

Hillingdon Youth Justice Service Five-Year Strategy



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Foreword

As we embark on this journey of shaping the future of youth justice services in Hillingdon during the next five years, it is with great enthusiasm and dedication that I present this strategy. Our mission is clear: to create a safer, fairer, and more inclusive society for all children, where their rights, needs, and potential are recognised and respected. Over the years, our understanding of youth justice has evolved, driven by research, evidence, and the voices of children themselves. We have learned that effective youth justice services require a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach that addresses the underlying causes of offending behaviour and promotes positive development and rehabilitation through a child first approach.

This strategy builds upon our achievements and experiences, while also charting a course for innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement. It reflects our commitment to embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our work, ensuring that every child has access to the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

Central to our strategy is the principle of early intervention and prevention, recognising that addressing issues at the earliest possible stage can prevent escalation and reduce the risk of future harm. We will work closely with partners across sectors to identify and respond to the needs of children and their families and carers, providing tailored support and interventions that address the root causes of offending and improve children's safety and wellbeing.

Equally important is our commitment to restorative justice principles, which prioritise accountability, healing, and the repair of harm. We continue to involve children, victims, and communities in the resolution of conflicts and the restoration of relationships, promoting understanding, empathy, and reconciliation.

As we embark on this journey, we do so with humility and a recognition of the challenges that lie ahead as we continue to deliver services post the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that transforming youth justice services requires courage, perseverance, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. But we also know that the rewards are great – safer communities, brighter futures, and a more just society for all.

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the development of this strategy – our dedicated staff, partner agencies, children, families, and communities. Your insights, expertise, and commitment have been invaluable, and I am confident that together, we can achieve our shared vision of a youth justice system that works for everyone.

Together, let us build a future where every child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential, where second chances are not just offered but embraced, and where justice is not just served but served with compassion, dignity, and fairness.

**Cllr Susan O'Brien,
Cabinet Member for
Children, Families and
Education**



Introduction

Hillingdon Council has a duty under S.38 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to provide youth justice services to children aged 10 to 18. The principal aim of Hillingdon Youth Justice Service (HYJS) is to prevent offending by children through early intervention, prevention, and rehabilitation. This strategy sets out the service's approach to working with children and families accessing youth justice services through early help and prevention and statutory intervention. This five-year strategy was developed in consultation with children, parents/carers and colleagues across the partnership and communities reflecting on and reviewing HYJS's performance during the past five years and considering a range of local and national drivers informing our youth justice work.

"We are committed to taking a child first approach to understanding the challenges faced by children and families, including social deprivation, discrimination, trauma, unmet health needs, and will actively empower children and families to improve outcomes by providing opportunities for every child to succeed. We take a "justice for all" approach by supporting victims, protecting the public and engaging our communities to divert children from entering the criminal justice system."

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) Strategic Plan 2024-2027 states that: "The YJB's vision is for a youth justice system that treats children as children" and sets out its requirements for a child first approach:

- prioritising the best interests of children and recognising their needs and potential
- promoting children's individual strengths and their capacities to develop pro-social identities

- encouraging children's active participation, engagement, and wider social inclusion
- promoting a childhood removed from the justice system.

Across the youth justice partnership in Hillingdon, the use of the word "child" has been widely adopted when discussing children who encounter the criminal justice system. Previous language such as young people or adolescents diluted the focus that those who come into contact with the youth justice system are children and should be supported as such. The work of HYJS and the partnership seeks to support engagement with children in multiple spheres from diversion through the delivery of school-based programmes such as 'Your Life You Choose', early intervention through active use of triage interventions, and in statutory interventions. The service takes a locality, place-based approach by delivering services and interventions to children within their context. Wider work across the local authority, with the development of locality-based family hubs and spoke buildings provides well-resourced and safe



places to meet children within the community. Children told us that they are more likely to engage with interventions in familiar surroundings and co-ordinating locality delivery supports engagement with wider services. The model works on supporting children to access the right services, at the right time, in the right place.

