles.

Serious Violence, Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding

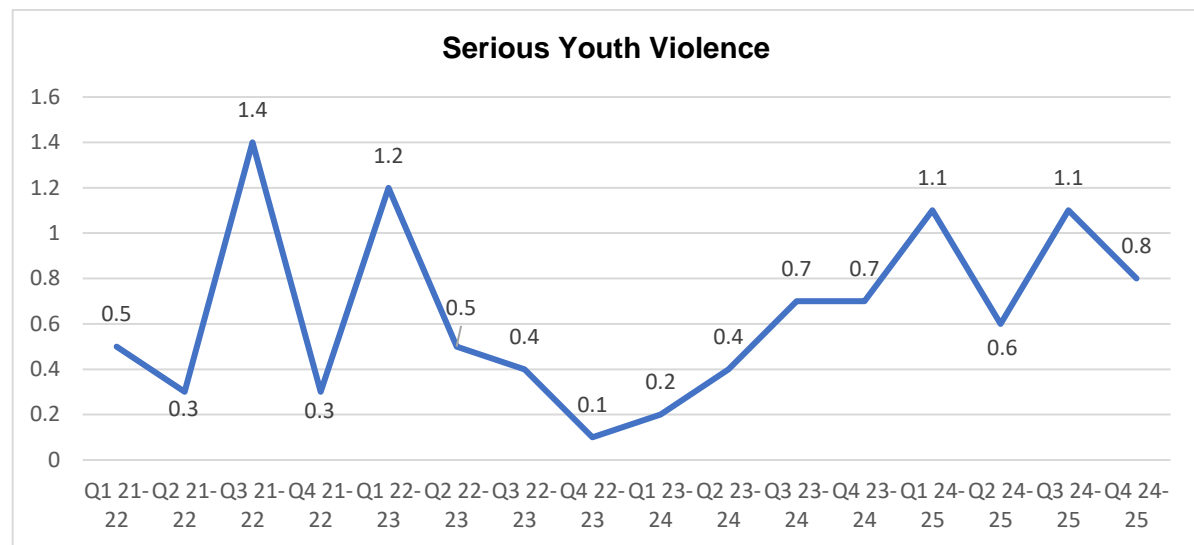
Serious Youth Violence

Across West Mercia the Serious Violence duty is delivered via the five Community Safety Partnerships (CSP). Governance arrangements exist at the local CSP level to support the delivery of the Duty, and West Mercia Office of the Policing Crime Commissioner (OPCC) oversees the delivery via the Crime Reduction Board (CRB). The CRB brings partners together to reduce offending and reoffending by ensuring that adults and children who offend are challenged and supported to desist from crime. We are a partner at each CSP and we attend and report on our service delivery to the CRB.



In 24/25, as a specified authority for the serious violence duty we contributed to the need assessments and strategy. We are fully engaged in the governance arrangements for the duty in each Local Authority area and at the West Mercia level; continuing to advocate for justice-involved children across West Mercia through fully participating in all local authority Serious Violence Duty Sub-Groups. We responded to serious violence with the introduction of VR headsets as a tool to work with children connected to serious violence and commencement of a contract with St Giles for the provision of lived experience mentors to work with children connected to serious violence.

In 24/25 there were 44 serious youth violence offences recorded in accordance with YJB guidelines. The rate of serious youth violence has fluctuated throughout the year.



In response to this, in 25/26 we will

- Continue to use the area-wide and local Serious Violence needs assessments to shape internal practice and delivery of a localised response.
- Implement the learnings and recommendations from the serious violence MACFA.
- Work with partners to update our response to children who display sexually harmful behaviours, including work with Police around MAPPA eligible children.

Contextual Safeguarding

We are part of the child exploitation strategy and operational groups and the Serious Organised Crime Joint Agency Groups (SOCJAG) across the area to address the issues of county lines type activity, organised crime group and gang activities. Exploitation is a priority across all areas; we contribute to the partnership work in all areas, including Get Safe Strategic and Operational Groups in Worcestershire and the Child Exploitation Strategic and Operational Groups in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.

In 25/26 the service will work with strategic leaders to position the service in accordance with reforms associated with the Families First and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships agendas.

Detention in Police Custody



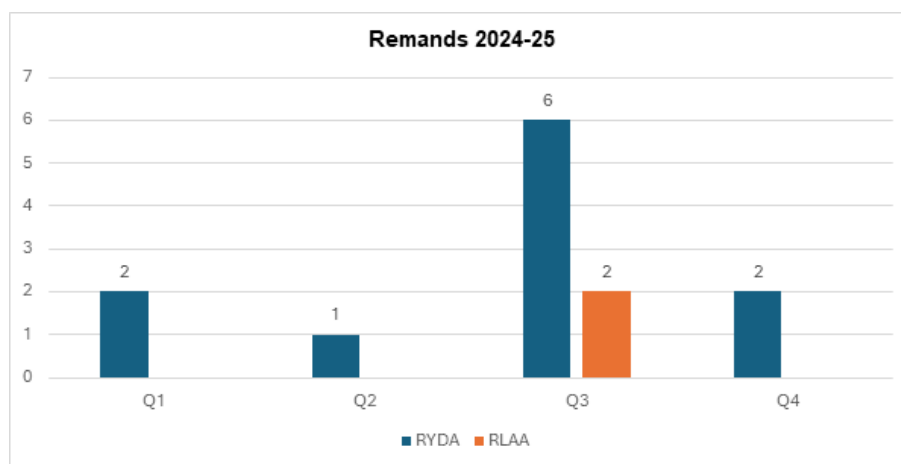
In 24/25 769 children in West Mercia were arrested, this is a significant reduction of 190 children from the previous year. Of the 769 children arrested 60.7% (467 children) were bailed to return to a police station; 39 children (5.07%) were charged and remanded in police custody and 14 children (1.8%) were detained for court. On comparison to the previous year, this represents a significant reduction in the number of children being detained for court.

The length of time that children spend in police custody in West Mercia is lower than the national average. Data relating to children in police custody is regularly scrutinised.

In 24/25 we worked closely with Police colleagues to automate information relating to children arrested, bailed and remanded. This supported the development of our proactive prevention offer ([Annexure 7](#)). We worked with Police Custody colleagues in the development of the Child-First Children in Custody Procedure. This is expected to be operational in mid-2025. We will continue to work with Police colleagues in the implementation of this.

Remands

During the year, 2024-25 11 children were remanded to youth detention accommodation and 2 children were remanded to local authority accommodation. This is an increase from the previous year. In the coming year we will work with Police, Children's Services and partners to develop the West Mercia response to the Bail and Remand Concordat.



Use of Custody and Constructive Resettlement

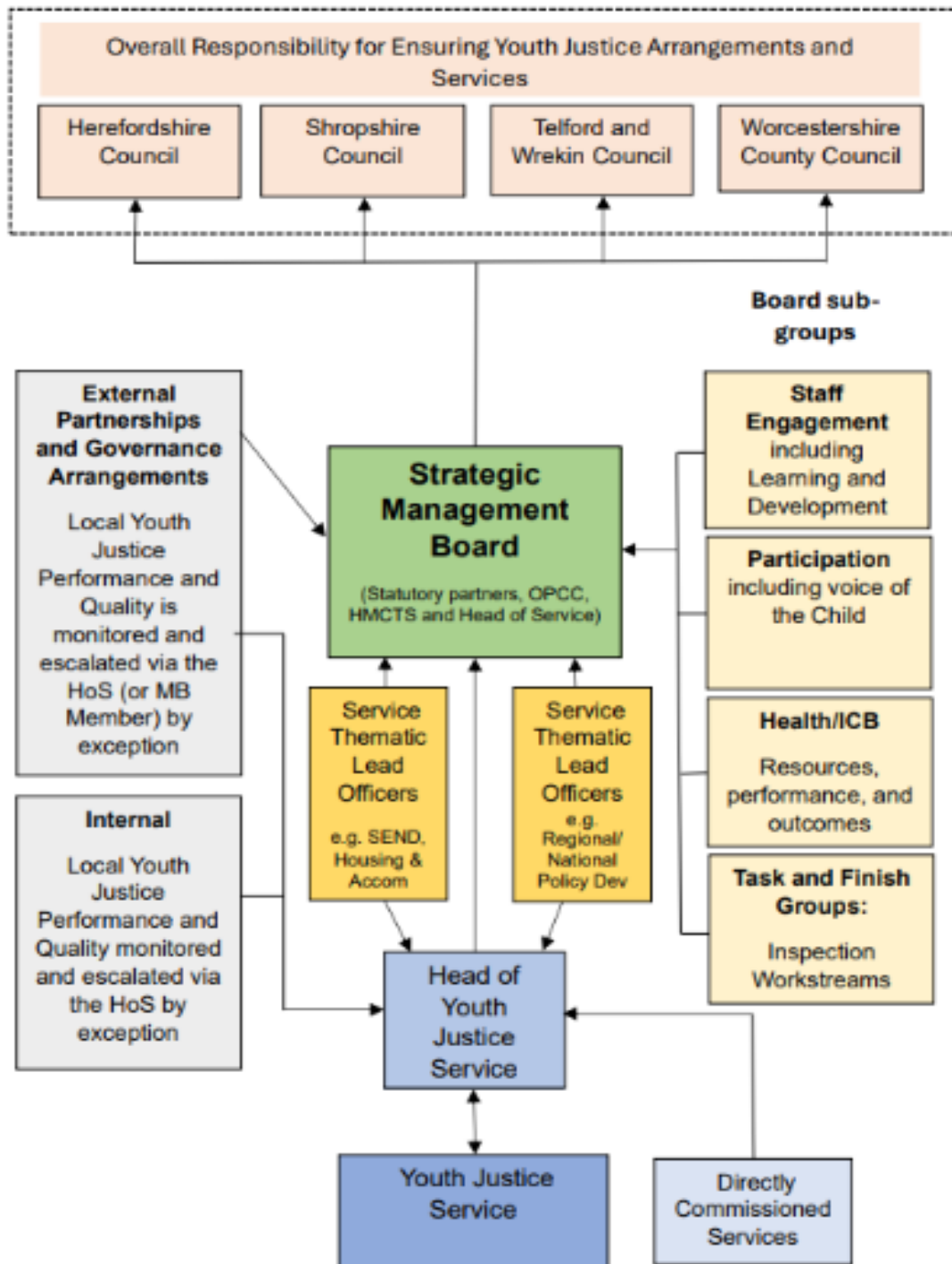
The rate of children in custody from West Mercia remains lower than the YOT family average and the rate across England and Wales. 4 children were released from custody; one of these children was released to an unsuitable placement. The placement was deemed unsuitable on the basis that they were released into Airbnb accommodation.

