

NATIONAL SURVEY REPORT

Understanding diversionary support for children within the criminal justice system in England and Wales

National Survey Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This document provides insights into the national survey Cordis Bright administered to Youth Justice Services (YJS) in England and Wales in 2024.

The aim of the survey was to address a significant gap in national-level information about the support provided by Youth Justice Services to children who come into contact with the police for an offence.

While youth diversion is widely practiced across England and Wales, access to these schemes varies due to several factors such as eligibility criteria, referral processes, and length of interventions. Currently, there is a lack of data on the types of support available, the impact of different OOC interventions, and how these interventions are tailored to each child's needs. Additionally, practitioners often face challenges in delivering support and accessing reliable research on the effectiveness of these interventions.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Participant selection

The online survey was distributed to staff across all 155 YJSs in England and Wales to gather national-level data on the types of support provided to children who come into contact with the police for an offence.

The survey was hosted using the SmartSurvey from 6 August 2024 to 6 October 2024. To maximise engagement, the project team distributed it through key networks, including YJB Heads of Regions, MoJ colleagues, and the Centre for Justice Innovation (CJI). Cordis Bright emailed all YJS contacts, offering personalised follow-ups and alternative participation options, such as phone interviews. Weekly response monitoring helped identify incomplete responses, prompting targeted follow-ups near the deadline to encourage completion.

1.2.2 Data collection

The voluntary survey aimed to address gaps in national understanding of the support YJSs provide to children receiving OOCs, capturing both the range of services and the factors influencing decision-making. Questions were developed iteratively, aligning with the study's research aims and incorporating feedback from YEF, DfE, CJI, and YJB. While individual survey responses were confidential, they were linked to specific YJSs to explore geographic variations in OOC support. Respondents were also given the option to provide their names and email addresses if they were willing to participate in deep dive interviews. The survey, structured into seven sections (see Table 1), with both closed and open-ended questions to balance quantitative and qualitative insights.

Table 1. National survey question sections and themes

Section in the survey	Main themes/areas covered	Types of questions
Introduction	• Name of YJS area, respondent's role • Types of OOCs offered and presence of dedicated support for each • Presence of a dedicated police officer for diversion scheme • Partnership-working between police and YJS • Presence and functioning of Joint Decision-Making Panels or alternatives	Multiple-choice (role, outcomes, Yes/No) Likert scale ratings Free text
Accessing support from the YJS	• Nature and levels of support for formal and informal OOC outcomes • Time taken for YJS assessment of OOC referrals • Time from OOC decision to accessing support • Mechanisms in place when a child does not engage	Multiple choice (numerical range, time) Free text
Types of interventions and decision-making around support	• Factors considered in tailoring OOC support • Perceptions of and/or reasons for disparities in support for children from minority ethnic groups • Specific interventions on offer for children in YJS	Multiple choice (factors, Yes/No, intervention types)
Alignment of support with evidence base	• Whether OOC support available is informed by evidence base • Sources informing practice and professional learning	Multiple-choice (alignment level, evidence sources) Free text
Enablers and barriers to delivering support	• Key factors supporting effective delivery • Key challenges hindering effective delivery	Multiple choice (enablers and barriers) Free text
Recommendations (optional question)	• Top three recommendations for improving children's access to and delivery of support	Free text
Conclusion	• Interest in follow-up participation or findings • Contact details if opted in for future participation • Opportunity to attach relevant documents	Yes/No Free text (with option to upload attachments)

1.3 Findings

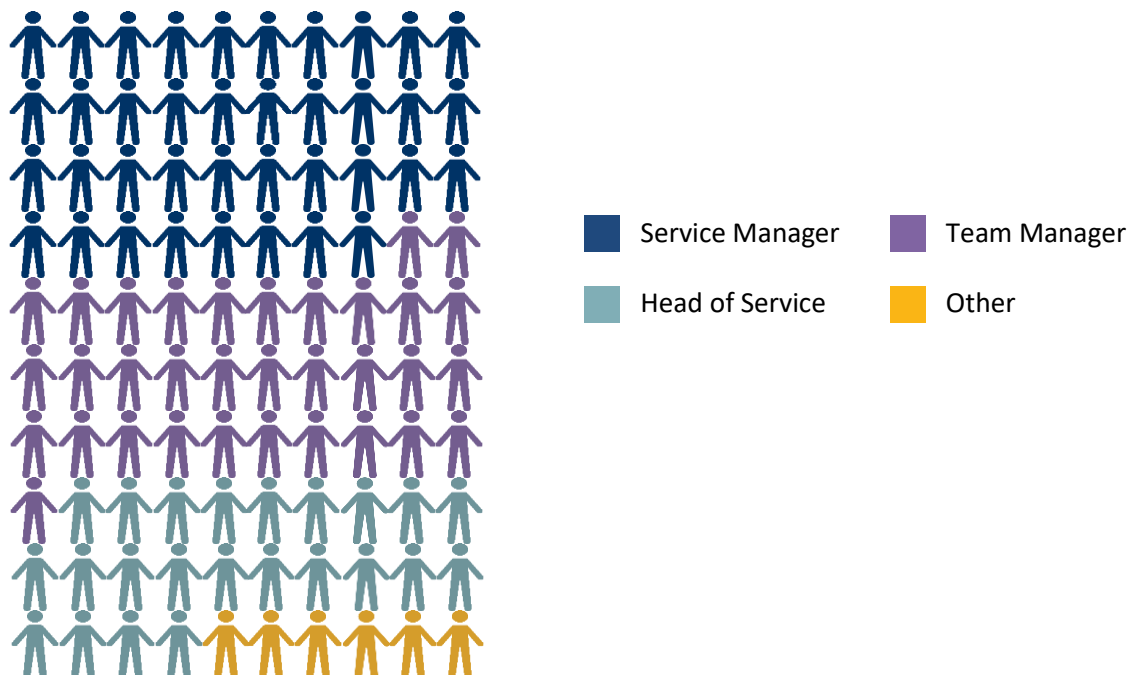
1.3.1 Youth Justice Service (YJS) role

In total 116 YJSs completed the survey out of a total 155 YJS across England and Wales. Typically, responses were completed by Service Managers, Team Managers and Heads of Service.

Table 2. Distribution of YJS roles in the sample

Role in the YJS	Percentage of respondents
Service Manager	37.1%
Team Manager	32.7%
Head of Service	23.3%
Other ¹	6.1%
Total	100%

Figure 1. Distribution of YJS roles in the sample



¹ The 'Other' category, consisting of seven respondents included: 1 Practitioner, 1 Group Leader in Family and Adolescent Support Service, 1 Early Intervention and Restorative Justice Coordinator, 1 Clinical and Strategic Lead, 1 Senior YOT Officer, 1 Education, Training, and Employment Manager, and 1 Practice Manager.

1.3.2 Local Authority representation

The next section provides insights into the YJS that completed the survey, considering the region, and police force they align to.

The survey achieved >50% coverage in all regions. In three regions, representation was >89% (i. North East and Cumbria, ii. East, iii. South East & South Central).

Table 3. Regional breakdown of responses

Region	Number of responses	Total YJSs in this region	% coverage of region	Number of missing responses
London	23	31 ²	74.2%	8
South East & South Central	17	19	89.5%	2
Midlands	14	19	73.7%	5
North East & Cumbria	12	13	92.3%	1
North West	12	18	66.7%	6
Wales	10	17	58.8%	7
Yorkshire & Humberside	10	15	66.7%	5
South West	9	13	69.2%	4
East	9	10	90.0%	1
Total	116	155	74.84	39

² Towler Hamlets and City of London is counted as 1 YJS area in our data.

Table 4. Police force breakdown of responses

YJS region	Police force area	Number of responses	% coverage of police force
North East & Cumbria	Cleveland Police	3	100.0%
	Cumbria Constabulary	2	100.0%
	Northumbria Police	6	100.0%
	Durham Constabulary	1	50.0%
North West	Cheshire Constabulary	1	100.0%
	Lancashire Constabulary	3	100.0%
	Merseyside Police	3	60.0%
	Greater Manchester Police	5	55.6%
Yorkshire & Humberside	West Yorkshire Police	4	80.0%
	South Yorkshire Police	3	75.0%
	Humberside Police	2	50.0%
	North Yorkshire Police	1	50.0%
Midlands	Leicestershire Police	2	100.0%
	Lincolnshire Police	1	100.0%
	Nottinghamshire Police	2	100.0%
	Staffordshire Police	2	100.0%
	Warwickshire Police	1	100.0%
	West Mercia Police	1	100.0%
	West Midlands Police	4	57.1%
	Derbyshire Constabulary	1	50.0%
	Northamptonshire Police	0	0.0%
East	Cambridgeshire Constabulary	2	100.0%
	Essex Police	3	100.0%
	Hertfordshire Constabulary	1	100.0%
	Norfolk Constabulary	1	100.0%
	Suffolk Constabulary	1	100.0%
	Bedfordshire Police	1	50.0%

YJS region	Police force area	Number of responses	% coverage of police force
London	Metropolitan Police ³	22	74.2%
Wales	Dyfed-Powys Police	3	75.0%
	North Wales Police	3	75.0%
	South Wales Police	3	50.0%
	Gwent Police	1	33.3%
South East & South Central	Hampshire Constabulary	4	100.0%
	Kent Police	2	100.0%
	Surrey Police	1	100.0%
	Thames Valley Police	9	100.0%
	Sussex Police	1	33.3%
South West	Devon and Cornwall Police	4	100.0%
	Dorset Police	1	100.0%
	Avon and Somerset Constabulary	3	60.0%
	Wiltshire Police	1	50.0%
	Gloucestershire Constabulary	0	0.0%
Totals		116	