Our plan continues to be set within the context of ongoing public service reform, associated organisational change, financial restraints and responding to

the challenges which continue post the COVID-19 pandemic. These circumstances present additional challenges to organisations as they seek to deliver their core business whilst also contributing to strategic partnerships. However, the partnership approach to developing and implementing this Youth Justice Plan has been informed by a commitment not only to maintain our investment in the youth justice agenda but to enhance it through continued effective collaboration.

Our priorities

Hillingdon Council is committed to putting residents first and reflects this commitment across the council's plans and services. Our youth justice priorities are directly aligned with this commitment, which will be set out in further detail in this document.



Context

Hillingdon is the second largest London borough, covering an area of 42 square miles over half of which is a mosaic of countryside, including canals, rivers, parks and woodland, interspersed with historic towns and villages. It shares borders with Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Hounslow, Ealing, and Harrow. Hillingdon is home to Heathrow Airport, which is one of the main local employers, but also a significant entry point for children and young people being trafficked into the country.

- Hillingdon has a higher proportion of 0 to 19-year-olds than the London average with 26 per cent and this proportion is expected to grow.
- There are approximately 120,700 children aged 0 to 17 years residing in the borough which make up 39.69 per cent of the population.
- 30,965 (25.65 per cent) of these children are aged 10 to 17 years.
- According to data from the End Child Poverty Coalition, which combines data from the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there are approximately 25,347 children in Hillingdon living in poverty, which is approximately 21 per cent.
- At 31 March 2024, there were approximately 329 children looked after by Hillingdon.
- 35 per cent of all residents are from a Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic background. Hillingdon is an ethnically diverse borough with most Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic communities residing in the south of the borough.
- 62 per cent of Hillingdon children aged 10 to 17 are from a Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic background (2021 Census).
- Our residents (aged three years and above) speak at least 85 different languages – this is similar to most other London boroughs and other large cities in England and Wales.
- The 2021 Census tells us that 77.9 per cent of our residents (aged three years and above) have English as their main language, followed by Punjabi (4.6 per cent), Romanian (1.8 per cent), Polish (1.7 per cent) and Tamil (1.6 per cent).
- In 2023/24, 3,503 children had an active Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This number has steadily increased at an average rate of approximately 11.6 per cent during the past five years.



HYJS is located within the Children, Families and Education Directorate and as such, the Assistant Director of Prevention and Youth Justice is part of the senior management team in Children's Services. The effectiveness of HYJS's collaborative work has been recognised in both our Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and SEND inspection outcomes. We have aligned HYJS with our Youth Offer and Early Help under one assistant director which supports our holistic planning for vulnerable children. The full staffing structure and budget costs and contributions will be included within annual youth justice plans.

