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Rt Hon Shabana Mahmood MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
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10 December 2025

Dear Home Secretary

Joint thematic inspection report HMICFRS & HMIP: The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending

Under Section 55(5) of the Police Act 1996, as Police and Crime Commissioner I am pleased to provide my formal response to the report by HMICFRS &HMIP entitled 'The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending'.

Both the Chief Constable and I welcome the publication of this report. The Chief Constable's response to the recommendations is shown in Appendix 1.

I have always been a firm believer that prevention is better than cure. By intervening early and addressing the underlying causes of criminality, we will have fewer victims of crime, young people will be diverted away from crime, and there will be less of a financial burden on the criminal justice system. For this reason, through the national

Serious Violence Duty grant funding and my Prevention Fund, I support a number of early intervention and prevention initiatives for young people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Whenever a young person encounters the criminal justice system, however, it is important that policing, criminal justice agencies, and the wider partnership use this contact as an opportunity to intervene, work collaboratively to address any vulnerabilities and/or risk-factors, and support positive outcomes.

In my Police and Crime Plan, I committed to working with the police, criminal justice agencies and the wider partnership to ensure that criminal justice and other enforcement processes are used effectively to tackle crime and disorder, to help keep our communities safe. This extends to the use of youth Out-of-Court Disposals (OoCDs) for children who commit criminal offences.

I support the Constabulary in the appropriate use of OoCDs as they intend to divert children away from the criminal justice system, while proactively addressing their behaviour early and providing appropriate support to prevent further offending. Of course this must be balanced with meeting the needs of victims and the wider community. Through my Business Coordination Board and the Youth Justice Management Board, I will continue to monitor and hold the Constabulary to account for its implementation of recommendation 11 to improve how OoCDs are managed locally.

I have been assured that there are robust governance arrangements in place to monitor the effective use of youth OoCDs in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and that these have recently been refreshed in partnerships with youth justice services. The Constabulary's Youth Out-of-Court Resolution (OoCR) Scrutiny Panel independently reviews a selection of cases that have been resolved by use of an OoCR. The Panel, determines whether the method of disposal can be considered appropriate, based upon the review of information/evidence that was available to the decision maker at the time.

The Cambridgeshire Criminal Justice Board (CCJB), which I chair, is a strategic Board that brings criminal justice organisations together to support joint working and improve the overall function of the local criminal justice system. Regular updates from the Youth Justice Management Boards for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are brought to the Board. This includes reporting on first time entrants to the criminal justice system, disproportionality and reoffending rates.

I hope this response, and that of the Chief Constable, provides reassurance of my and Cambridgeshire Constabulary's commitment to ensuring the effectiveness of diverting children away from the criminal justice system, preventing reoffending, and keeping communities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough safe.

Yours sincerely



Darryl Preston
Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Enc - Appendix 1 – Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to HMICFRS report 'The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services'.

Appendix 1

Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to HMICFRS report 'The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services'.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1 and 2:

1. Amend crime outcome types to clearly distinguish between Outcome 22 (no further action), deferred youth cautions, and deferred prosecutions. Also, consider whether deferred youth cautions and deferred prosecutions should be formally recognised as positive police outcomes
2. Ensure that out-of-court disposals data for children is separated from that for adults.

Constabulary Response:

These recommendations are for The Home Office.

Recommendation 3 and 4:

3. Work with the Home Office and Youth Justice Board to review the relevance, suitability, and effectiveness of the first-time entrants key performance indicators, and implement new reporting processes for all out-of-court disposals. This includes tracking Outcomes 20 and 21
4. Include all out-of-court disposals where interventions are delivered to children, including community resolutions and Outcome 22, in criminal justice system reoffending statistics.

Constabulary Response:

These recommendations are for the Ministry of Justice.

Recommendation 5:

5. Remove youth cautions from the out-of-court disposal framework and explore the feasibility of introducing statutory deferred prosecution schemes and statutory provision for community resolutions.

Constabulary Response:

This recommendation is for The Home Office and Ministry of Justice.

Recommendation 6:

6. Evaluate the data on outcomes delivered to children to understand the effectiveness of out-of-court disposals in reducing reoffending.

Constabulary Response:

This recommendation is for The Home Office, Ministry of Justice, and the Youth Justice Board.

Recommendation 7, 8 and 9:

7. Amend the NPCC child gravity matrix guidance so that any divergence of more than one score must be authorised by an officer of at least the rank of police inspector.
8. Amend the NPCC Community Resolutions Guidance to include standardised wording for community resolution forms, to ensure consistency and to prohibit the use of coercive wording.
9. Work with the Youth Justice Board and Home Office to develop guidance in relation to the use of Outcome 20 and 21. This should include referral to youth justice services when appropriate (in accordance with the NPCC child gravity matrix guidance).

Constabulary Response:

These recommendations are for The National Police Chiefs' Council.

Recommendation 10:

10. Amend the NPCC Community Resolutions Guidance, the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice for prosecution and case management, and the

YJB case management guidance to reflect that community resolutions are issued only when the child has accepted responsibility or where there is evidence that would provide a realistic prospect of conviction.

Constabulary Response:

This recommendation is for The National Police Chiefs' Council, College of Policing, and Youth Justice Board.

Recommendation 11

11. 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.