In 25/26 we will

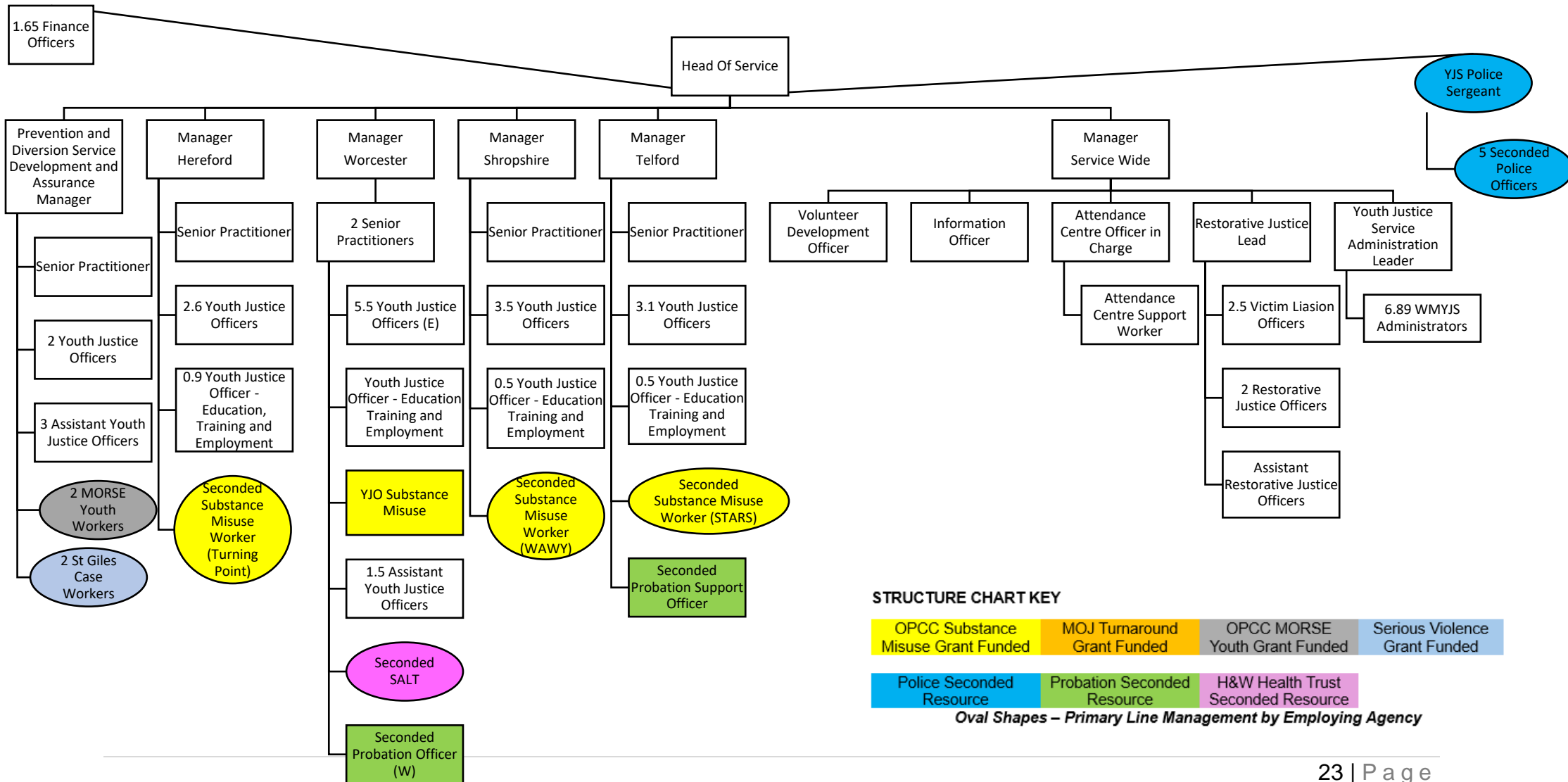
- Work with Probation to finalise the revised transition arrangements into case management
- Review housing policies/protocols for vulnerable children in each area to ensure they identify and prioritise children coming out of custody

Annexure 1: Our Governance Structure

West Mercia Youth Justice Partnership and Service Governance Diagram (From 1st April 2025)



Annexure 2: Our Staffing Structure



Annexure 3: Strategy on a Page: Good Health and Wellbeing for Everyone 2023 - 2033



Annexure 4: Budget Costs and Contributions 2025/26

The Youth Justice Service has a complex budget structure comprising of partner agency cash, seconded staff and the Youth Justice (YOT) Grant from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. The table below outlines the provisional contributions for 2025/26, as some contributions were still to be confirmed, including some of the seconded staff arrangements, at the point this plan was agreed.

Agency	Staffing Costs – Secondees (£)	Payments in kind (£)	Other Delegated Funds (£)	Total (£)
Local Authorities			1,179,999	1,179,999
Police Service	263,597		63,000	326,597
National Probation Service	69,844		5,000	74,844
Health	143,891		36,894	180,785
Police and Crime Commissioner			201,291	201,291
YJB – Youth Justice Grant			1,567,664	1,567,664
Other- MOJ Grant (Turnaround) & movement from Reserves			241,465	241,465
Total	477,332		3,295,313	3,772,645

Category	Budget (£)
Employee Costs	2,685,245
Other Employee Costs	25,000
Premises	192,453
Supplies and Services	22,552
ICT	137,019
Third Party Payments	183,215
Transport	49,830
TOTAL	3,295,314

Annexure 5: Our Progress Against 24/25 Priorities

Key: Completed (16) In Progress (10) Not Yet Started (3)

Theme	Priority	Inspection Action (where applicable)	Actions	Year End Update
CHILD FIRST	Embedding Child-First		Work with children and staff to develop the service's Child First vision and values.	Completed. Staff have sought feedback around the service vision and values which have been incorporated into the updated draft vision and values.
			Increase the frequency at which the service captures the voice of children and responds to this; utilise ICT to make capturing and analysis easier.	Partially Completed. We are more frequently responding the feedback from children; this is the first agenda item on team meeting and leadership meetings. We are starting to use MS Forms more regularly.
PEOPLE	Supporting staff development, wellbeing and morale		Implement the revised staff supervision policy.	Completed. All staff are expected to receive monthly supervision. Administration staff record children and victim case discussions. Supervision frequency is monitored.
			Complete a dip sample of staff supervision/appraisals; providing a summation report to the Management Board evidencing quality of staff performance and identifying service-wide development needs.	Not Completed. In 25-26 the staff appraisal process needs to be updated and all staff need to have an appraisal. The QA framework and audits should also be included in informing the Board of service-wide development needs.
			Link the Service-Wide Learning Log with the Workforce Training and Development Plan; review our progress and actions quarterly.	Completed. The service-wide learning log is in place which informs the training plan. The L&D group have met quarterly to review this and ensure actions are progressed.
	Understanding and addressing disproportionality within West Merica	2.1	Revise the performance data to capture disproportionality to help understand children from groups which are over-represented to include revised educational data and work with girls.	Completed. The performance reports to Board now include ethnicity and gender. This can be further refined in 25-26 with support from the ICB Board Member.
			Implement a Disproportionality Strategy	Not Completed.
PRACTICE	Ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance	3.1	Commence review of service policies and procedures to reflect Child-first principles, new legislation (Working Together 2023) and evidence-based practice; aligning policy reviews with learning from quality assurance activity and national policy.	Partially Completed.
		4.2		We have started to review our policies and procedures; this has been led, in part, by the priorities of our partners and learning from their reviews. This will continue in 25-26.
	Strengthening our restorative offer and victim satisfaction		Recruit a Restorative Justice Lead to lead our restorative offer and provide oversight of Victim Liaison Officers and Restorative Officers.	Completed. Our leaders are in post and have completed their induction periods.
			Work with Police, OPCC and Local Authority Partners to deliver restorative practice in accordance with any changes required through the "Immediate Justice" Approach.	Completed. This government approach did not progress.
			Develop a service-wide policy and work with partners to develop practice guidance around working with victims who are children	Partially Completed. The concept for working with victims is in place, we need to update this further and finalise this, including a tool to use to capture Victim Needs Assessment.
			Undertake a deep dive audit focussed on the Making it Right Approach to understand the successful implementation of this.	Not Completed In 25-26 we need to undertake a broader practice review around our referral order practice, this will include the Making it Right Approach to panels.
	Improving the consistency of practice across the service	1.1, 4.3 1.2, 2.1 3.3	Implement the revised management oversight policy; supervision policy and simplified QA framework which includes sufficient focus on diversity, inclusion and meeting individual needs; monitoring that responding to changing circumstances in planning is effective; ensuring the involvement of other agencies and alignment of plans	Partially Completed. The management oversight and supervision policies have been implemented. The QA framework has been drafted and needs a further simplification before implementation. We have implemented a monthly leadership practice reflection session for Senior Practitioner to support practice consistency. We will further refine our practice to be consistency across West Merica in 25-26 including further improvements in relation to responding to risk management, changing circumstances and alignment of plans.
			Implement the outstanding actions from the National Standards 2 – At Court Action Plan.	Partially Completed.