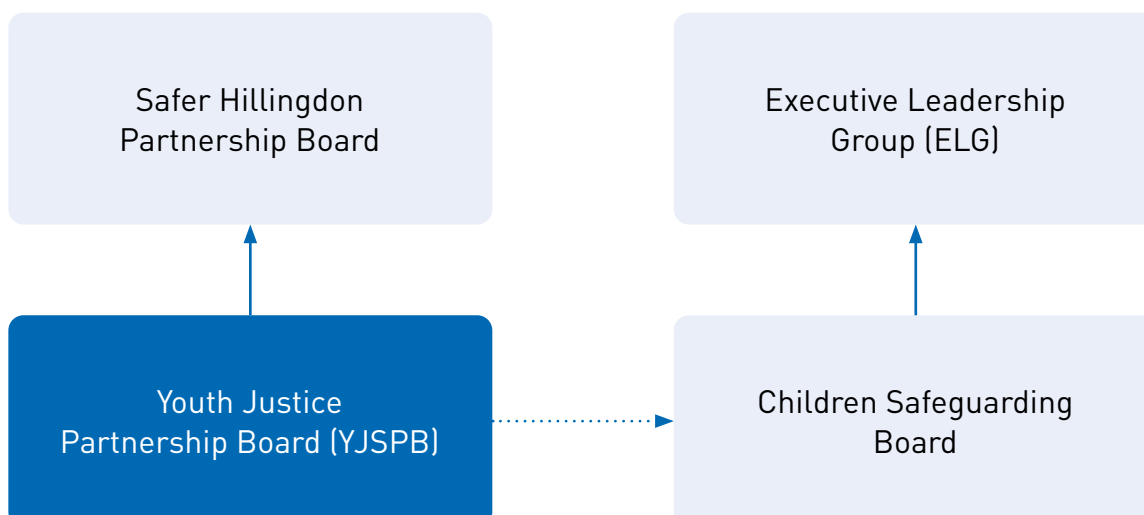
Governance, leadership and partnerships

HYJS is funded centrally and through the grant contributions from the Youth Justice Board and statutory partner agencies, in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. All funds are used to deliver youth justice services in Hillingdon.

The work of HYJS is located within the broader context of our Safer Hillingdon Partnership (SHP) and the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board (SCPb). Both boards have operational and strategic representation from all partner agencies. HYJS is represented at the SHP and SCPb by the Corporate Director for Children, Families and Education. In achieving our ambitions and vision for our children, we continue to receive full political and corporate support and a level of financial investment which ensures that each year's budget setting considers both the needs of the service and the contingencies based on demographic growth and increasing levels of complexity. Our elected member for Children, Families and Education and the Chief Executive have an active interest and understanding of the youth justice agenda. They scrutinise children's services' performance and practice updates in quarterly meetings with the Senior Management Team.

Complex and high-risk issues have oversight at this level to ensure political, financial and strategic investment to keep children safe.

The Youth Justice Partnership Board (YJSPB) is co-chaired by the Corporate Director for Children, Families and Education and the Detective Chief Inspector for the West Area Borough Command Unit which demonstrates committed leadership. The YJSPB includes representatives from all of the key partner agencies and operates in line with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) Governance and Leadership guidance. The Corporate Director for Children, Families and Education is a member of every senior governance board in the borough and can exert influence and leverage support and resources to further the work of the YJSPB. Similarly, there is a direct understanding of other policy and strategy landscapes to inform the YJSPB plan and to inform others' strategies and plans to be observant of YJS concerns. These include all council political meetings, health governance which covers the borough, new ICB, All London DSC Group, West London DCS steering groups, and West London Commissioning Alliance whilst maintaining instantaneous direct access to the most senior leadership across the borough and region.



From His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection in 2021, it was noted by the inspectorate panel that we have a strong management board attendance, this has continued since with an average of 73 per cent of senior partners attending. New board members have an induction to help them understand the role of the service and explore the expectations and contributions they will be making to the service. Our governance and leadership arrangements are maturing and whilst we believe we have a clear local vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised, and responsive service for all children, we recognise the need to ensure that vision is promoted and understood by all stakeholders. Our partnership relationships are strong at both strategic and operational levels. Local resourcing levels have been retained despite significant financial challenges for all the partners and the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery. Our board members are active, own the youth justice agenda and recognise the contributions their own agency makes to it. For example, the ICB representative on the board initiated a review of the health need of the YJS cohort which resulted in the commissioning of dedicated speech and language therapy provision; whilst the Community Safety representative has advocated YJS work and secured funding from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to support early identification and intervention of young people at risk of exploitation.

HMIP inspects youth justice services across England and Wales and forms part of HYJS's governance arrangements. This is completed through independent inspection, thematic inspections and reports, recommendations, research and effective practice guidance.

The YJB for England and Wales is responsible for monitoring and measuring our performance through the submission of national key performance indicators (KPIs). The YJB undertakes oversight activity to meet its statutory duty to monitor the operation of the youth justice system. This function is undertaken in line with its independence from national and local government and all named statutory partners.

