



## **Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

### **Inspection Title:**

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

### **Published on:**

15 October 2025

### **Publication Types:**

Child protection, Criminal justice joint inspections, Evaluation, Joint inspection and Youth offending service.

### **Police Forces:**

All local forces in England and Wales

### **Link to Report:**

[The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

### **Section 55 Response Deadline:**

10 December 2025

### **Key Findings**

The fieldwork for this inspection involved HM Inspectorate of Probation visiting eight Youth Justice Services (YJS) within six police force areas. HM Inspectorate of Probation inspected a total of 98 cases: 88 involving children who had received a youth community resolution or Outcome 22, and 10 involving other types of disposals.

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspected the quality of disposal decisions made by police officers. The police crime outcome types that they focused on were:

- Outcome 8: a community resolution (with or without formal restorative justice) applied in accordance with policing guidance.

- Outcome 20: further action resulting from the crime report is undertaken by another body or agency other than the police, subject to the victim (or person acting on their behalf) being made aware of the action being taken.
- Outcome 21: further investigation resulting from the crime report that could provide evidence sufficient to support formal action being taken against the suspect is not in the public interest – police decision.
- Outcome 22: diversionary, educational or intervention activity, resulting from the crime report, has been undertaken and it is not in the public interest to take any further action.

The inspectorates held a range of meetings and focus groups with staff delivering out-of-court disposals, their managers, and senior leaders at a national level. They commissioned User Voice to conduct surveys and interviews with 50 children, and inspectors spoke with 31 parents or carers, gathering their perspectives on the services they received. These were not necessarily the children or parents or carers whose cases were inspected.

The inspectorates found a broad consensus on the importance of avoiding the unnecessary criminalisation of children, with national and local commitments to child-centred justice. The overall approach to out-of-court disposals was, however, fragmented and hindered by inadequate data, oversight, and strategic direction.

Inconsistent police recording of crime outcome types, limited tracking, and the inability to disaggregate data specific to children undermined efforts to monitor trends, assess reoffending, and evaluate the impact and cost effectiveness of interventions. This undermines public confidence and limits the quality and consistency of support available to children.

The inspectorates found wide variation in the use of tools such as the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Child Gravity Matrix and disposal options like deferred prosecutions. This had created a 'postcode lottery' in decision-making and fostered perceptions of unfairness. They also found some confusion about how different police crime outcome types affected what may be disclosed later, for example to employers, which can have a significant impact on children's life chances.

A significant number of children, including those involved in serious offences, were being dealt with informally, often by police alone and without YJS involvement. The inspectorates saw cases where children were wrongly told they had to complete interventions or face prosecution, which was both inaccurate and potentially coercive. Where decisions were made in conjunction with the YJS, procedures were not always followed to ensure the most suitable disposal, and decision rationales were often unclear, leading to a lack of transparency.

Police officers did not routinely use the NPCC Child Gravity Matrix and associated guidance, even in cases involving serious offences such as violent or sexual crimes. The inspectorates found occasional tensions between the police and partner agencies over final disposal decisions, particularly in more serious cases such as those involving knives.

Patterns of repeat offending were not always considered when making police-only and joint decisions about out-of-court disposals involving children. This oversight could result in the same child receiving multiple disposals without appropriate escalation or timely intervention.

In some instances, Outcome 20 and Outcome 21 were used inappropriately for serious offences, which undermined the concerning nature of the crimes and the need for appropriate responses. The widespread and largely unmonitored use of Outcome 20, including in school settings, raised concerns about whether children and communities were kept safe and victims supported. Without clear national data and oversight, the full scale and impact of these practices remained unknown.

## **Recommendations**

18 recommendations are made within the report, one of which is directed at Chief Constables nationally:

### **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.

## **Areas For Improvement**

There were no areas for improvement.

## Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement

I acknowledge the findings of the joint inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services into the use of out-of-court disposals for children. I fully support the need for effective processes that divert children from unnecessary criminalisation, safeguard victims and communities, and ensure consistent, transparent, and child-centred decision-making.

In January, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation published its findings following an inspection of Youth Justice Services (YJS) in Norfolk. The inspection included an assessment of the quality of our local out-of-court disposal work, including the effectiveness of partnership arrangements. The inspection rated our out-of-court disposal activity as good for assessment and policy/provision, and outstanding for planning, implementation, and delivery.

Key strengths highlighted in the report include:

- A robust out-of-court disposal protocol, policy, and procedures between YJS and the Constabulary.
- An active Steering Group with police representation.
- An effective multi-agency diversion panel co-chaired by the Constabulary.
- The contribution of three seconded Police Constables leading triage, supported by formal data-sharing arrangements and access to YJS and police systems.

Our local partnership brings together police, Children's Services, Probation, and other agencies to manage youth out-of-court disposals. Where unanimous decisions cannot be reached, cases are escalated to a YJS independent Service Manager and either the Chief Inspector or Superintendent responsible for seconded officers. They provide rationale and direction for interventions, referencing the NPCC Child Gravity Matrix. Safeguarding referrals are made and monitored through the partnership. The multi-agency Steering Group reviews performance and quality, monitors reoffending rates, examines the profile of children involved, and identifies any overrepresented groups.

Despite these strong local arrangements, a recent review undertaken by the Constabulary has identified opportunities for us to improve the consistency of our decision-making for youth out-of-court disposals, and the application of NPCC guidance for Outcomes 20 and 21, including more consistent use of the Child Gravity Matrix and the recording of decision rationales. The review has also identified the need to strengthen our processes for issuing community resolutions to young people.

Progression of the activity needed to meet all the elements of this recommendation, alongside actions identified through our recent review, will be overseen by the

Constabulary's Child Protection Standards Working Group and the Children and Young People Board.

## **PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas For Improvement**

I welcome the report into the joint inspection in the use of out of court disposals for children. Norfolk residents can be assured by the work that Norfolk Constabulary has done, and continues to do in this regard, and the fact that there are positive lessons to be learned from that work.

In addition, in our county, out of court disposals benefit from the use of Restorative Justice which provides further scope to prevent future offending and keep our communities safe.

I welcome the continued work that the Constabulary is undertaking with partners to improve decision making with regards to out of court disposals. I also acknowledge the strong partnership working that is undertaken in this regard and would highlight the need to safeguard these arrangements as the local provisions for devolution, local government review and Police Reform are implemented.

### **For Office Use Only:**

- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response submitted to the HMICFRS monitoring portal.
- Response published on the OPCON website.