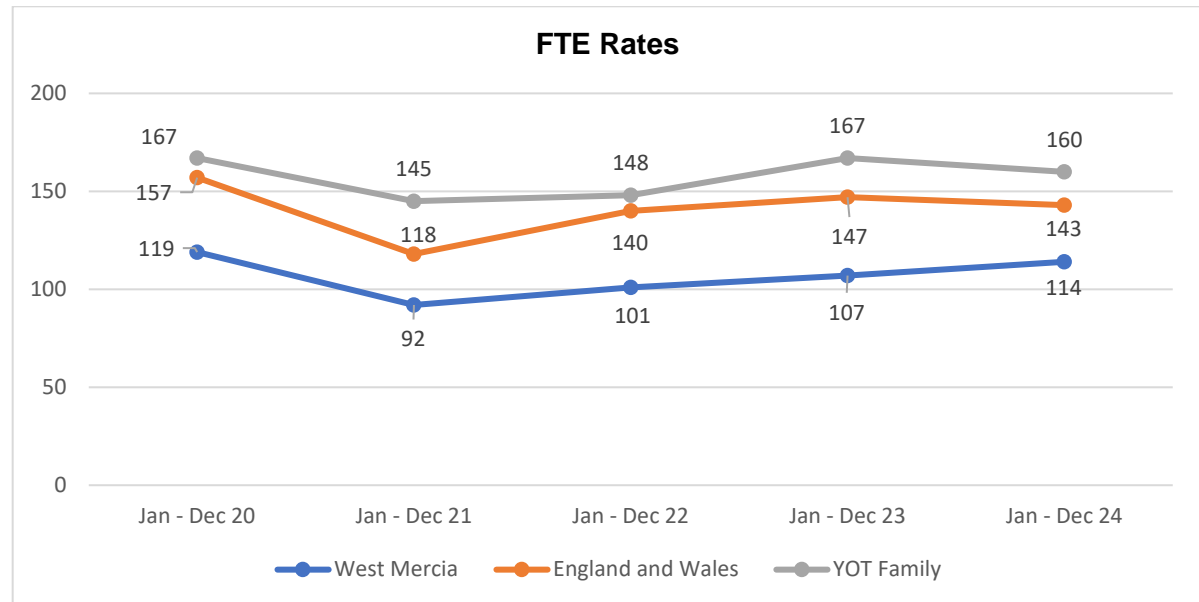
				There are several actions in progress that will be completed in 25-26.
	Improving our diversion and early intervention offer		Deliver training to the service in the use of the new YJB mandated Prevention and Diversion Assessment Tool.	Completed All staff in post received training. The training is to be included as a standard module in our induction pack. In 25-26 we will update our induction programme.
			Work with partners (Police, Children's Social Care) to update JDMF processes to be child-first, proportionate and maximise diversion.	Completed In 25-26 we will work with CPS to trial updated processes for diversion from court. This will inform national practice.
		8.2	Establish an internal scrutiny process for OoCD which complements the existing external scrutiny process.	Partially Completed Dip audits have occurred and a draft process is in place; this needs further refinement in 25/26.
		8.3	Utilise the Youth Justice Legal Centre to provide induction process and training for panel members to include child first/child centred policing and trauma informed approaches	Partially Completed Training has been received from the YJLC. A draft training and induction process has been completed and will be trialled for feedback before wider rollout.
			Develop and deliver the Youth MORSE Programme in partnership with the OPCC and YSS to improve the diversionary offer for vehicle crime.	Completed The Programme is operational, and funding has been secured for it to continue until 31 March 26.
			Develop an early intervention offer which complements existing provision (Children' Social Early Help Offer and Police ASB and Intervention and Prevention Offer)	Completed. We have a developed a clear prevention offer. Our offer is proactive and complements existing provision.
	Improving the health offer in the youth justice service	7.3	Finalise the review of health resources deployed into YJS teams and work with partners to secure appropriate health provision for all children within WMYJS.	Partially Completed. A draft model has been developed; a single-service specification should be developed by December 2025.
PARTNERSHIP	Improving our work with other agencies	9.1	Probation: Finalise the revised transition arrangements into case management. (18 year old cohort) Police: Work with Police, Children's Services and partners to develop a combined West Mercia-wide remand strategy. Work with Police to implement, monitor and review the new commissioning arrangements for the Appropriate Adult Service. Children's Social Care: Work with Children's Services to align information sharing and recording to improve the interconnectedness of plans for children support by WMYJS and Children's Social Care. Education: Work with education colleagues to collate further contextual information relating regarding children's education including school exclusions children who are not receiving their education entitlement, excluded, on part time timetables or electively home educated. Analyse this data to identify any disproportionality including the care status of the child. OPCC: Work with OPCC colleagues to share analysis, data, needs assessments and commissioning intentions.	Partially Completed <i>Probation:</i> The arrangements have been finalised and are awaiting sign off. <i>Police:</i> The Appropriate Adult Service is operational. Our strategy has been superseded by the Bail and Remand Concordat. <i>Children's Social Care:</i> We have worked with colleagues to improve interconnectedness of plans. This has been helped by WMYJS having access to Children's Social Care records. <i>Education:</i> We are gathering this information more regularly, we need to standardise this approach so that it can be easily reported. <i>OPCC:</i> We now routinely meet with OPCC colleagues and were part of commissioning processes for the CCE contract awarded to Catch 22.
	Addressing disparities in service provision and commissioned services between areas	7.1 7.2	Complete a comprehensive and up-to-date Needs Analysis of Children within WMYJS including a focus on SEND, substance misuse and domestic abuse. Use the needs analysis to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the service model across the areas to identify gaps opportunities to level up and ensure consistency; Ensure the staffing structure of the service reflects the profile and needs of the children; Work with the OPCC Treasurer to undertake a financial review to profile the service's costs of meeting the needs of children; Work with partners to align our processes and practice with Working Together 2023 including better 	Completed The Needs Assessment has been completed. The service model for 25-26 shows a more consistent offer which reflects the profile and needs of children. Work with the OPCC Treasurer has commenced. The first proposals around this have been presented to the Board and a further view and proposal will be tendered in 25-26. Our Processes and Practice with partners continues to improve. The utilisation of specialist workers and work with partners has improved; this has been evidenced in our significantly improved KPI recording.

			<p>information sharing, closer relationships and joined up approaches with partners;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shape WMYJS service delivery and response to children (substance misuse, domestic abuse, serious youth violence) through contemporary practice approaches, utilisation of specialist workers where appropriate and work with partners 	
	Supporting delivery of the Serious Violence Duty across West Mercia		<p>Work with CSPs and the CRB to deliver the Serious Violence Duty.</p> <p>Use the area-wide and local Serious Violence needs assessments to shape internal practice.</p> <p>Work with partners to determine a response to children who are released under investigation (RUI) for serious violence related offences.</p> <p>Undertake a joint review with Worcestershire colleagues in response to a serious youth violence incident; identifying and opportunities for the service learning and development.</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p>We have upheld our responsibilities as a specified authority. We attend all CSP and CRB meetings. We have worked closely with the Serious Violence Duty Partnership Manager.</p> <p>Partially Completed</p> <p>We have a greater awareness of the prevalence of violence across West Mercia; we have improved our practice with VR headsets. We need to shape our response to children who demonstrate harmful sexual behaviour.</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Our prevention offer includes children released under investigation. All children RUI are offered support from WMYJS. Support complements existing plans in place.</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>The learning from the review is being used to shape further refinements to the GET SAFE model including WMYJS role as part of the Strategic Group.</p>
GOVERNANCE / LEADERSHIP	Ensuring management oversight of practice and leadership of service development	1.4 5.3	Ensure sufficient capacity to provide management oversight through recruitment of Restorative Justice Lead, Administration Lead and Additional Manager in Worcestershire; Limited Term Prevention and Diversion Manager and review of the supervision arrangements for Seconded Police Officers.	<p>Completed</p> <p>Restorative Justice Lead and Administration Lead are in permanent posts. The Prevention and Diversion Manager role will continue until 31 March 26.</p> <p>The YJS Seconded Police Officers now report to a dedicated Sergeant. In 25-26, the Sergeant will be an operational post based within the YJS.</p>
	Refining internal governance arrangements		Review governance arrangements of WMYJS inclusive of internal reporting procedures and delegations.	<p>Completed.</p> <p>The governance arrangements have been updated included a revised ToR for Management Board and an updated governance structure.</p>