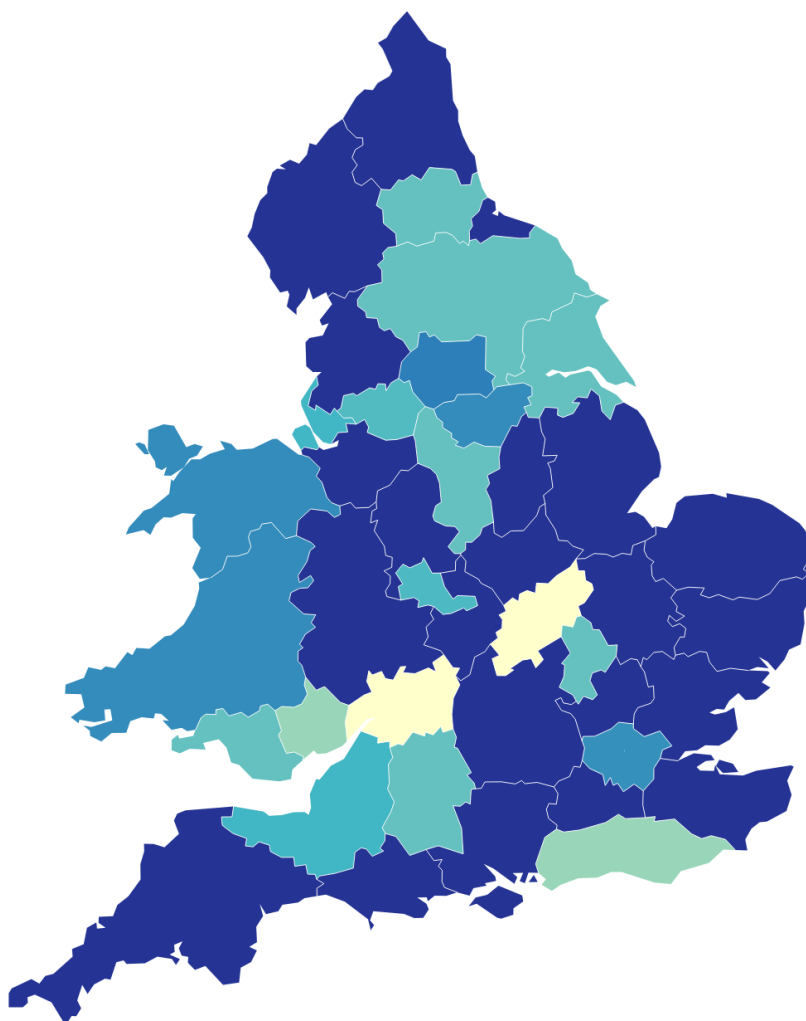
As highlighted on the map (overleaf), and in Figure 2, Gloucestershire Constabulary and Northamptonshire Police were not represented. Both areas only have one YJS and neither of these completed the survey.

³ The City of London police is not highlighted as a separate police force since Tower Hamlets and City of London is counted as 1 YJS area in our data.

Figure 2. Coverage of police force areas across YJS responses

YJS coverage stratified by police force in England and Wales

This graph looks at the number of YJS that completed a survey over the total number of YJS within each police force area to determine % coverage of responses. Darker colours mean greater coverage of police area.



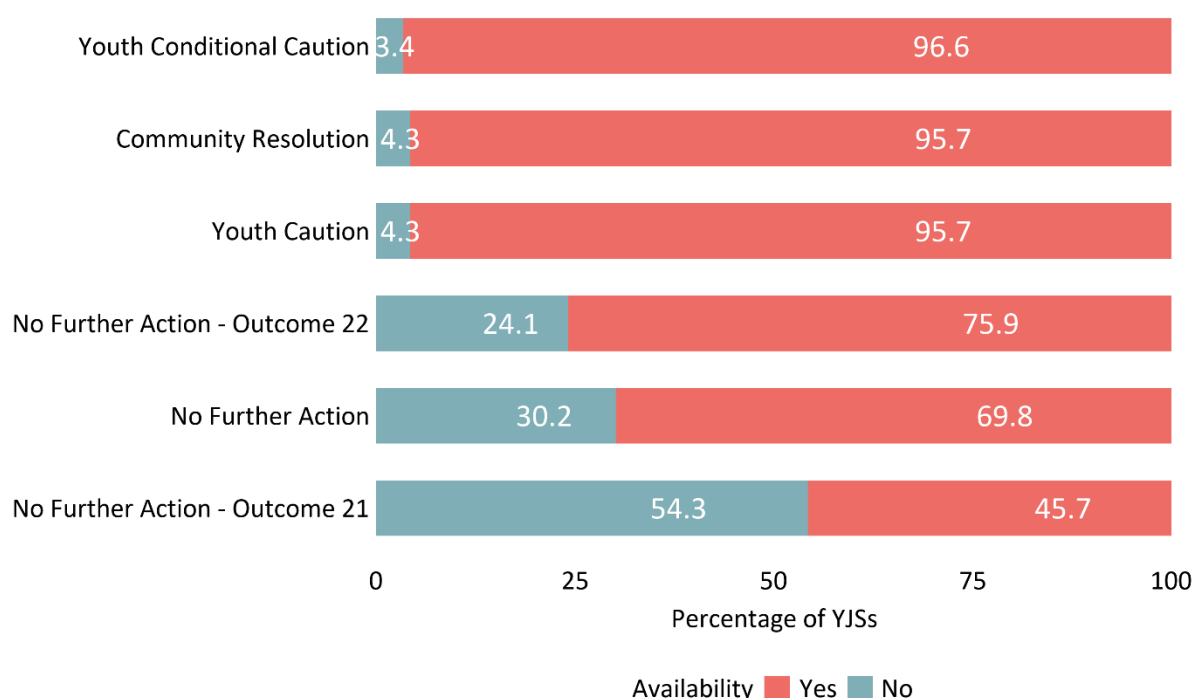
Map: Cordis Bright • Source: Cordis Bright • Created with Datawrapper

1.3.3 What out-of-court disposals (OCD) do children receive?

This section provides insights into the type of OCD YJSs currently offer to children. The options given to respondents included: Youth Cautions (YC), Youth Conditional Cautions (YCC), Community Resolution (CR), No Further Action (NFA), NFA – Outcome 21, NFA – Outcome 22, and Other.

As seen in Figure 3, YCC and YCs are the most common formal OCDs and CRs are the most common informal OCDs on offer.

Figure 3. Distribution of OOCd types on offer across YJSs in the sample



Of note, we found:

- YCCs (96.6%) and YCs (95.7%) are the most common formal OOCds on offer across YJSs in the sample.
- CRs (95.7%) are the most commonly available informal OOCd.
- Both NFA – Outcome 22 and NFA are less commonly available, though available more than Outcome NFA – Outcome 21 which has relatively low availability compared to other informal OOCds offered by YJSs.
- In addition to the standard OOCd options above, 41 YJSs provided qualitative insights into ‘Other’ OOCd options available in their areas.

1.3.4 Using Outcome 22

The use of Outcome 22 varied across regions, with the North East and Cumbria and East regions having the greatest response rate, and London with the lowest.

In London, the use of Outcome 22 (NFA – diversionary, educational, or intervention activity) is notably low. Only **3 out of 23** YJSs in the sample (13.04%) reported using Outcome 22, representing just 9.68% of all London YJSs. This is likely because the Metropolitan Police Force currently do not offer Outcome 22. That said, Outcome 22 is being piloted and is under consideration for roll-out across the Metropolitan Police Force.

In contrast, **all sampled YJSs (100%)** from the East, South West, Wales, North East & Cumbria, and North West reported using Outcome 22. When considering all possible YJSs within these regions, the overall usage rates are high, ranging from approximately **60% to 92%**, with a **median usage rate of 69%**. These trends align with findings from the [Crime Resolution Tracker](#) by Transform Justice.

Table 5. Region-wide distribution of YJSs with Outcome 22 on offer

Region	% of YJSs in the sample	% of total YJSs in region ⁴
London	13.0%	9.6%
East	100.0%	90.0%
South West	100.0%	69.2%
Yorkshire & Humberside	90.0%	60.0%
Wales	100.0%	58.8%
Midlands	78.5%	57.8%
North East & Cumbria	100.0%	92.3%
North West	100.0%	66.6%
South East & South Central	76.47%	68.42%

⁴ These percentages are calculated based on the total number of YJSs within each region, including those that did not respond to the survey. As a result, the data presented here includes missing responses.