The oversight process follows an ongoing cycle of:

- monitoring YJS performance against the oversight fields outlined and assigning services to performance quadrants
- identifying the scale and nature of support needs and/or areas of effective performance and evidence-based practice
- co-ordinating improvement (and where necessary, formal intervention).



Performance data 2019-2024

Together with its partners, HYJS continues to realign resources to meet service demand and the requirements of the wider public sector reform agenda, which supports transformation of essential services in an evidence-based way to promote best practice.

The YJS informs and supports the Children's "High Fives":

- contextual safeguarding
- neglect
- where our children live
- targeted help
- our people.

These five key strands of operational and strategic activity drive improved outcomes for children in Hillingdon.

The YJB is responsible for monitoring a number of key performance indicators and each local authority and youth justice partnership must submit quarterly data against each. It is a condition of the YJB Grant that it is used to achieve a positive reduction across all performance indicators with data being published by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on a quarterly basis.

The following three performance indicators have been embedded within services, so we have been able to capture data and measure our performance over a longer period:

1 Reduction in First Time Entrants

(FTEs): Children entering the criminal justice system for the first time receiving a disposal at court or a caution.

2 Reduction in reoffending:

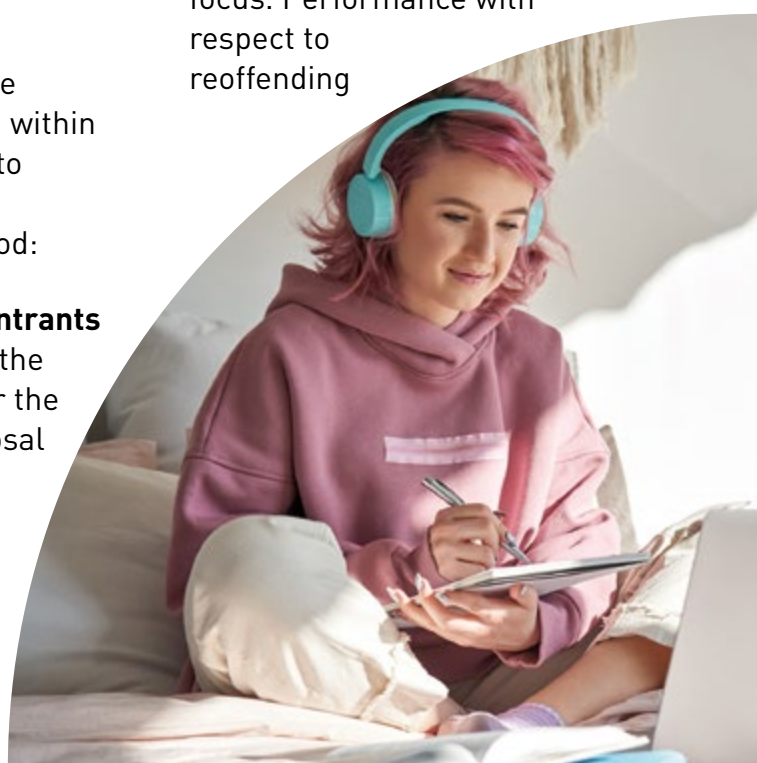
Monitoring of children who receive a substantive outcome (not triage) for a period of 12 months for any

further offending and associated frequency.

3 Reduction in the use of custody:

Reduce the number of children who receive a custodial sentence.