Constabulary Response:

The below response should be seen in the context of the following local arrangements for Cambridgeshire which deliver decision making around OOCR for children. There is a weekly panel held between:

- The Police
- Youth Justice Service
- Health
- Children's Social care

- Substance misuse services
- Education
- Restorative justice

Referrals are made by the Police via a written process, and cases are presented by the Police officers embedded in the Youth Justice teams.

To reflect current local authority arrangements there are two panels each week, one for Cambridge and one for Peterborough. The process is underpinned by a jointly agreed policy framework between both areas and the Police.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary also maintain a team of four officers, based within our Information Management Unit (IMU) and DS who specialise in the support of, guidance, filing and compliance of Out of Court Referrals (OOCR).

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:

Operational sharing of information via the Youth Offending Panels is well managed by the Youth Offending Scheme (YOS) Police Officers, in partnership with Local Authority Youth Offending and other partners who sit on the panel. We however recognise two gaps for our local partnership:

1. The ability to understand trends in type and volume over time: work will be undertaken with internal and external stakeholders to develop a performance product derived from Police data which can be shared across the partnership at a tactical and strategic level to meet this.
2. Broader information sharing, which often provides crucial context. For example, where a child has been the suspect in another criminal investigation which may have had no further action taken, or where they may have been the victim of another offence. This context is routinely shared by the Police; however, it is recognised that this currently relies on the experience and capability of those in some posts rather than being an explicit policy expectation. Local policies are being adjusted to reflect explicit expectations

around sharing and noting who should be sharing what information to support appropriate decision making.

Ensuring decisions about the use of crime Outcomes 20 and 21 are consistent and appropriate and reflect revised NPCC guidance:

Outcome 21's are submitted through the panels and are therefore subject to consistent decision making. Outcome 20's are not automatically submitted to the panels. However, this outcome is generally reached either:

- By the panel as an outcome of a referral
- By some degree of engagement of the officers in the Out of Court Resolution Team (OOCR).
- Ultimately through the Designated Decision Maker (DDM's) to ensure crime outcome integrity.

All elements of the above are cognisant of current guidance and there is consistent decision making in the use of this outcome. It is recognised that there is a limited risk of this outcome being applied outside of these circumstances and an internal review of police processes will consider ways to remove this risk i.e., by a mandatory referral to the panel.

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:

The current child gravity matrix is well embedded in a recent 2025 refresh of the policy which underpins the panels. It is also well understood as a key tool in decision making for those involved in said joint decision making. It features in Police gatekeeping training and decision-making processes.

Police officers dedicated to the compliance and monitoring OOCR embedded in the Incident Management Unit (IMU), will monitor for examples of where its not be used and take remedial action with managers including training and guidance. Panel decisions around the use of OOCR for children are recorded and are auditable.

Ensuring that joint decisions with the youth justice service about out-of-court disposals are made at the appropriate level of seniority:

YOS police officers are supported by the attendance of the OOCR DS at panels. Where this person isn't available OOCR PCs (who are not inside line management arrangements with YOS) attend to support. There is felt to be a strong culture of robust but professional discussion at the panels which routinely achieves consensus. However, it is recognised that the current strength of this partnership is, at least in part, built on experienced and robust individual officers rather than deliberate and explicit organisational decision about what level of seniority Police decision making should sit at routinely. In light of this, the process is being reviewed internally. There is a well understood escalation process to more senior officers where joint decision making cannot achieve a consensus. Whilst not used frequently, this has been utilised in 2025 effectively.

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:

Local Community Resolution processes make it clear there is a requirement for an appropriate adult to be present and engaged in the process. This is well embedded. Adherence to the explicit use of the caution is less well understood in current processes. The new digitisation process will re-enforce this requirement and relevant messaging, and expectations has been circulated to frontline officers.

Ensuring that safeguarding referrals are made when appropriate:

This is well embedded. All cases, including where a decision has not been made at the panel (for example where there is no criminal antecedence of any kind and OOCR is used) decisions go to panel for review and the safeguarding referrals and actions are always reviewed and recorded.

Recommendation 12, 13 and 14

12. Ensure that current data collection mechanisms support future evaluation of the effectiveness of out-of-court disposals in outcomes for children, reoffending rates, potential net-widening, and their cost-effectiveness

13. Work proactively with youth justice partnership boards to help them build a clear understanding of all out-of-court disposals used locally, evaluate their impact, and ensure their effectiveness
14. Work together with partners to establish an evidence base about which interventions and disposals are most effective in reducing reoffending and delivering positive outcomes for children.

Constabulary Response:

These recommendations are for The Youth Justice Board.

Recommendation 15

15. In line with the case management guidance:
    - Collate data on all out-of-court disposals, including from partner agencies, to analyse and monitor use, to ensure appropriate application, identify trends, and assess for net-widening.
    - Ensure all partners take a collaborative approach to out-of-court disposal decision-making and intervention delivery, supporting joint work and effective exit planning.

Constabulary Response:

This recommendation is for Youth justice partnership boards.

Recommendation 16, 17 and 18

16. Consider the complexity and nature of the risk and safety concerns for each child, and match these with the skillset and experience of staff when allocating work
17. Improve the quality of assessment, planning, and service delivery so that they focus equally on supporting the child and keeping them and other people safe
18. Ensure that children and their parents or carers understand the requirements of the out-of-court disposal and the aims of their intervention plan.

Constabulary Response:

These recommendations are for Youth Justice Service Managers.