Annexure 6: Our Key Performance Indicators

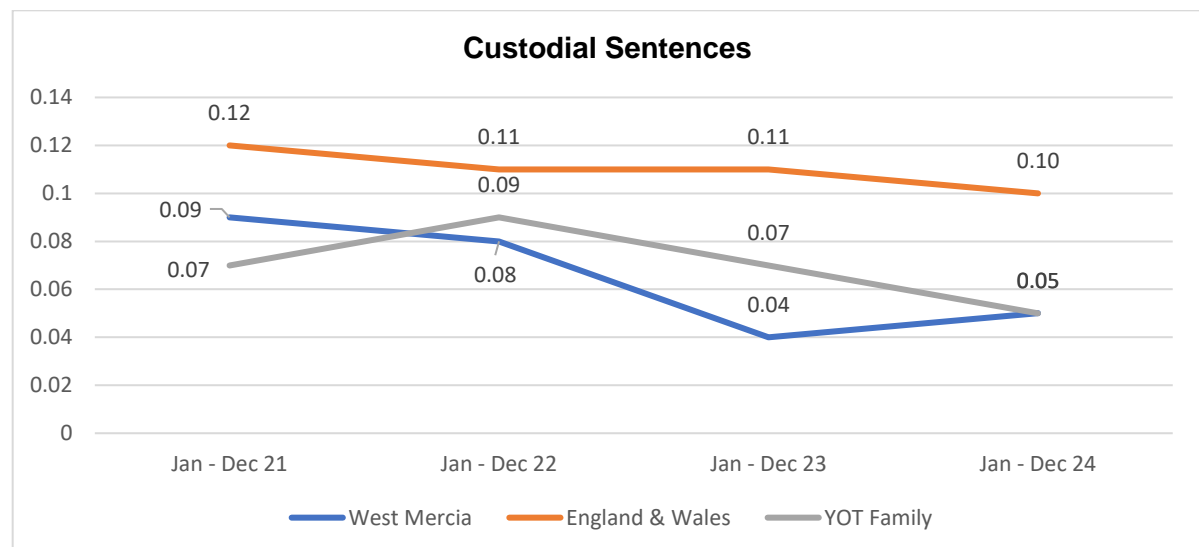
Key Performance Indicators: How well is the system working for children in West Mercia?

Number of children entering the criminal justice system (Rate of First Time Entrants per 100,000)



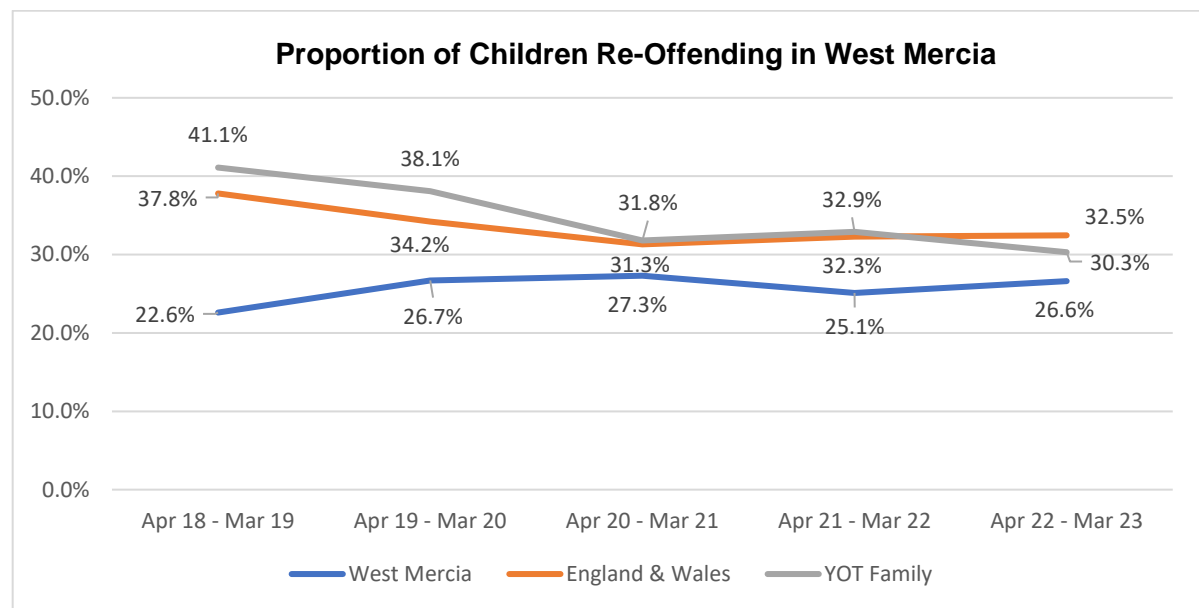
The number of children entering the criminal justice system within West Mercia continues to be below the YOT Family and England and Wales average, although there has been an increase in the last 12 months.

Number of children in custody (Rate of Custody per 1,000 Population)



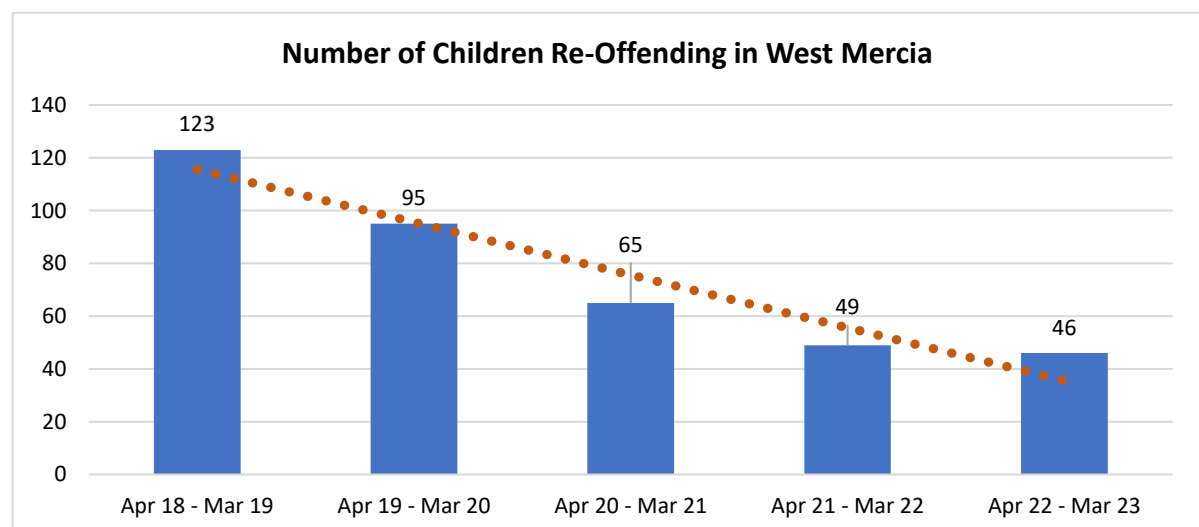
The rate of children in West Mercia is 0.05 which is the same as the YOT Family average and below the England and Wales average, although there has been an increase in West Mercia the last 12 months, whereas the YOT Family has seen a decrease.

Proportion of children in West Mercia who are re-offending



The proportion of children reoffending in West Mercia is 26.6%, which is a slight increase on the previous year. The rate remains below the YOT Family and England and Wales average.

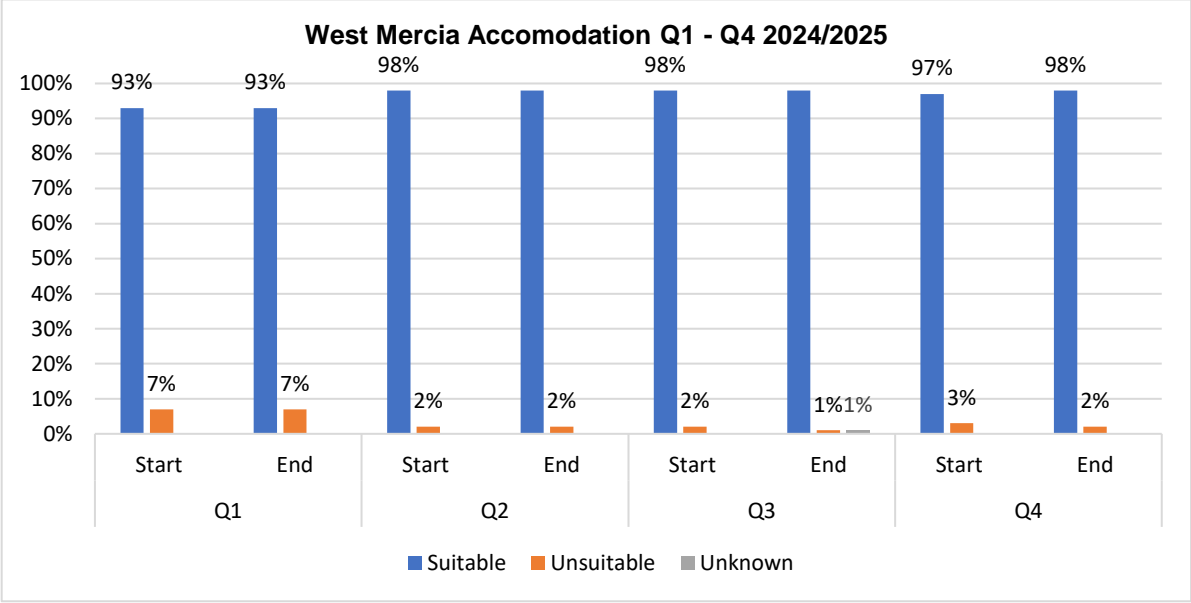
Long Term Trends in the Number of Children Re-Offending



The primary aim of the YJS is to reduce levels of re-offending by children in West Mercia. The chart shows longer term trends in re-offending rates within the context of the number of children re-offending in West Mercia.