The HYJS and the partner agencies and professionals who work with them, have an impressive track record of contributing to the realisation of our vision through effective preventative work, as well as out-of-court and post-court case work. Our performance against the first-time entrants' national performance indicator is consistently strong with the rate below both national and London averages. A focus on early intervention and prevention services across the partnership has contributed to this, including an effective working relationship between the police and the HYJS with regards to decision making and the delivery of robust assessments and interventions. Our custody rates have shown a gradual reduction in recent years but with complex cohorts of children and a national rise in knife crime, this remains an area of priority focus. Performance with respect to reoffending



should be considered within the context of a much smaller cohort, due to our success at reducing FTEs, containing individuals that often have more complex needs, higher levels of vulnerability and pose a greater risk to others. These young people have a range of challenges and unmet needs, which take longer to address and effect permanent changes in lifestyles and outcomes. As with the national picture we have an over-representation of boys from a Black and Mixed ethnic background in custody which is a priority of activity in this strategy.

Since April 2023, it has been a requirement of youth justice services to report on the following new KPIs, with the first nationally published data expected in spring 2025:

- 1 Suitable accommodation
- 2 Education, training, and employment
- 3 Special educational needs and disabilities
- 4 Mental health care and emotional wellbeing
- 5 Substance misuse
- 6 Out of court disposals
- 7 Links to wider services
- 8 Management board attendance
- 9 Serious violence
- 10 Victims

Youth justice services have access to the Youth Justice Application Framework (YJAF) to view data submitted and compare to national data. Data from quarters (Q) 1-3 for 2023/24 on YJAF tells us that Hillingdon is performing above national indicators in the proportion of

children in suitable accommodation (an average of 96 per cent in Hillingdon compared to 86 per cent nationally).

Looking at the proportion of children in suitable education, training, and employment at the end of their order, Q1-3 showed 87 per cent of school age children were in full time education at the end of their intervention, like the 86 per cent seen at the end of 2022/23. For the non-school age children, 67 per cent were in full-time education, up from the 56 per cent seen at the end of 2022/23. We also have a higher than the national average number of children identified with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and additional learning needs (ALN) with a formal plan. This is reflective of the links we have built with our partners in Education and SEND, and continue to ensure that we collaborate with partners to ensure that we remain child-focused. It is a real strength of HYJS to have a speech and language therapist embedded within the service to ensure all children open to the YJS, AXIS and other prevention services such as Turnaround, are offered speech and language assessment at the earliest opportunity. This ensures there is an understanding of their needs, and collaboration with partners and interventions are personalised to maximise positive outcomes for each child.



HYJS have reported an average of 39 per cent of children open to the YJS with a screened or identified need for an intervention to improve mental health or emotional wellbeing, compared to 25.6 per cent of the national average for Q1-3 for 2023/24. The well-resourced Health Hub within the YJS combines the skills of a liaison and diversion worker, a full-time dedicated speech and language therapist and a child and adolescent mental health practitioner to ensure a co-ordinated approach to meeting the health needs of children entering the youth justice system to promote positive outcomes.

The total number of outcomes have decreased during the past five years, from 246 in 2019/20 to 100 in 2023/24. It is positive that the number of court outcomes have decreased by 54 per cent during the period. We have also seen a 65 per cent decrease of out of court disposals and a 77.5 per cent decrease in triage outcomes in the same period. The main cause of this is due to the increase in community resolutions being given for low-level offences. It is positive that in the last year we have seen an increase in the rate of engagement as compared to the previous year.

The most common offence in 2023/24 was violence against the person related, with 60 offences (29.13 per cent). In 2021/22, drugs had been the most common offence, but this has continued to decrease from 52 offences (28.42 per cent) in 2021/22 to 12 offences (5.83 per cent) in 2023/24. This is due to the continued decrease in triage offences, with drug possession offences being dealt with via community resolutions.

Burglary, robbery, and theft and handling offences accounted for 33.98 per cent of all offences, up from 25.23 per cent in the previous year and 11.48 per cent in 2021/22. For the second year in a row, "Burglary other than dwelling" was the single most common offence, representing 9.22 per cent of all offences. It is important to note that all 19 of these offences were committed by two children. However, the next most common offence was "Possess knife blade/sharp pointed article in a public place" with 14 offences, committed by 14 different children. HYJS continues to work with its partners to reduce these offences, and this remains a priority for the Safer Hillingdon Partnership.