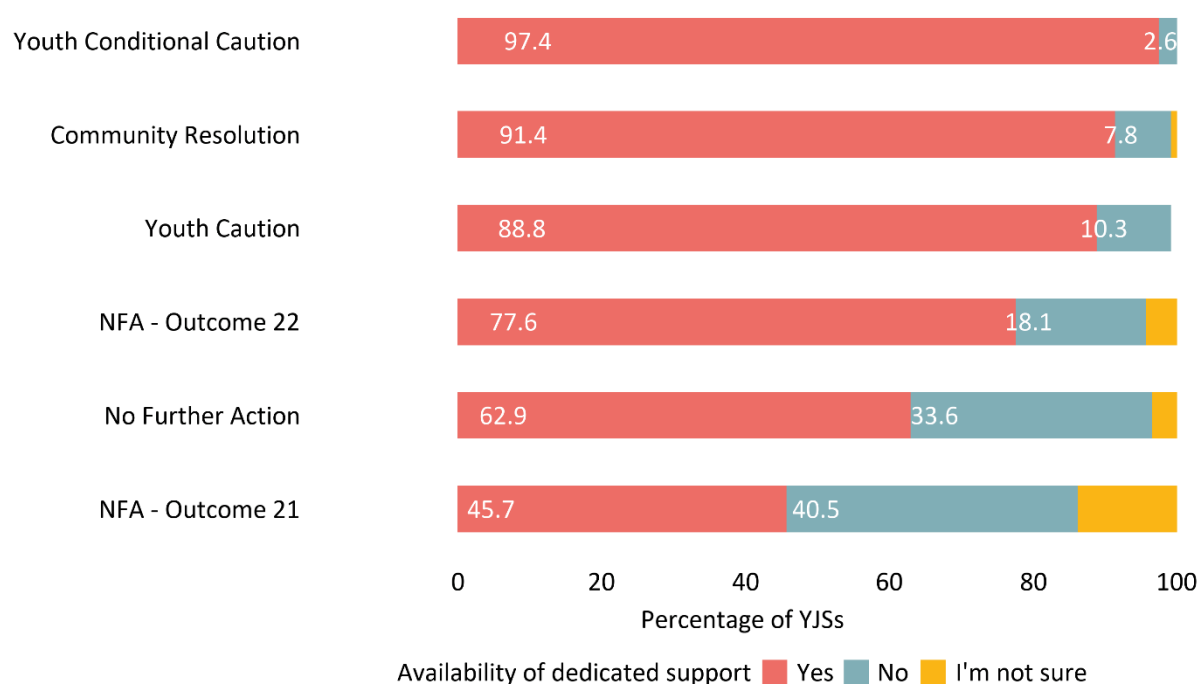
1.3.5 Dedicated Offers for different OOCs

Respondents were asked to indicate what types of OOCs are on offer for children. This includes YC, YCC, CR, NFA, NFA – Outcome 21, NFA – Outcome 22, and Other.

As seen in Figure 4, the availability of dedicated support was greatest in YCC, CR and YC.

At the other end, NFA – Outcome 21 has the lowest number of available support and the greatest number of respondents saying, 'I'm not sure' (13.8%).

Figure 4. Availability of dedicated OOC support across YJSs



Formal OOCs (YCC, YC) and Community Resolutions have the most robust support structures in place across YJSs.

- YCCs have the highest availability of dedicated support, with 97.4% of YJSs offering support. Only 2.6% report that support is not available. This makes sense since YCCs are also the most commonly available OOC option reported by YJSs.
- For CRs, dedicated support is available in 91.4% of YJSs.

Informal OOCs (e.g., NFA Outcomes 21 and 22), especially Outcome 21, have significantly lower levels of dedicated support.

- 33.6% of services report no availability of OOC support for NFAs (general).

- NFA – Outcome 21 has the lowest level of support availability among all OOCs, with only 45.7% of YJSs offering dedicated support.
- A sizeable proportion of services remain unsure about the availability of support for NFA – Outcome 21, reflecting possible gaps in clarity or consistency in service provision.
- Very similar regional patterns (as above) with only **21% of sampled YJSs in London** (representing **16.13% of all London YJSs**) offering dedicated support for Outcome 22 OOCs. In contrast, **100% of sampled YJSs** in the East, South West, Yorkshire & Humberside, and Wales reported having dedicated Outcome 22 support. When considering all YJSs in these regions, the **median availability of dedicated Outcome 22 support** was **67.9%**, excluding London.

Table 6. Region-wide distribution of YJSs with dedicated NFA – Outcome 22 support available

Region	% of YJSs in the sample	% of total YJSs in region ⁵
London	21.7%	16.1%
East	100.0%	90.0%
South West	100.0%	69.2%
Yorkshire & Humberside	100.0%	66.6%
Wales	100.0%	58.8%
Midlands	78.5%	57.8%
North East & Cumbria	91.6%	84.6%
North West	91.6%	61.1%
South East & South Central	82.3%	73.6%

⁵ These percentages are calculated based on the total number of YJSs within each region, including those that did not respond to the survey. As a result, the data presented here includes missing responses.

1.3.6 Effectiveness of Partnership Working with Police

Respondents were asked to rate their partnership work with the police at both strategic and operational levels, specifically in relation to diversion efforts.

While the majority of YJS mentioned having a dedicated officer/s assigned to diversion schemes, there were some patterns within those that did not specify having this.

A majority of services (86.20%) reported having one or more (teams) of dedicated police officers assigned to the diversion schemes in their service.

15 areas reported not having dedicated police officers assigned for diversionary activities.

Table 7. Proportion of YJSs having a dedicated police officer

Response	Percentage of YJSs
Yes	86.21%
No	12.93%
I'm not sure	0.86%
Total	100%

107 Youth Justice Services (YJSs) (92.2%) provided free-text responses about the roles and ranks of police officers involved in diversion schemes.

- In more than three-fourths of these YJSs, arrangements typically involve Police Constables, Sergeants, and Inspectors in direct roles, with occasional support from civilian staff or higher-ranking officers.
- Some officer ranks, particularly Sergeants, act as liaisons or coordinators, working closely with YJS teams to implement diversion schemes.
- While the staffing configurations are generally similar, there are some slight variations in how officers are allocated. Some YJSs use shared or part-time roles to optimise staffing resources. For example, one YJS benefits from a dedicated team comprising an Inspector, a shared Police Sergeant, two Police Constables, a Police Information Officer, and a Police Community Support Officer. Another YJS has a Police Constable seconded to the team, supported by a Police Sergeant who acts as a key point of contact and works closely with the service. Whereas in another YJS, the arrangement involves one 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Police Sergeant and two FTE Police Constables working on a rota basis.

In terms of operational partnership working with local police in YJS areas:

- 4.3% rate these partnerships as “Highly effective” with the vast majority of YJSs (95.7%) rate operational partnerships as “Very effective”, indicating strong collaboration and functionality at this level (Figure 5). This suggests operational partnerships are consistently reliable but not perceived as exceptional.
- The narrow confidence interval (seen in Figure 6) for operational partnerships reflects consistent perceptions across YJS staff in terms of satisfaction with police partnerships in relation to diversion efforts.
- Around 93% (94) YJSs who rated their operational partnerships with the police as “Highly” or “Very effective” (101) also rated their JDMPs as being “Highly” or “Very effective.”

In terms of strategic partnership working with local police in YJS areas:

- Strategic partnerships show more variability, with 44.8% of services rating them as “Very effective” and 25% as “Moderately effective” (see Figure 5).
- However, all but four areas (95%) that rated strategic partnerships as “Highly” or “Very effective” (80) also rated their JDMPs as working highly or very effectively.
- A small but notable 6% of services rated strategic partnerships as “Slightly effective”, suggesting challenges or misalignment in collaboration at this level.
- The confidence interval for strategic partnerships is much wider, reflecting greater variation in YJSs perceptions of their effectiveness, which could likely be influenced by regional, structural, or contextual factors (Figure 6).

Interestingly, across both levels, no YJS reported having ineffective or very poor working relationships with the police in their area.

Figure 5. YJS ratings of operational and strategic partnerships with the police

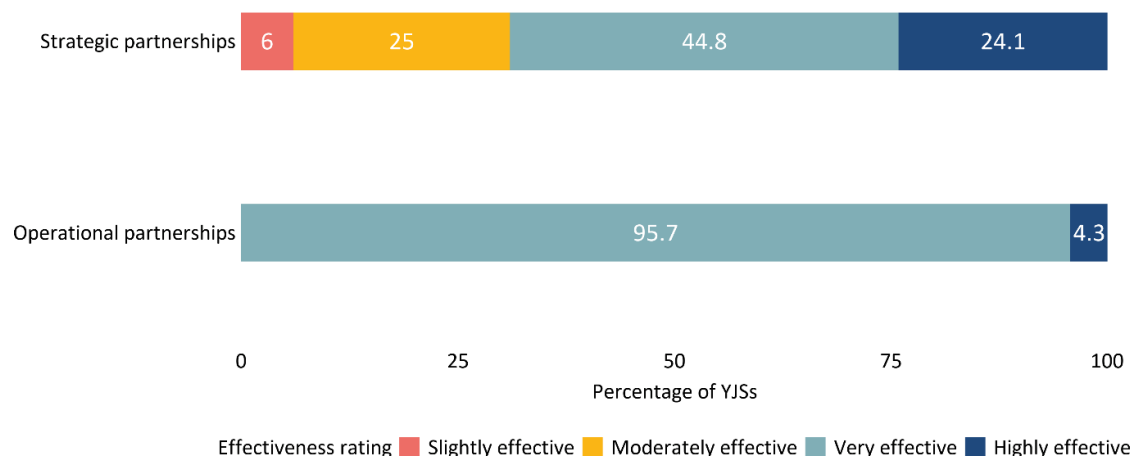
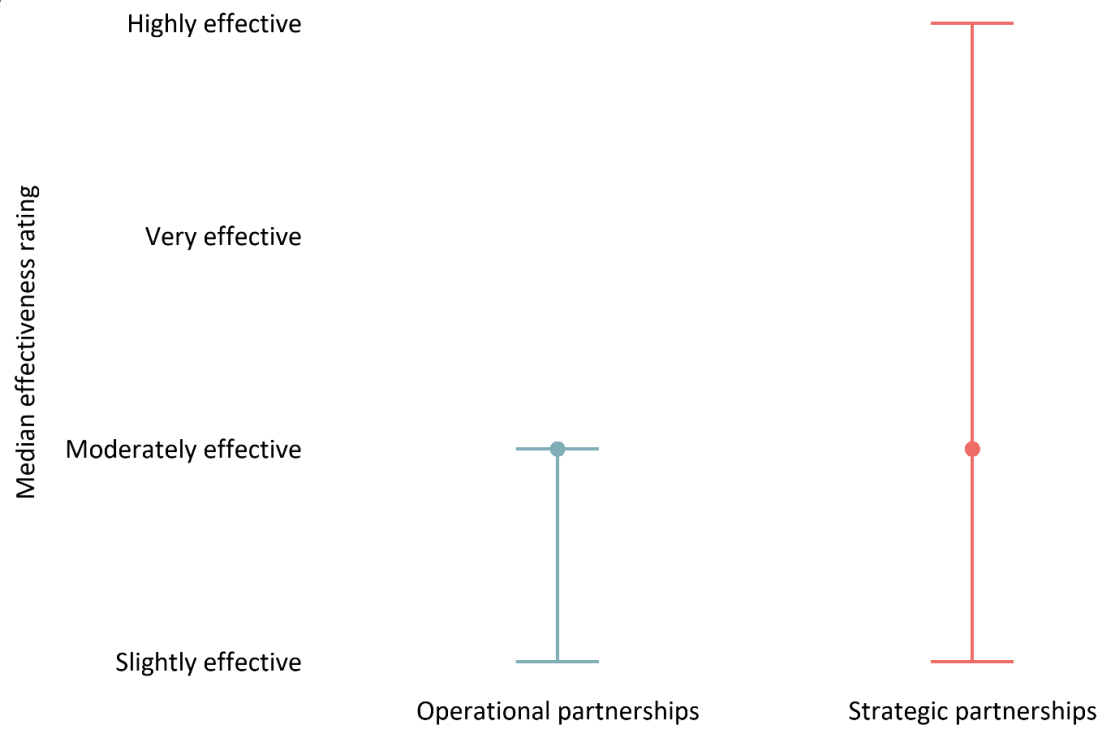