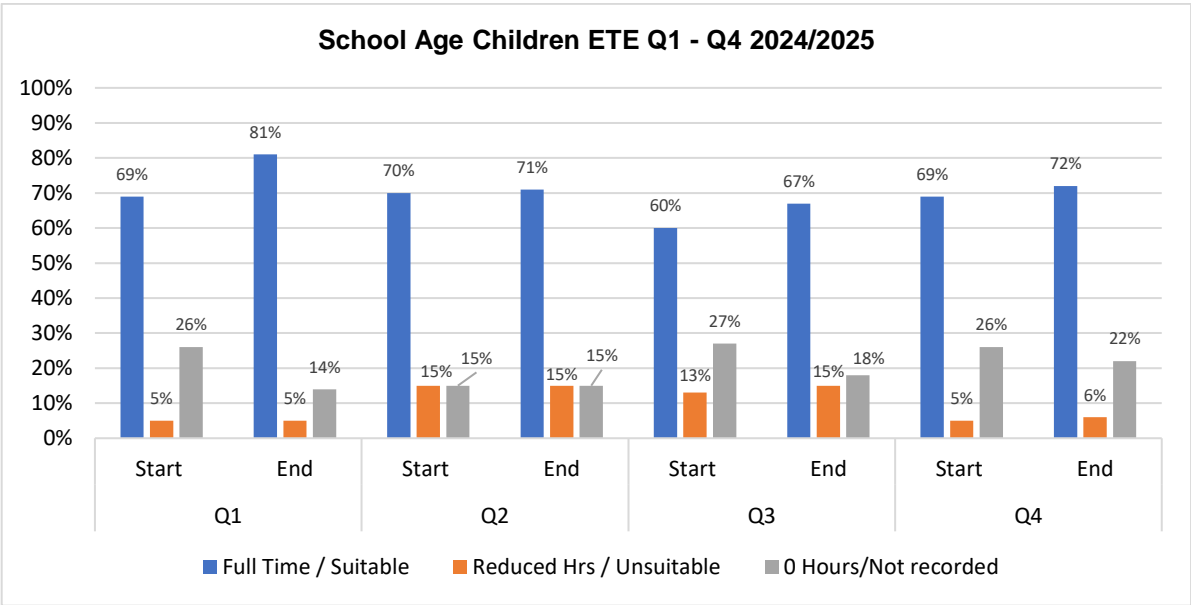
Key Performance Indicators: What are the needs of children the service has worked with? To what extent have these been met?

Accommodation Suitability: Children’s access to safe and suitable accommodation

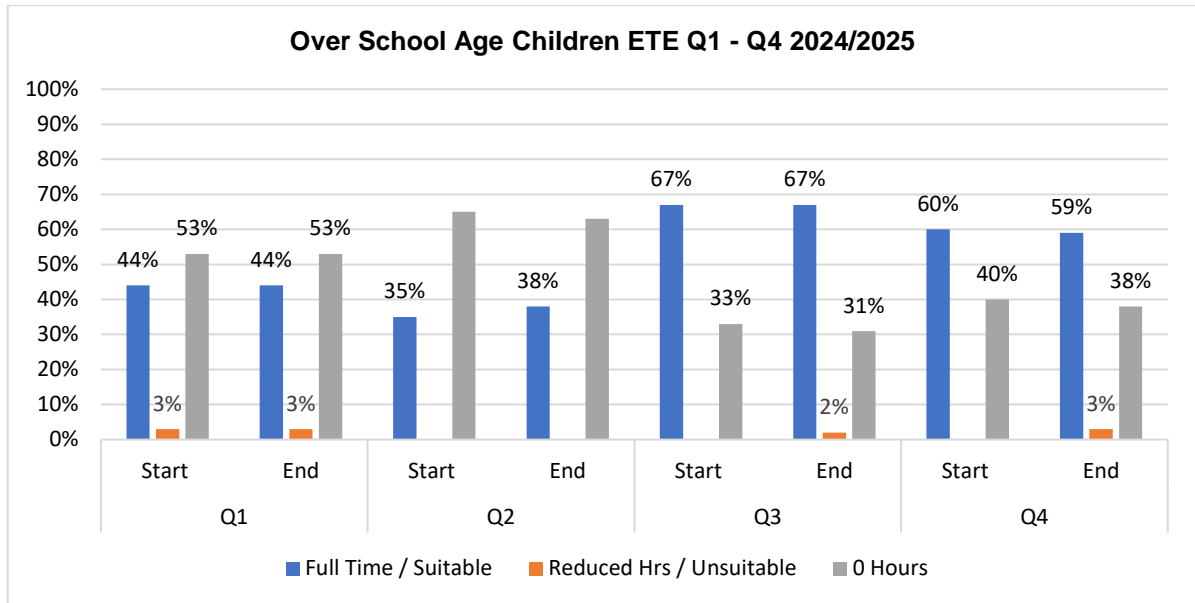


Most children in West Mercia have access to safe and suitable accommodation.

Education, Training and Employment (ETE): The number and proportion of children in suitable ETE by ETE provision type

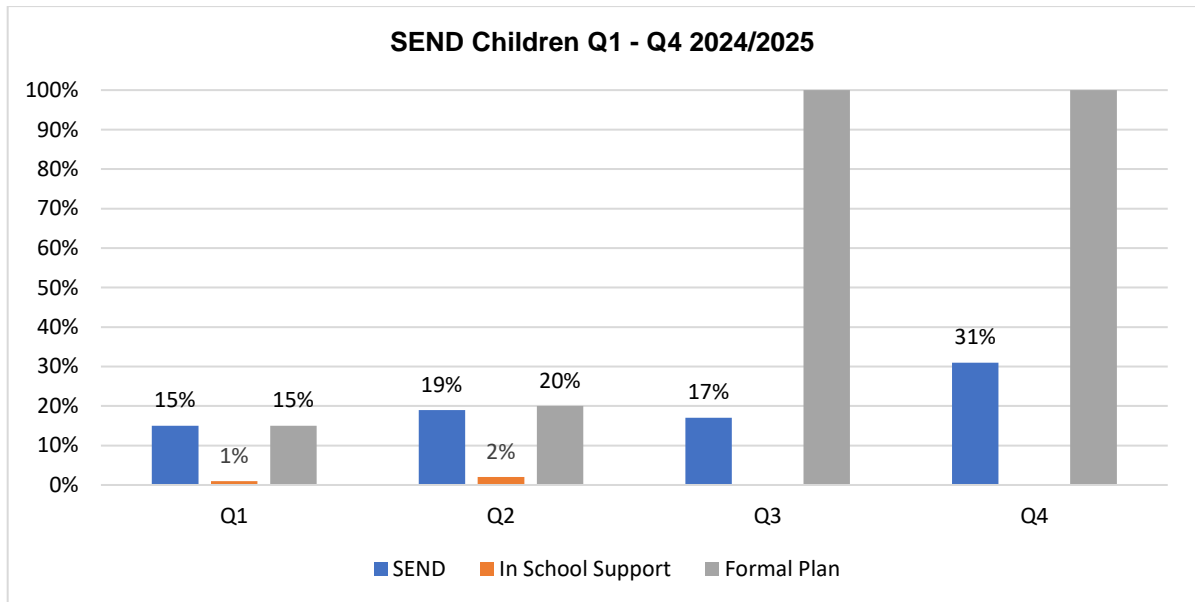


Most school-aged children within West Mercia were engaged in suitable education, training or employment (ETE) provision at the end of their intervention.