Hillingdon monitors serious violence rates with the assistance of the YJB's 'Serious Youth Violence Tool'. The rate of serious violence per 100,000 population increased in 2023 to 7.5, up from 5.3 in 2022 which has put us in line with our YJS family. This is still lower than historic figures as outlined in Table 1 below. The rate of serious violence offences has fallen in since its peak of 10.7 in 2021. Hillingdon's rate of serious violence offences has remained below the London rate. Robbery continues to be the most common serious youth violence offence, accounting for 79 per cent of offences in Q1-3 2023/24.

Table 1

Rate of Serious Violence offences (per 100,000 population) – Year ending December					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hillingdon	4.5	10.5	10.7	5.3	7.5
London	17.5	13.8	12.4	10.4	10.5

Priority 1: Prevention and early intervention

This priority seeks to address the root causes of offending behaviour and explore the wider determinates of social inequalities, intervene at the earliest possible stage to prevent escalation and reduce the risk of future harm, ensuring the safety and security of our communities.

HYJS is situated within the Children's Services directorate and falls under the umbrella of Prevention and Youth Justice. HYJS and its partners have an impressive track record of contributing to the realisation of our vision through effective preventative work. This continues to be an area of focus over the next five years to further develop our prevention offer. During the past five years, we have seen our first-time entrants (FTE) figures decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic and rise again (see Table 1), however the figure remains below pre-pandemic levels.

As mentioned previously and outlined in Table 2 below, the total number of outcomes have decreased during the past five years, from 246 in 2019/20 to 100 in 2023/24. It is positive that the number of court outcomes have decreased by 54 per cent over the five years. We have also seen a 65 per cent decrease of out of court disposals and a 77.5 per cent decrease in

triage outcomes in the same period. The main cause of this is due to the increase in community resolutions being given for low-level offences.

In the year 2023/24, we have seen a varied rate of engagement for children receiving a community resolution (CR) with an average rate of 31 per cent of children consenting to receiving intervention with HYJS. This is an increase from the previous year where we had an average of nine per cent of children receiving an intervention.

Our AXIS service, unique to Hillingdon, continues to offer understanding of the complexity, risk and safety and wellbeing concerns of local children in 'real time'. AXIS is instrumental in identifying children on the periphery of involvement in Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, children arrested for Possession with intent to supply, or those that are linked to suspected 'gang' involvement and serious youth violence. AXIS works with children referred on a voluntary basis or will refer them to Children's Social Care where appropriate. AXIS also supports the wider partnership and local services' engagement with children and will provide headline data to inform how and where services are delivered in Hillingdon.

Table 1

	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
Number of first-time entrants	64	48	38	46	46

Table 2

Outcomes	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
Court	124	76	47	57	57
Pre-Court	122	94	87	56	43
<i>Of which Triage</i>	98	73	65	33	22
Total	246	170	134	113	100



Table 3

	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024	2024/ 2025
MoJ quota	9	26	27
Number of children engaged with Turnaround	9	32	34

In December 2022, Hillingdon was provided funding (ending March 2025) from the MoJ to mobilise Project Turnaround, to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent children entering the criminal justice system under the Early Help framework. Turnaround has been a success in Hillingdon, and the data shows we have exceeded the MoJ quota of children who have voluntarily engaged with this project and have seen positive outcomes for this cohort for children (see Table 3).

The Metropolitan Police's Pan-London Project Engage, funded by the VRU (Violence Reduction Unit) was set up in January 2024 to engage with children in police custody, capturing the teachable, reachable moment to build a positive relationship to understand the causes of their offending and identify bespoke interventions and services best placed to divert children from the criminal justice system. The Engage team fosters good relationships with partners, including community and voluntary groups, to support children in their own communities and provide opportunities through social inclusion to divert them from criminality.