Figure 6. Median effectiveness ratings of operational and strategic partnerships with the police



1.3.7 Effectiveness of Joint Decision Making Panels

Question 8 asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of the Joint Decision Making Panel (OOCd) in their local area. There were six response options: i. Highly effective, ii. Very effective, iii. Moderately effective, iv. Slightly effective, v. Not at all effective, and vi. We do not have a Joint Decision Making Panel (JDMP).

The majority of YJS confirmed having a JDMP and rated the effectiveness of the JDMPs as very effective or highly effective.

Almost all YJSs (97.5%) in the sample reported having a JDMP for OOCds, with only three exceptions (2 in South East & South Central and 1 in North West) reporting they did not have a JDMP. As abovementioned, these three YJSs reported not having a dedicated officer for diversionary activities.

- One YJS reported that they are currently in the process of setting up a JDMP. Current arrangements include the police approaching the YJS, who in turn will reach out to partners and collate a response, which will then inform the discussions between police and YJS.
- In another YJS, the Operational Manager meets with the Youth Justice decision-maker and partners including case managers who are working with the child.
- Another YJS states that a county-wide decision-making panel has proven impractical due to the volume of child arrests and the complexity of place-based Early Help systems. Instead, they're exploring dual agency triaging with partners to reach children earlier and tailor support through health services or VCS providers commissioned by the PCC, aiming to avoid unnecessary involvement with the CJS or YJS.

A majority (90.1%) of YJSs rated JDMPs as "Highly" or "Very effective," showing strong confidence in their utility and impact.

Table 8. Effectiveness ratings of JDMPs by YJSs in the sample

Effectiveness rating of JDMP	Number	Percentage of YJSs
Very effective	54	47.7%
Highly effective	48	42.4%
Moderately effective	11	9.7%
Do not have JDMPs	3	2.5%
Total	113	99.3%

All the 48 YJSs that rated their JDMPs "Highly effective" also rated operational level partnerships with the police as either "Highly effective" (64.5%) or "Very effective" (33.3%).

This reinforces the role of robust day-to-day collaboration with the police in ensuring effective decision-making on OOCs.

A majority of services (71.5%, n = 73) who rated their JDMPs as “Highly” or “Very effective” (n = 102) reported having strong **strategic partnerships with the police**, while a minority (28.4%, n = 29) reported having only “moderately effective” or “slightly effective” relationships with local police. The gap could suggest that while operational collaborations directly support JDMPs’ working, strategic misalignment could hinder long-term consistency/effectiveness when determining OOC outcomes.

- Several YJSs emphasised the positive impact of longstanding working relationships with other professionals, including the police. For example, one YJS cited the importance of maintaining ‘*fantastic working relationships over many years*’, emphasising how such collaboration has been important for the panel’s successful functioning.
- Some YJSs reflected on the value of external feedback and scrutiny panels, such as those involving Police, CPS, MOPAC, and judiciary representatives, to ensure accountability and alignment of decisions at higher strategic levels.
- A YJS raised concerns about the potential impact of regional decisions made by senior police officials, such as Chief Constables, without meaningful local consultation.
- Another YJS recently revised their OOC panel process to include assessments before the OOC panel meetings (compliance with guidance). The service also proactively addresses ‘stop and search’ practices and the child’s identity to tackle disproportionality in accessing OOC support.

1.3.8 Distribution of formal and informal OOCs within YJS caseloads

Respondents were asked about the approximate percentage caseload that consist of informal OOCs (as opposed to formal), responding in 10% ranges.

Typically, around 50-59% of cases are informal, with more than half of the YJSs reporting to have a higher number of informal caseloads compared to formal caseloads.

The **median caseload** of informal OOCs lies within the **50-59% range across YJSs**, indicating that informal OOCs form a sizeable, but not necessarily significant part of YJSs diversion strategies.

More than half (57.8%) of services reported having higher informal caseloads.

Table 9. Distribution of YJSs by informal OOC caseload percentage ranges

Informal OOC caseload % range	Number of YJSs	Percentage of YJSs
50-59%	23	19.8%
60-69%	22	19.0%
70-79%	15	12.9%
20-29%	14	12.1%
40-49%	10	8.6%
10-19%	9	7.8%
Unknown	6	5.2%
80-89%	6	5.2%
30-39%	6	5.2%
0-9%	4	3.4%
90-100%	1	0.9%
Totals	116	100%

In terms of regional differences, some regions reported having relatively higher proportions of informal OOCd caseloads.

Table 10. Regional distribution of YJSs with higher informal OOCd caseloads

OOCd caseload % range	Region
80-89%	North East & Cumbria (2)
	Midlands (1)
	South East & South Central (1)
	South West (1)
	Wales (1)
70-79%	North East & Cumbria (2)
	Midlands (1)
	South East & South Central (4)
	Wales (3)
	East (1)
	Yorkshire & Humberside (1)

All London YJSs that completed the survey (n = 23) reported **less than 50%** of their caseloads as informal OOCds, highlighting a reliance on formal disposals or alternative strategies.

1.3.9 Timeframes for making an OOC decision and accessing support

Respondents were asked approximately how long an assessment informing the OOC decision takes, and how long it would be before a child starts accessing support after the OOC has been agreed. For both questions, response options were: 1-2 weeks; 3-4 weeks; 5-6 weeks; and 7 or more weeks.

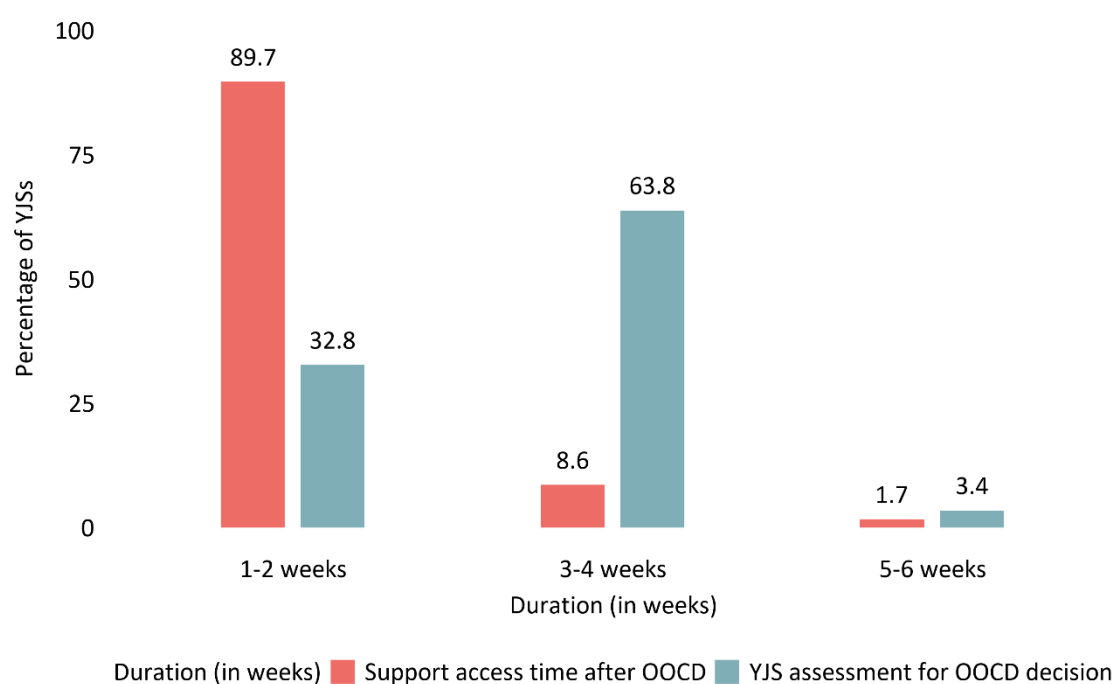
Responses ranged from 1-6 weeks, with the majority of OOC assessments taking 3-4 weeks and accessing support after OOC decisions taking 1-2 weeks.