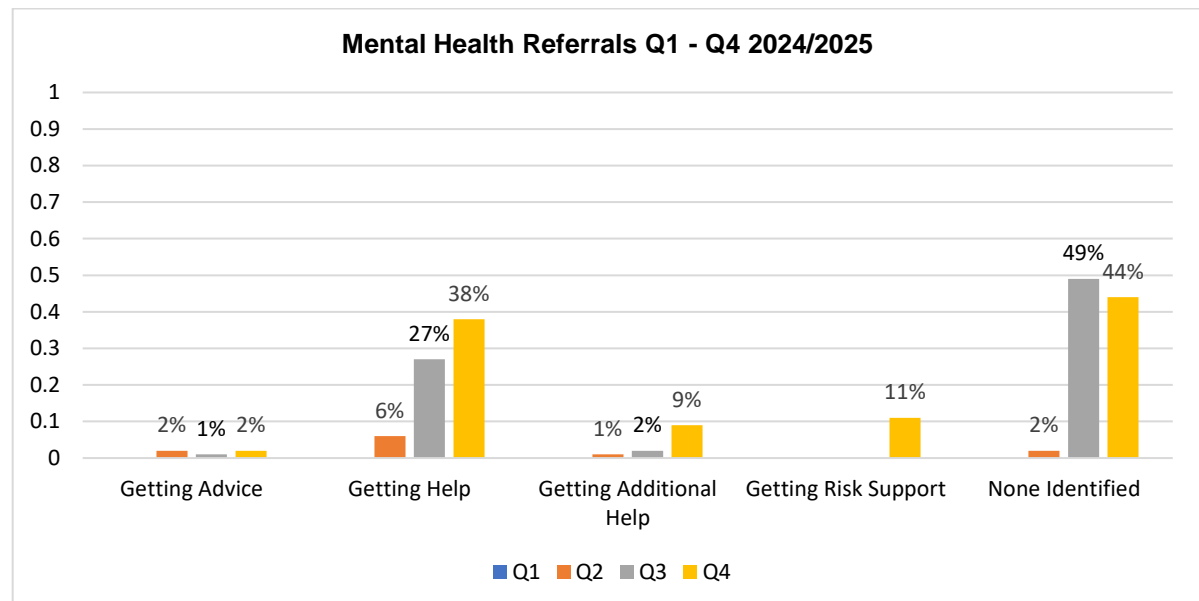
Around a third of children above school-age were not in suitable education, training or employment.

SEND: The number of children with an identified SEND and whether they have a formal plan in place. [A formal plan includes an EHCP and an individual learning/education plan].



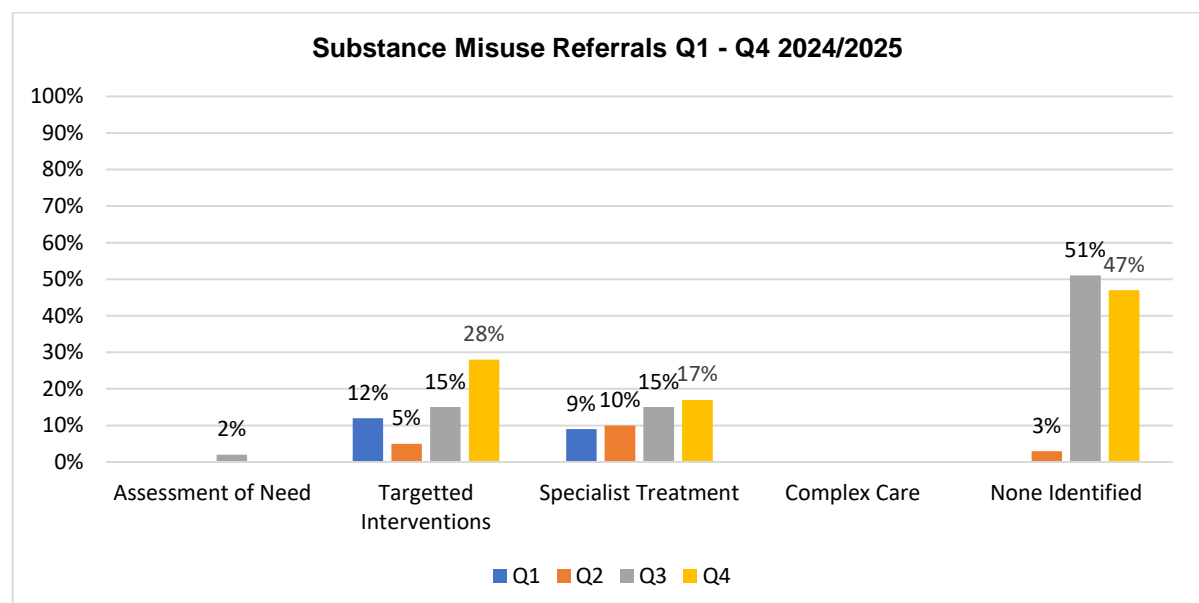
Around 20% of children working with WMYJS have an identified Special Educational Need or Disability. There has been an increase in the number of children who have a formal plan in place to support their needs

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing: The number of children screened or assessed to understand their mental health and emotional wellbeing needs.



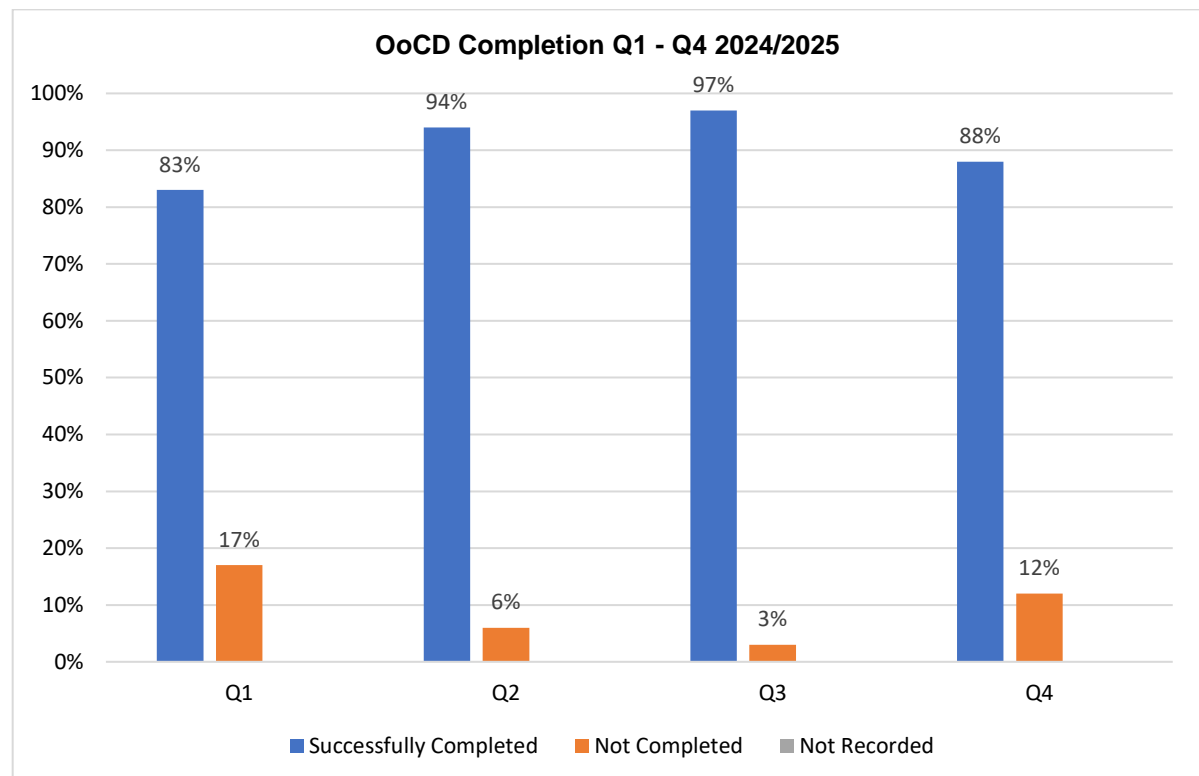
There has been an increase in the number of receiving support for their mental health; this includes an increase in getting help, getting additional help and getting risk support. The numbers of children with no identified mental health need has reduced in the last quarter.

Substance Misuse: The number of children with a screened or identified need for an intervention or treatment to address substance misuse and of that, the number of planned/offered treatment and the number of children attending intervention/treatment.



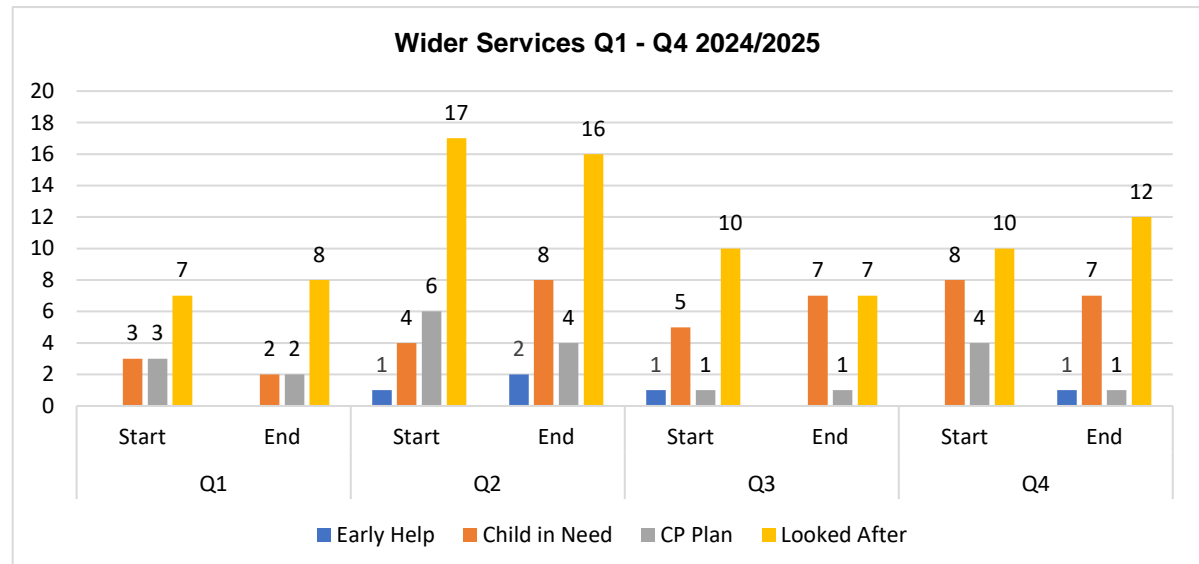
More children are getting support for their substance misuse. There has been an increase in the number of children receiving targeted interventions and specialist treatment.