Our focus under this priority is to embed long term early help systems to enable multi-agency intervention at the earliest opportunity, to divert children from the criminal justice system, build resilience, and promote positive outcomes. This means effective intervention to be targeted

towards children and families at risk of experiencing adversity through a myriad of issues including poverty, social exclusion, familial violence, mental health, disability, substance misuse and school exclusions. We believe residents should be able to access the right help at the right time. The Family Hub strategy will support this through having integrated services across the disciplines of maternity, health, education, social care, and the voluntary sector under the principles of early help and intervention, to provide accessible services to families, situated within their own communities, at their point of need. The offer will link support for the whole family where there are children and young people up to the age of 19 (25 for those with SEND), acknowledging the impact of the right support and care, in the right place, at the right time, on the future lives of children.





Success measures:

- Ensure assessments support early identification of risks and vulnerabilities.
- Continued prevention service to support children at risk of entering the criminal justice system after MoJ Turnaround funding ceases.
- Stronger partnerships with colleagues across the partnership to identify children most at risk at the earliest opportunity.
- Reduced FTE rates.
- A reduction in suspensions and permanent exclusions in schools.

¹ Hillingdon Family Hub Strategy 2023-2025

Priority 2: Over-representation and disproportionality

Addressing disproportionality in youth justice is crucial for ensuring fairness, equity, and justice within our society. Disproportionality refers to the over-representation of certain groups, particularly from Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic backgrounds, within the youth justice system. It is imperative to recognise and rectify these disparities to create a system that treats all children equally, regardless of their background. By addressing disproportionality, we can reduce the barriers that prevent children from accessing support, thereby promoting trust in the system.

The Youth Justice Board states: "The Youth Justice Board is committed to recognising and addressing inequality and the children who are involved with the youth justice system reflect a range of social inequalities. There is over-representation of children in care, children living in poverty, those with neurodivergent conditions or speech and language difficulties, and those who have experienced trauma. However, the most persistent and significant over-representation is children from minoritised racial communities."²

The population of Hillingdon has changed significantly during the last decade as outlined in the 2021 census data:

- White British children made up 50 per cent of the 10-17 year-old population in Hillingdon in 2011, this dropped to 31 per cent in 2021.
- Asian children made up 24 per cent of the population in 2011, this increased to 34 per cent in 2021.

- Black African children made up six per cent of the population in 2011, this increased to nine per cent in 2021.
- Any Other ethnic group saw the largest percentage increase of 174 per cent.

In Hillingdon, Black children accounted for 27 per cent of stop and searches compared to 13 per cent of the population in the year 2023/24. However, 81 per cent of these stop and searches had an outcome of NFA (no further action). There has been a large decrease in the number of children on bail and those released under investigation in November 2023 (76) compared to February 2024 (19). Black children made up 42 per cent of children bailed/released under investigation in November 2023 but now account for 21 per cent due to an increased focus in this area to reduce the number of children subject to a release under investigation. Our data tells us that Black and Mixed ethnicity children are less likely to plead guilty; in 2023/24 eight per cent of Black and Mixed ethnicity