As seen in Figure 7, only **32.8% of YJs** complete their assessments for OOC decisions within the same **1-2 week timeframe**, highlighting potential delays in evaluating referrals despite the quicker provision of support. The majority of YJs (63.8%) conduct their assessments within **3-4 weeks**, indicating that while YJs prioritise minimising waiting times for support, challenges in referral pathways may delay assessments necessary to inform these decisions.

Very few YJs (1.7% for support and 3.4% for assessments) exceed **5-6 weeks**, reflecting a general commitment to keeping waiting times for both processes within structured timelines. No YJ said this process took 7 or more weeks to complete.

A majority of YJs (89.7%) provide support access within 1-2 weeks after an OOC decision, demonstrating a strong emphasis on reducing waiting times for children receiving OOCs.

Figure 7. Duration of YJ assessment for OOC decisions and accessing support following OOC decisions.

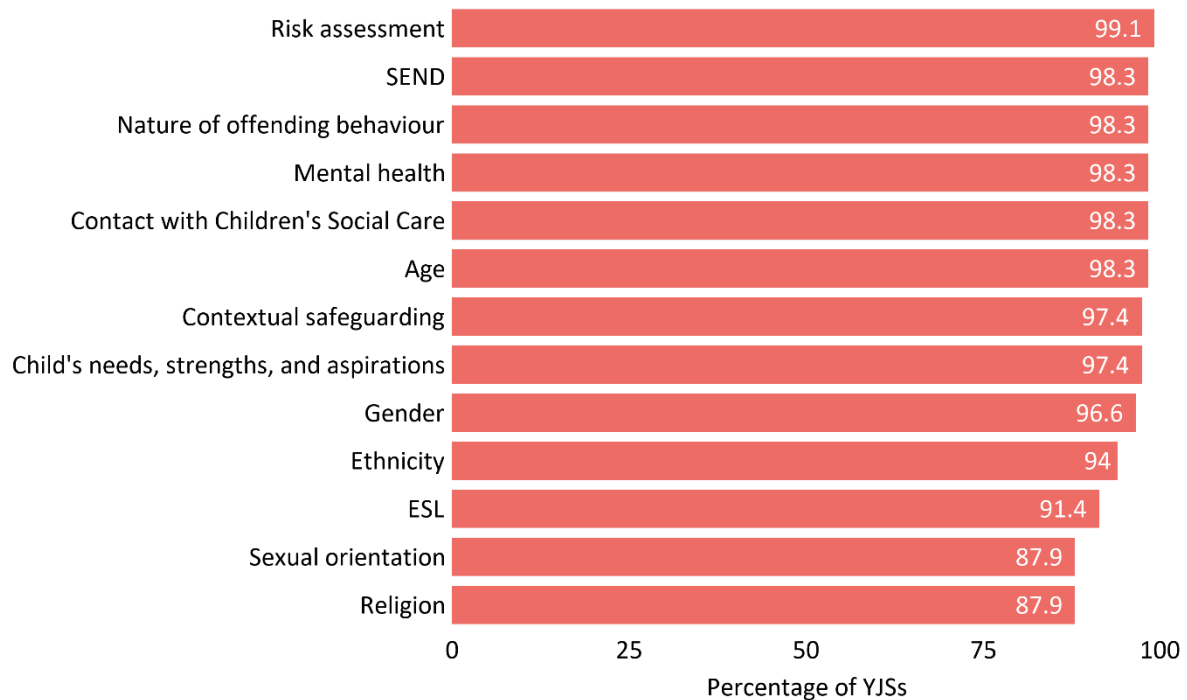


1.3.10 Decisions around offering tailored and targeted support

Respondents were asked about the factors/characteristics that are considered to ensure that the OOCd support is targeted and tailored to the child.

Risk assessments were most consistently considered by YJSs, with 99.1% stating they do consider this factor. At the other end, 87.9% of YJSs said they consider sexual orientation and religion.

Figure 8. Factors considered by YJSs when tailoring OOCd support



As seen in Figure 8, all 13 categories received high responses for consideration, which

- At the top end, 99.1% of YJS consider risk assessments.
- 98.3% of YJS consider SEND, nature of offending behaviour, mental health, contact with Children's Social Care, and age. These factors reflect a holistic approach to addressing children's needs.
- 97.4% of YJS consider contextual safeguarding (97.4%) and children's needs, strengths, and aspirations (97.4%), showing an effort to incorporate the child's environment and positive attributes into support planning. This emphasis also demonstrates a commitment to tailoring interventions that align with the Child First principles in diversion cases.
- At the other end, factors such as gender (96.6%), ethnicity (94%), English as a Second Language (ESL) (91.4%), sexual orientation (87.9%), and religion (87.9%) are considered by fewer YJSs.

Free-text responses from 51 YJSs highlighted a number of key themes:

- Many YJSs reported taking a trauma-informed, child-first approach in their assessments, ensuring that all relevant factors - such as risk, patterns of offending behaviour, mental health, SEND, speech and language needs (SALT), health, family dynamics, and educational background, are carefully considered.

- Several YJSs emphasised integrating children's strengths, interests, and aspirations into their support plans. For example, tailoring interventions to children's preferred learning styles, promoting positive identity development, and referring them to group activities or external agencies where appropriate (Child First).
- Some other specific factors considered:
 - Lived experiences of harm or victimisation (e.g., racism, school exclusion, bullying).
 - Young parenthood
 - Education-specific considerations including school attendance and exclusions; learning style and educational attainment
 - Community where the child resides and access to local services (youth clubs).
 - Environmental and family dynamics - including community where the child resides, parental capacity
 - Child's legal status and previous involvement with police or courts.
 - Substance misuse
 - Nationality
 - Gravity matrix
 - Developmental trauma, ACEs
 - Police intel on offending history or suspected gang/group involvement and prior exploitation assessments completed.

We capture what the world around the child looks like for each child.

- Many services noted that tools like PADT (Prevention and Diversion Tool), 'GGRRAAACCEESSS' framework, or bespoke assessments are used to inform decisions, incorporating police intelligence, previous contact with services, and patterns of offending behaviour. This approach supports evidence-based decision-making especially in cases involving complex needs/vulnerabilities.
- Some YJSs actively incorporate cultural needs into their assessments. For instance, one YJS uses culture-specific mentors. Another YJS avoids explicitly identifying ethnicity within decision-making panels to reduce bias, but it is integrated into assessments to inform and tailor interventions appropriately.

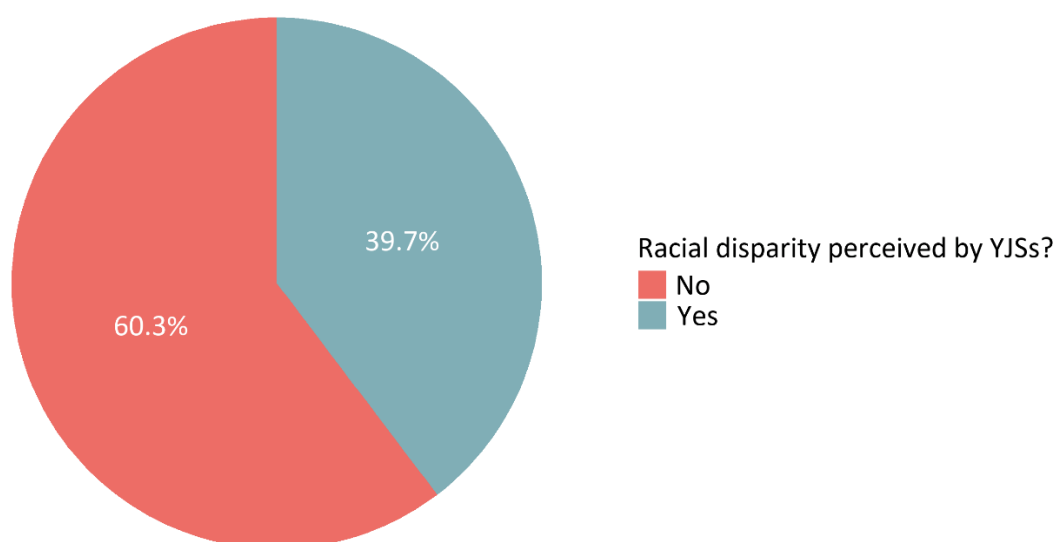
1.3.11 Racial disparities in accessing OOCd support

Respondents were asked if they perceived a difference in the benefit that minority ethnic children receive from OOCds when compared to their white peers. In other words, are children from minority ethnic backgrounds more likely to be charged than to receive an OOCd option. Responses were yes/no.

60.3% of YJs reported not perceiving racial disparities in their service.

As seen in Figure 9, **60.3% of YJs** reported that they do not perceive racial disparity in their services, while **39.7% of YJs** acknowledged the presence of racial disparities. The division in perception suggests potential differences in how YJs approach or recognise racial disparity, possibly linked to regional or organisational awareness and practices.