Out of Court Disposals: Children completing diversionary interventions with WMYJS



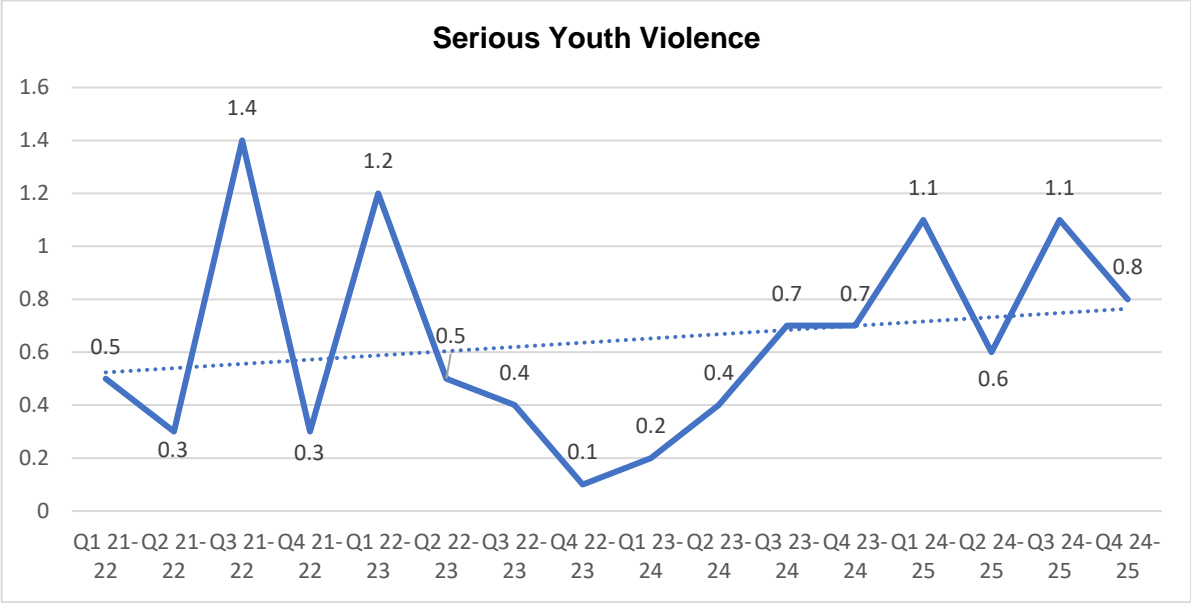
Most children in West Mercia successfully completed their diversionary interventions with WMYJS.

Wider Services: Wider services which children were linked to at the end of their intervention



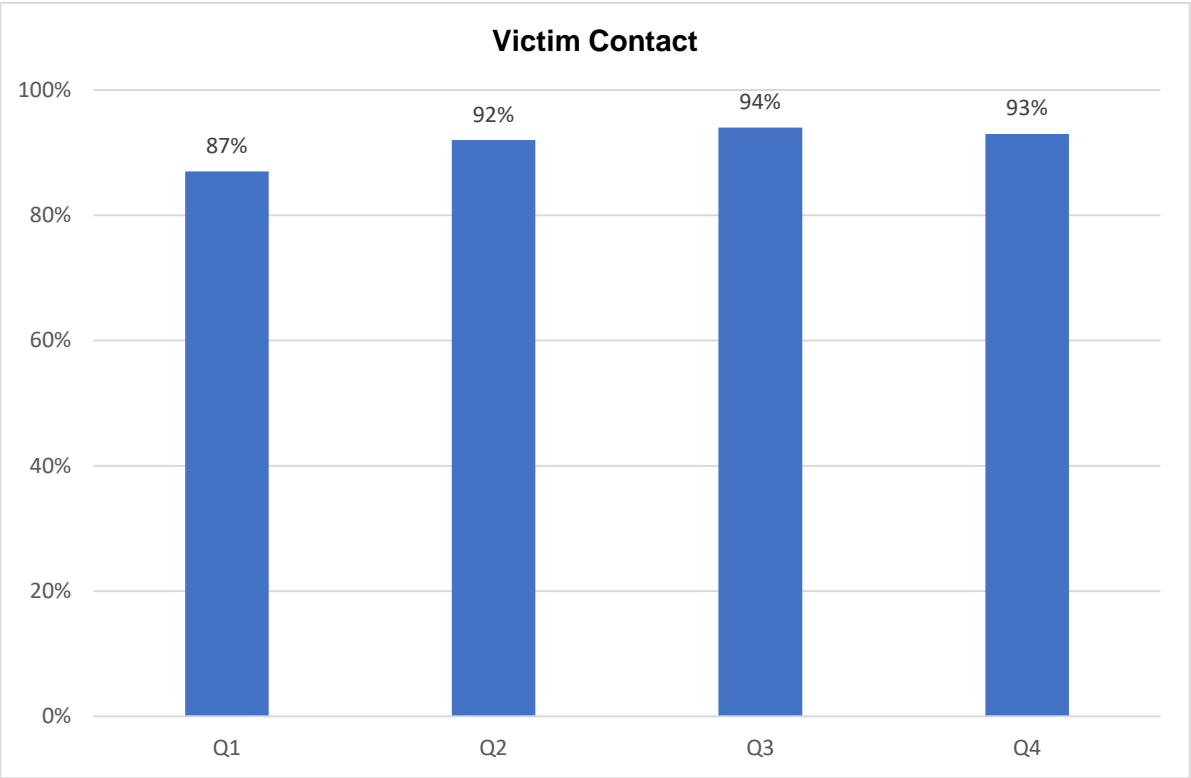
Children remain connected to wider services at the end of their intervention with WMYJS

West Mercia Serious Youth Violence Rate per 10,000: The number of children cautioned or convicted of Serious Violence offences



There were 44 serious violence offences in 2024-25. Serious violence rates have fluctuated in 2024-25; there has been a marginal increase since 2022.

Victims: The number of Victims Contacted by WMYJS



On average, 90% of victims were contacted by the service.

Annexure 7: Our 25/26 Plan on a Page

Theme	Priority	Inspection Action	Actions	Impact Measures
CHILD FIRST	Embedding Child-First		Continue to use the Child-First Champion group to lead children's participation in service development activities.	Audits evidence voice of the child Children's Feedback informs service development. Evidence of You Said, We Did Feedback and Implementation
			Embed the use of ICT in capturing the voice of children and victims to make capturing and analysis easier.	
			Work with children and parents to update the service feedback procedure, including responding to Compliments and Complaints.	
			Develop a service-wide collaboration strategy incorporating recommendations from the Child First Collaboration Research Report.	
PEOPLE	Supporting staff and volunteer development, wellbeing and morale		Work with staff and partners to update the WMYJS Induction Policy and Procedure, including links to lone working, mandatory training and role specific guidance for seconded staff (Police and Probation).	Proportion of staff receiving monthly supervision. Proportion of appraisals completed and % of staff making progress % Positive Feedback from staff following training Annual Staff survey results
			Co-produce an updated Volunteer Policy, Handbook and Induction Programme.	
			Complete a dip sample of staff supervision/appraisals to ensure there is a consistent approach. Provide a summation report to the Management Board evidencing quality of staff performance and identifying any service-wide development needs.	
	Understanding and addressing disproportionality within West Merica	2.1	Further refine performance data to help understand children from groups which are over-represented.	Data reports and analysis evidence an understanding of experience and outcomes for those groups of children over-represented in the youth justice system and a plan for how this can be improved
			Implement a Disproportionality Strategy	
			Work alongside Willowdene and justice-involved women and girls to improve youth justice service provision for girls.	
PRACTICE	Ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance	3.1	Continue to review service policies and procedures reflecting Child-first principles, new legislation (Working Together 2023) and evidence-based practice; aligning and prioritising policy reviews with learning from quality assurance activity and national policy.	Audits evidence greater consistency in decision making across the service
		4.2		
	Strengthening our restorative offer and victim satisfaction		Develop a service-wide policy and work with partners to develop practice guidance around working with victims who are children including development of a Victim Needs Assessment Tool.	Service user feedback shows improved victim satisfaction Reduction in FTE Reduction in reoffending
			Work with OPCC, Victim Support and Police in linking the YJS Offer with the development of the West Mercia Victims Hub.	
			Undertake a practice review to consider referral order practice, including the Making it Right Approach to panels.	
			Upskill all Practitioners to improve their confidence and ability to deliver restorative approaches across all work with children and victims.	
			Work with children and victims to more closely match reparation placements with children's interests and victim's needs.	
			Standardise the Restorative Justice Officer roles.	
	Improving the consistency of practice across the service	1.2	Implement the simplified Quality Assurance Framework.	Audit/KPI and Service User feedback evidence learning and progress to achieving a consistent quality of practice across service teams Number of children receiving accredited educational outcomes
		2.1		
			Finalise the outstanding actions from the National Standards 2 – At Court Action Plan.	
			Embed West Mercia Learning Centre to provide a consistent educational offer for all children.	
		3.1 3.3	Update assessment, planning and risk guidance to ensure assessment and plans are future focussed and consider how to keep the child, victim and community safe including work with Police around the role of Seconded Officers as Offender Managers.	
	Improving our diversion and early intervention offer		Establish and deliver cross-service development workshops building on the Senior Practitioner practice focus sessions (at least quarterly)	Audits evidence greater consistency in OoCD decision making across the service Data evidences increased Prevention and Diversion outcomes for children and
		8.2	Embed the West Mercia Prevention Offer, ensuring Turnaround Grant Funding requirements are met.	
			Embed the internal scrutiny process for OoCD which complements the existing external scrutiny process.	