Figure 9. YJs perceptions of racial disparity in accessing OOCds



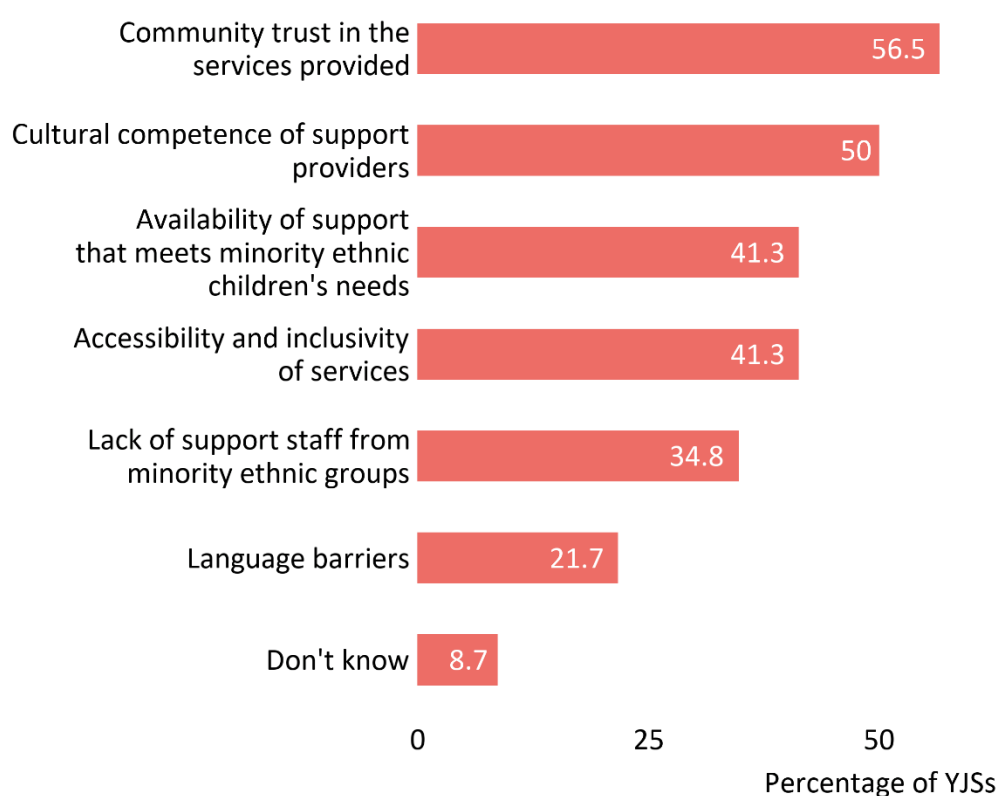
Among YJs that identified racial disparities in children accessing OOCd support, those in the Midlands had the highest proportion, with 57.1% of sampled YJs (representing 42% of all YJs in the region). This was followed by London at 56.5% of sampled YJs (or 41.9% overall) and the South East & South Central region at 52.9% of sampled YJs (or 47.4% overall).

No YJs in the North East and Cumbria reported racial disparities, and only one YJ in Wales, acknowledged such disparities.

As highlighted in Figure 10, the most commonly identified factor contributing to perceived racial disparity is a lack of community trust in the services provided (56.5%). For example, Cheshire's combined YJS said:

Trust and confidence of some groups (Black, African Caribbean and GRT in particular) in the criminal justice system is leading to some being less inclined to trust in the diversionary process and accept some responsibility (if not admission). Some Solicitors can be unhelpful too - advising no comment interviews - when diversion and non-formal outcome would be in best interests of their client and public. This sometimes means children (and disproportionately black children) being charged sent to court, then admitting offence at later date.

Figure 10. Factors contributing to perceived racial disparity in accessing OOC support



Cultural competence of support providers (50%) also ranks highly, suggesting that gaps in understanding or addressing cultural contexts may undermine effective engagement with minority ethnic children and families. 41.3% of YJSs highlighted the lack of support that meets the needs of minority ethnic children and issues with the accessibility and inclusivity of services as factors contributing to perceived disparity.

Less prominent factors included a lack of support staff from minority ethnic groups and language barriers. Some YJSs also noted that having access to SALT specialists has improved access to OOCd support (see below).

30 YJSs entered free-text responses about perceptions of racial disparity in accessing OOCd support.

- Many of these YJSs referenced **unconscious bias in police and court processes**, with specific concerns about the ‘adultification’ of Black and minority ethnic children, where they are viewed more as perpetrators than victims. For example, such bias may result in fewer opportunities for diversion at police stations. Lewisham YJS explicitly addresses unconscious bias and adultification at their panel and in assessments.
- One YJS is currently undertaking **training for staff in the court processes for referring children back to JDMP**.
- Staff in some services flagged **mistrust** among minority ethnic communities toward the police and justice system resulting in children giving ‘**no comment**’ interviews. **Poor legal advice from solicitors worsens this problem** as children who do not admit guilt in interviews may lose eligibility for OOCds. One London YJS stated that the Met Police's practice of charging cases with ‘no comment’ interviews directly to court limits access to OOCds, even for minor offences.
- **Systemic and institutional racism within the criminal justice system**, including **disparities in police decisions** (and lack of cultural competence), CPS practices, and the seriousness of offences assigned to different ethnic groups. Staff from YJS one YJS noted that in some areas, Black children are charged more quickly or are disproportionately sentenced to Referral Orders instead of receiving diversion opportunities.
- The **presence of SALT specialists** in many YJSs was seen as a **mitigating factor against potential language barriers** that could affect access to support.
- **Lack of community trust in services undermines engagement with minority ethnic families**. A YJS reflected on the need for more proactive outreach to engage with communities to ensure families understand the offer of support before they are in a situation where they are forced to comply. The adoption of Outcome 22 is seen by some YJS staff as a potential solution for children unwilling to admit guilt, a barrier more common among minority ethnic children.

1.3.12 Types of support/interventions available

Respondents were asked about the support available to children in their area, indicating if they were available for formal OOCs only, informal OOCs only, or both, or none.

The majority of interventions/support programmes across YJSs were on offer for both areas, with smaller numbers specified to only formal/informal OOCs. Most commonly reported interventions were victim awareness classes and activities (99.1%), restorative justice (99.6%), and substance use education and counselling (95.7%).

Table 11. OOC support interventions/programmes on offer across YJSs in the sample

Intervention/approach	Both	Formal only	Informal only	Not available
After-school programmes	31.9%	0.0%	0.0%	68.1%
Challenge-based activities in outdoor settings	33.6%	0.9%	0.0%	65.5%
Summer schools	38.8%	0.0%	0.0%	61.2%
Family support programmes	50.0%	1.7%	0.0%	48.3%
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)	52.6%	2.6%	0.0%	44.8%
Mentoring programmes	64.7%	1.7%	0.0%	33.6%
Social skills training	81.0%	0.9%	0.0%	18.1%
Education and tutorial services	81.9%	0.0%	0.9%	17.2%
Sports programmes	81.9%	0.9%	0.0%	17.2%
Service-learning programmes	80.2%	3.4%	0.0%	16.4%
Speech and language support	81.0%	1.7%	0.9%	16.4%
Trauma-focussed interventions	82.8%	2.6%	0.9%	13.8%
Positive activities including art, creative writing, dance	86.2%	0.9%	0.0%	12.9%
Job and vocational skills training	86.2%	1.7%	0.0%	12.1%
Crisis intervention	89.7%	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%
Relationship and violence prevention lessons and activities	94.8%	0.9%	0.9%	3.4%
Weapon use prevention/education programmes	94.0%	1.7%	0.9%	3.4%

Intervention/approach	Both	Formal only	Informal only	Not available
Mental health support	93.1%	3.4%	0.9%	2.6%
Victim awareness classes and activities	95.7%	1.7%	0.9%	1.7%
Restorative justice	96.6%	0.9%	0.9%	1.7%
Substance use education and counselling	99.1%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%

Note: Some YJSs responded that the classification in our survey questions, i.e., Availability for ‘formal only’, ‘informal only’, or ‘both’ is challenging and oversimplifies their approaches and doesn’t apply to how they work.

As highlighted in Table 11, the majority of interventions/support programmes across YJSs were on offer for both areas, with smaller numbers specified to only formal/informal OOCs. Most commonly reported interventions were substance use education and counselling (99.1%), restorative justice (96.6%), and victim awareness classes and activities (95.7%).

Less common interventions/approaches included after-school programmes (68.1%), challenge-based activities in outdoor settings (65.5%), and summer schools (61.2%) saying these were not available, respectively.

Some YJSs provided some additional insights into the interventions they have on offer:

- One YJS responded that the availability of interventions in their service fluctuates based on partner offers and funding, making it difficult to classify them consistently.⁶
- Another YJS reported that many interventions fall into universal services theoretically available to children but are often heavily rationed in practice. Also, some services are only occasionally accessible rather than routinely offered, and others, such as victim-related interventions, address the subject matter but are not structured as formal activities/sessions.
- A YJS said the availability of support can vary depending on location and time. For example, mentoring support is accessible in some postcodes but not others (so to a degree a postcode lottery still exists but efforts underway to address these gaps

⁶ Education Officers support all caseloads but do not provide specific tutoring, focusing instead on maximising universal opportunities. Leeds differentiates between Turnaround cases and Youth Panel cases, rather than categorising interventions by formal or informal outcomes. Despite the demand for early intervention services like CAMHS and SALT, these remain inaccessible due to resource limitations. Leeds is working towards Child First principles; however, structural challenges, workforce capacity, and partners still operating with a deficit model.

through more targeted commissioning.). Certain interventions, like outdoor wilderness activities, may only be offered intermittently.

In total, 34 YJSs in the sample provided free text responses for 'other' interventions on offer (beyond the above). Across the board, YJSs emphasised that each intervention is highly tailored to the child's unique learning style, specific offence, identified needs, and personal life experiences. Sessions are designed to be flexible, allowing them to be revisited as needed throughout the intervention. Priority is given to building a relationship and identifying the best way to deliver the sessions and in what order the best suits each child.

These included:

- Referrals to external agencies to provide interventions that may not be available in-house, such as referrals for crisis intervention, CAMHS, SALT, substance misuse education.
- Some YJSs offer group-based interventions such as Girls Groups, motor offenders programmes, or parenting programmes like SAFE! and Who's in Charge?
- Using interactive activities such as VR headsets to show children films/videos about awareness on knife crime, exploitation, and peer pressure
- Several YJSs incorporate health assessments into their interventions, including speech and language screening, dyslexia screenings, and access to physical health nurses and sexual health clinics. E.g., educational psychologists as part of YJS intervention planning.
- Reparation projects co-produced with children, incorporating their hobbies and interests. These include immersive activities and reparation tailored to children's preferences.
- Specialist support like the Ether programme designed for boys from ethnic minority backgrounds to develop personal and leadership skills.
- Targeted interventions for harmful sexual behaviour (e.g. AIM3 assessments in Hampshire), with one YJS extending OOC interventions for 24 weeks for harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) cases.
- Police intervention workbooks.
- Motor offenders programme.
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and emotional regulation groups.
- Fire Service intervention for car crime and arson.

The availability of the list of interventions/programmes described in **Table 11** across YJSs in the sample ranged from 33.3% (lowest) to 100%, with a fairly high median availability of 80.9%.

1.3.13 Aligning with evidence base

Respondents were asked how well the OOCd supports currently available to children in your area align with the evidence-base of what works best.

32.7% of respondents said they were “very well aligned” and 55.1% said they were “somewhat aligned” with their understanding of the evidence base for effective practices.

Table 12. YJS responses on the alignment of available interventions with the evidence base

Response	Number of YJS	% of YJS
Somewhat aligned with the evidence base	64	55.1%
Very well aligned with the evidence base	38	32.7%
Other (please specify)	12	10.3%
I don't know what the evidence base says	2	1,7%
Not aligned with the evidence base	0	0%
Practical experience in our area shows that different approaches (than the evidence base) are more effective	0	0%
The available evidence is not applicable to our local context	0	0%
I'd like to access the evidence base but have been unable to do so	0	0%
Total	116	100%

As seen in Table 12, over half of YJSs (55.1%, n = 64) reported their interventions as being “Somewhat aligned” with their understanding of the evidence base for effective practices. This suggests that while many YJSs aim to integrate evidence-based practices, there may be challenges in achieving full alignment, such as resource limitations, training gaps, or operational constraints.

32.7% (n = 38) of YJSs rated their interventions as “Very well aligned”, showing a smaller proportion have successfully implemented evidence-based practices.

32.7% (38) YJSs said their interventions are ‘very well aligned’ with their understanding of the evidence base of what works best.

1.3.14 Aligning with, and staying up-to-date with evidence-base

Respondents were asked about the resources they use to ensure alignment of your OOCd support with the evidence base, and how they stay informed about the latest evidence-based practice and/or policy/legislative development on effective OOCd support for children.

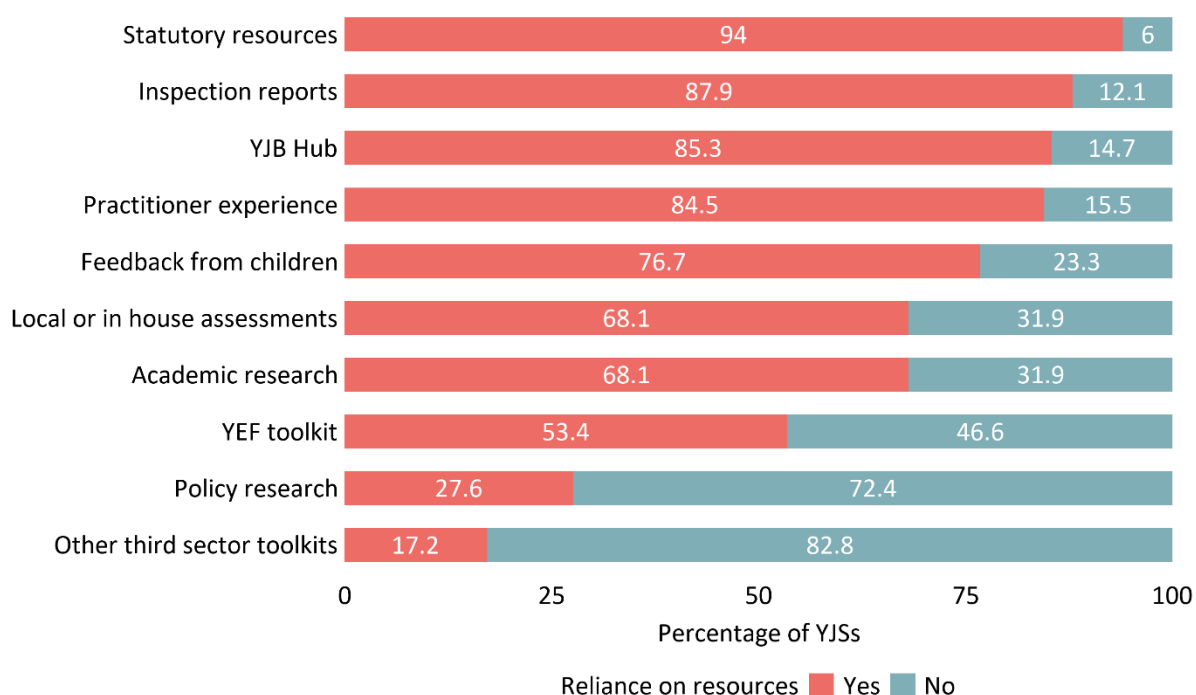
The most common source was statutory resources (94%). The least common was other third sector tools (17.2%). The most common way to stay informed was internal training (90%) and attending conferences/events (89.7%). The least common was online forums (44.8%).

As seen in Figure 11, Resources used by YJSs to ensure evidence-based OOCd support most YJSs rely on **statutory resources (94%)**, **inspection reports (87.9%)**, and the **YJB Hub (85.3%)**, reflecting confidence in government sources.

Practitioner experience (84.5%) and **feedback from children (76.7%)** are also highly valued, indicating that both professional judgment and child-centred approaches play a role in shaping diversion support.

Less than half of YJSs rely on the **YEF Toolkit (53.4%)** and **policy research (27.6%)**, implying there are likely more opportunities to enhance the use of sector-specific tools and broader research evidence in decision-making. **Third-sector toolkits** are the least utilised, (17.2%).

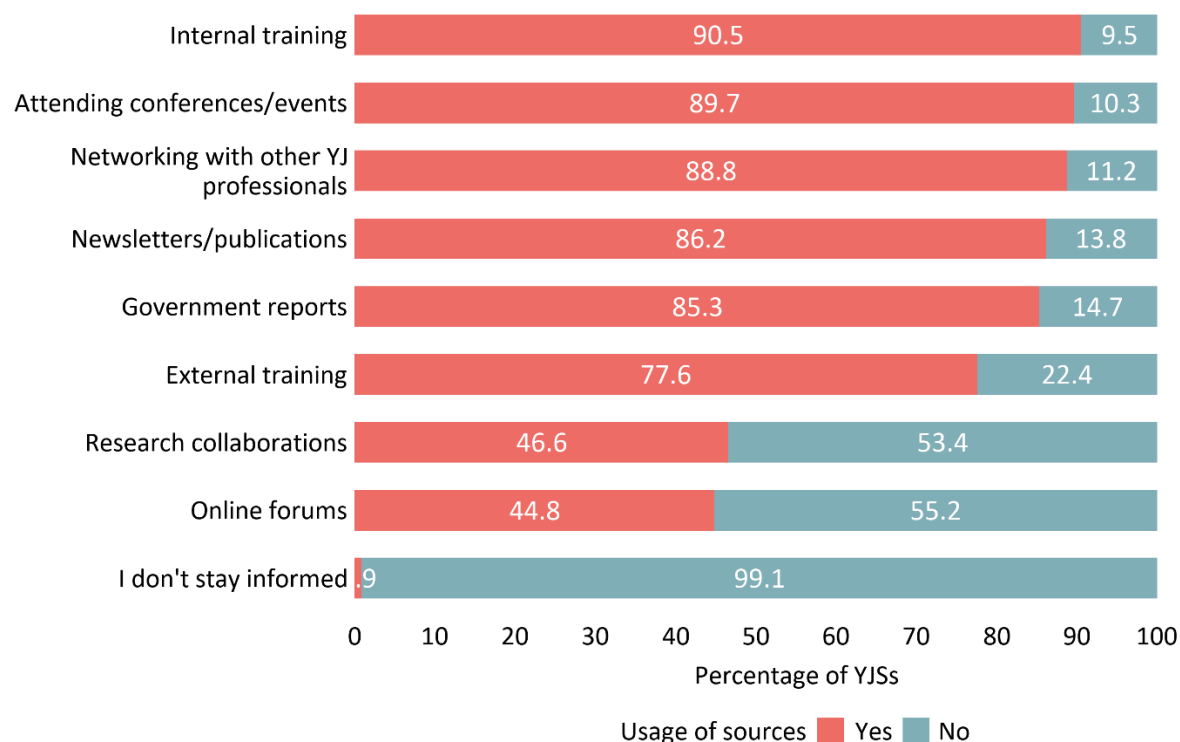
Figure 11. Resources used by YJSs to ensure evidence-based OOCd support



As seen in Figure 12, the most common information sources to stay informed with the latest evidence was **internal training (90.5%)**, followed by **attending conferences/events (89.7%)**, and **networking (88.8%)**.