		8.3	Roll out the updated induction and training for OocD panel members to include child first/child centred policing and trauma informed approaches	a reduction in children entering the youth justice system
			Work with partners to improve the response to children who may be at risk of radicalisation (Prevent Duty)	
			Work with CPS and Police to pilot an updated OOC process to inform CPS work on National Protocol/Guidance; ensuring the YJS response to children in court is more proactive and provides additional opportunities to maximise diversion.	
			Work with strategic leaders to position the service in accordance with reforms associated with the Families First and Young Futures Prevention Partnerships agendas.	
PARTNERSHIP	Improving the health offer in the youth justice service	7.3	Work with partners to finalise the single service specification for health resources deployed into YJS teams. Work with partners to secure appropriate health provision for all children within WMYJS.	Service offer evidences a consistent health offer to children across West Mercia
	Improving our work with other agencies	9.1	Probation: Finalise the revised transition arrangements into case management. (18 year old cohort).	Children leaving custody are released to suitable accommodation Reduction in number of children remanded Audits evidence connectedness of plans between agencies Increase in children with educational needs being met
			Housing: Review of housing policies/protocols for vulnerable children in each area to ensure they identify and prioritise children coming out of custody	
			Police: Work with Police, Children's Services and partners to develop the West Mercia response to the Bail and Remand Concordat	
			Children's Services: Continue to Work with Children's Services to align information sharing and recording to improve the interconnectedness of plans for children supported by WMYJS and Children's Social Care.	
			Education: Work with education colleagues to collate further contextual information relating regarding children's education including school exclusions children who are not receiving their education entitlement, excluded, on part time timetables or electively home educated. Analyse this data to identify any disproportionality including the care status of the child.	
			Third Sector: Increase awareness of the work of the YJS with third sector partners and improve relationships with local providers.	
	Addressing disparities in service provision and commissioned services between areas		Work with partners to create a directory of projects, activities and services available for children and victims; including awareness of third sector organisations working in local communities.	Service offer evidences consistency across West Mercia Audit/KPI and Service User feedback evidences consistency across the area
			Complete a Needs Analysis of Victims working with WMYJS using the same methodology as the Needs Analysis for children.	
			Work with the OPCC Treasurer to ensure the staffing structure of the service reflects the profile and needs of children and victims.	
	Supporting delivery of the Serious Violence Duty across West Mercia		Use the area-wide and local Serious Violence needs assessments to shape internal practice and delivery of a localised response.	Reduction in Serious Violence Offences committed by children Improved provision for children at risk of serious violence
			Implement the learnings and recommendations from the serious violence MACFA.	
			Work with partners to update our response to children who display sexually harmful behaviours, including work with Police around MAPPA eligible children.	
GOVERNANCE / LEADERSHIP	Ensuring management oversight of practice and leadership of service development		Embed in-time data reporting using metabase to more efficiently further improve management oversight of practice.	Proportion of children with management oversight evidenced on their record Proportion of annual plan and inspection improvement plan tasks completed within timescale
			Establish quarterly performance meetings which triangulates performance reporting with the voice of children and victims to further inform service development.	
			Develop the strategic vision for the service including a longer term strategic plan which is financially viable.	

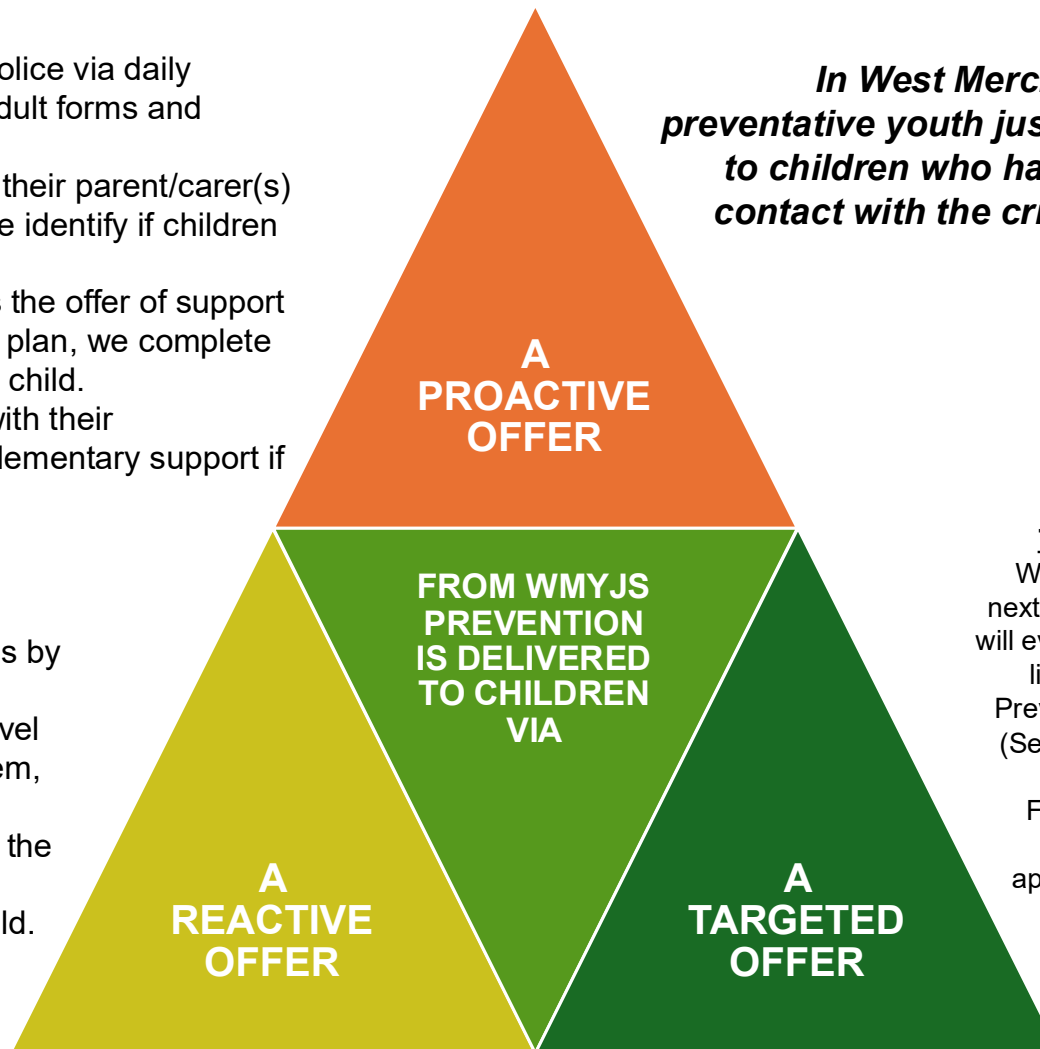
Annexure 8: Our Prevention Offer

PROACTIVE OFFER

- We receive automated referrals from Police via daily arrests, custody checks, Appropriate Adult forms and voluntary interview data.
- We proactively contact all children and their parent/carer(s) to offer them support. As part of this, we identify if children are already receiving support.
- If a child and their parent/carer accepts the offer of support and they do not have a current support plan, we complete an assessment, plan and work with the child.
- If a child already has a plan, we work with their professional network to offer any complementary support if needed.

REACTIVE OFFER

- Children are identified and referred to us by someone in their connected network.
- We identify if the child has had some level of contact with the criminal justice system, and, if so, we offer them support.
- If a child and their parent/carer accepts the offer of support we complete an assessment, plan and work with the child.
- Sometimes, we might be asked to do a specific piece of work as part of a plan which is already in place for the child.



In West Mercia, we deliver preventative youth justice services to children who have had some contact with the criminal justice system.

TARGETED OFFER

We know that over the next 12 months this offer will evolve and develop in line with West Mercia Prevention Partnerships (Serious Violence Duty) and Focussed Deterrence initiatives. We will apply similar principles as our proactive and reactive offers