Newsletters/publications (86.2%), government reports (85.3%) and external training (77.6%) were also used by many YJSs, indicating that a mix of online sources, with practical opportunities are most informative to support YJSs.

Figure 12. Information sources accessed by YJSs to stay informed with latest evidence



1.3.15 Enablers and barriers to delivering OOC support

Respondents were asked what the main enablers and barriers/challenges are to delivering support for children who come into contact with the police for an offence?

The most common enablers were information sharing, JDMP' and good relationships with the police.

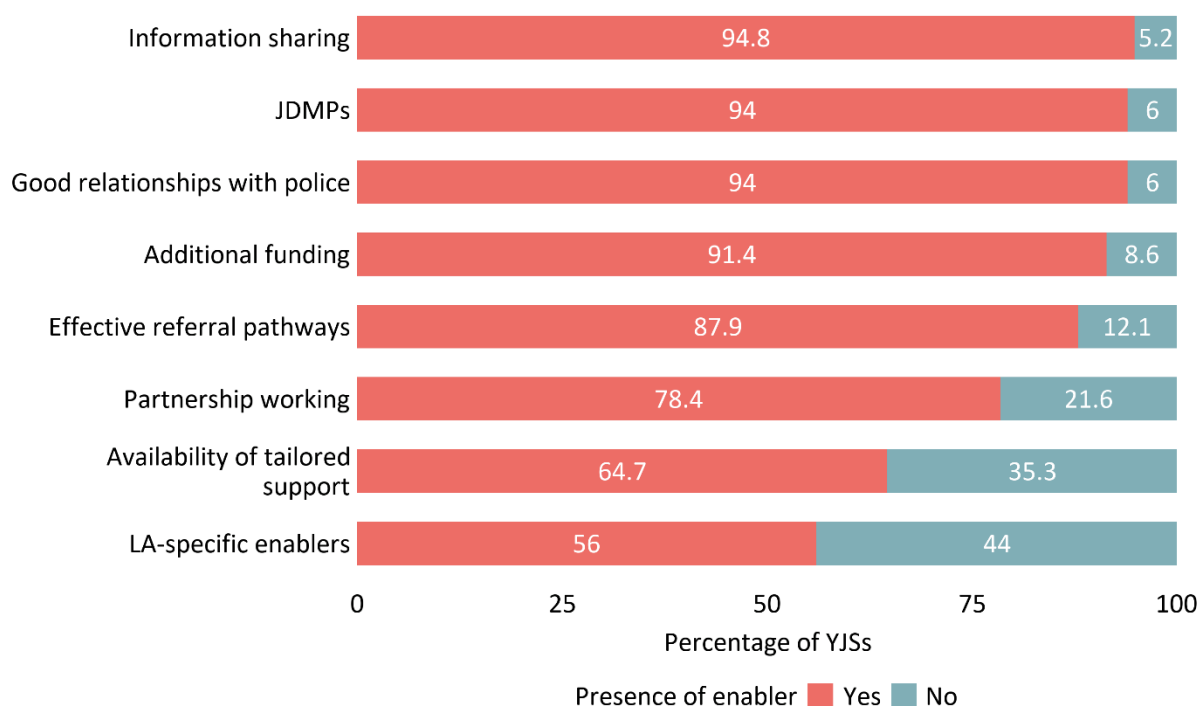
The most common barrier/challenge was limited funding.

As seen in Figure 13, information sharing (94.8%), JDMPs (94%), and good relationships with the police (94%) are the most commonly reported enablers across YJSs. This likely shows a strong foundation for multi-agency working within YJSs.

While 91.4% of YJSs identified additional funding as an enabler, 77.6% also flagged limited funding as a barrier, making it a double-edged sword (see Figure 13 and Figure 14).

Effective referral pathways (87.9%) and partnership working (78.4%) are widely acknowledged as enablers. However, challenges such as lengthy referral periods (35.3%) and poor partnership working (15.5%) indicate that while strong systems exist in many areas, these mechanisms are not uniformly robust.

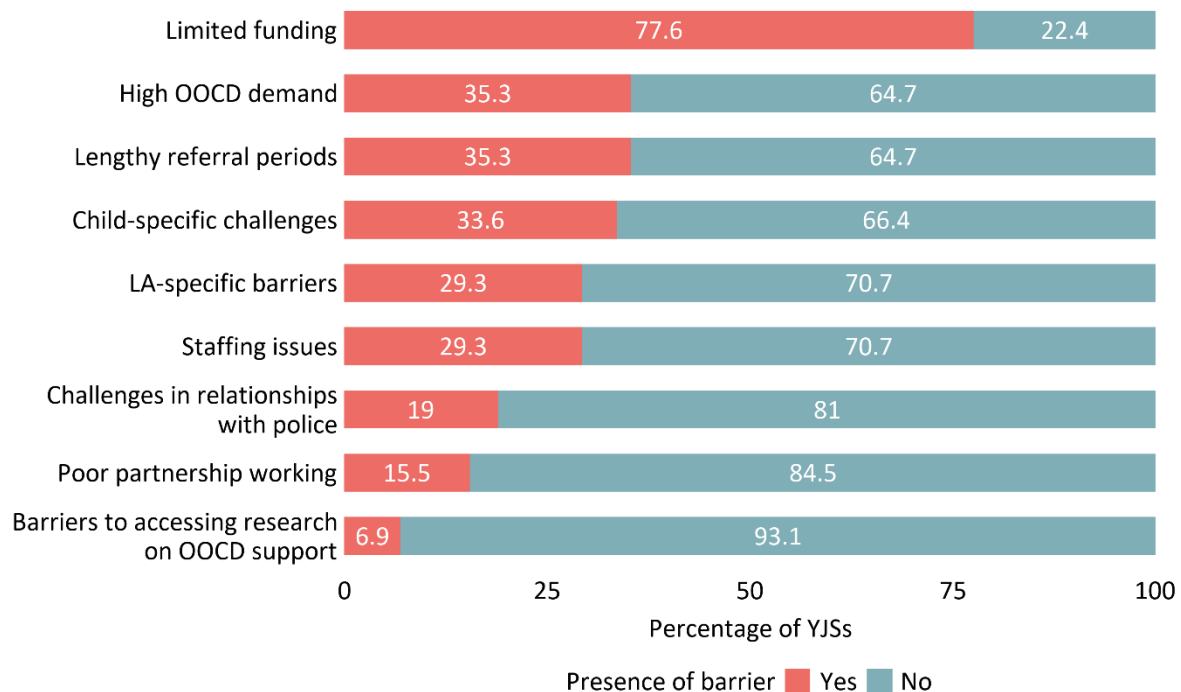
Figure 13. Enablers identified by YJSs for delivering effective OOC support



16 YJSs fed back free-text responses for 'other' enablers:

- Support beyond formal diversion which involves providing assistance to children Released Under Investigation (RUI) or on police bail, with information obtained from custody records (PIC sheet).
- Some YJSs noted the success of being an ‘early adopter’ of diversionary programmes to prevent children from becoming FTEs.
- Strong partnerships with children, parents, and local services (e.g., early help, health, and children’s services) alongside child-centred policing approaches.
- Preventative interventions e.g., Engage and Turnaround which start from the point of arrest or detention (ensuring early support).
- A collaborative ethos and shared understanding of Trauma-Informed, Child-First, and ACEs principles across YJS teams and partners.
- A willingness to try novel approaches, innovate, and persevere in building trust and engagement with reluctant children seen as essential for successful outcomes.
- Well-resourced YJSs and the capacity to deliver interventions at scale or in response to local needs.

Figure 14. Barriers identified by YJSs for delivering effective OOC support



24 YJSs fed back free-text responses for ‘other’ barriers:

- Delays from the point of police interception to making a referral, particularly in cases with lengthy investigations or waiting for mobile evidence, create challenges

for YJS teams attempting to engage young people at critical moments. Linked to this, high volumes of cases requiring outcomes are overwhelming resources, with some police approaches leaning toward punitive rather than trauma-informed practices. E.g., a reluctance from the police to refer cases for OOCs or adopt mechanisms like Outcome 22 and deferred prosecution.

Delays from the time the police ‘intercept’ the child to making the referral [is a barrier]. In other words, delays on the police side. Once the referral comes to us, we respond swiftly.

- The use of the gravity matrix has restricted children’s eligibility for OOCs. Police or CPS reliance on the gravity matrix can reduce referrals for OOCs leads to missed opportunities for early intervention.
- Geographical challenges in large YJS areas make it challenging to deliver consistent services or spend adequate time with children across the region. Wide service areas can limit the availability of local, accessible support services and increase travel time for both staff and young people.
- Political environment.
- Barriers in collaborating with schools (who like the police typically lean towards punitive/exclusionary measures instead of collaborating with the YJS). Lack of a ‘shared language’ between schools and YJSs hinder joint efforts.
- When services are voluntary and consent-based, children and families may refuse support, impacting participation in CRs, YCs, or other preventative programmes.
- Limited resources, especially in education and mental health services, prevent YJS from fully supporting children with complex needs. Resource gaps extend to critical roles like SALT or specialist support workers, which are challenging to recruit and retain, especially for children with neurodiversity or trauma needs.