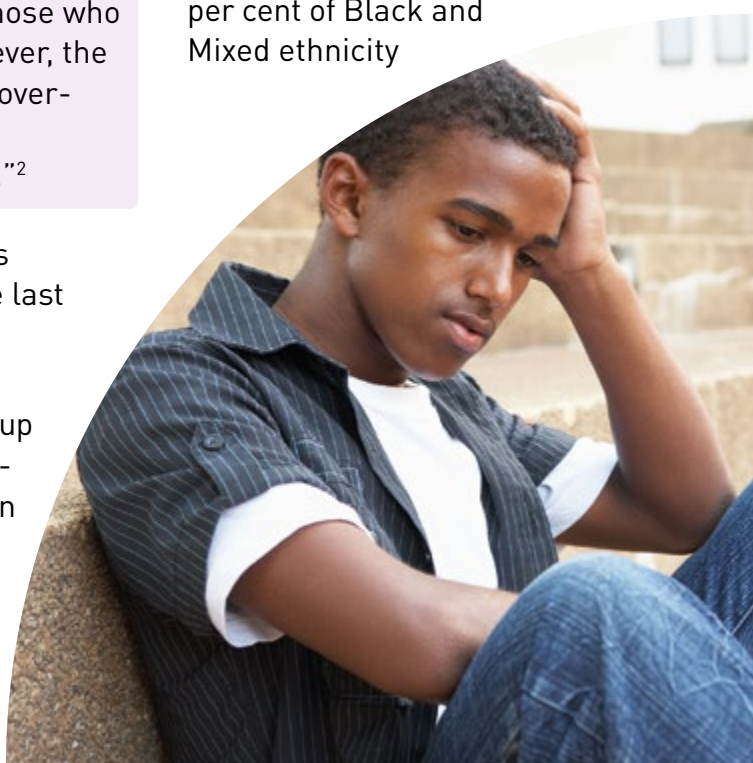


Table 1

Ethnicity	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
White	44.83%	50.36%	55.56%	49.45%	45.05%
Black	24.71%	17.53%	14.81%	18.68%	19.78%
Asian	15.52%	16.06%	12.04%	6.59%	12.19%
Mixed	13.79%	10.95%	12.96%	16.48%	14.29%
Other	1.15%	5.11%	4.63%	8.79%	7.69%

children were found guilty compared to three per cent of White children.

In Hillingdon, children from Black and Mixed backgrounds are more likely to experience adverse childhood experiences, such as poverty, neglect, and parental conflict, in the early years of their lives.

Black and Mixed ethnicity children account for 18 per cent of children on a Child Protection (CP) plan in Hillingdon, whilst making up six per cent of the population of children in Hillingdon.

Black children in Hillingdon are 1.4 times more likely to be severely obese compared to other ethnicities. Thirty-three per cent of Hillingdon's current looked after children are of Black or Mixed ethnicity. Black looked after children were less likely to have their health assessment up to date, 72 per cent compared to 95 per cent for White children. They were less likely to have immunisations up to date, 66 per cent compared to 83 per cent for White children. White children had the lowest amount of tooth decay in 5-year-olds.

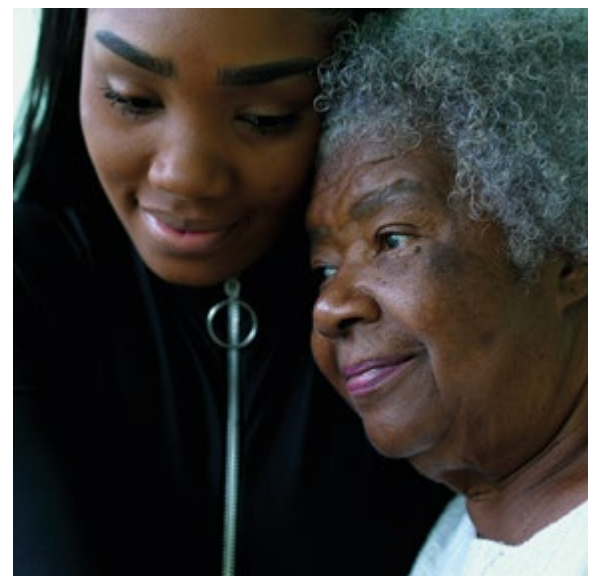
In terms of education outcomes, 29 per cent of exclusions and 33 per cent of suspensions were from Black and Mixed ethnicities in the 2022/23 academic year. Boys (52 per cent) were significantly more likely to not have achieved at least the expected standard in Early Learning Goals by age 5 compared to girls (70 per cent), with boys from Other ethnic backgrounds (48 per cent) and Black boys (50 per cent) with the lowest percentage.

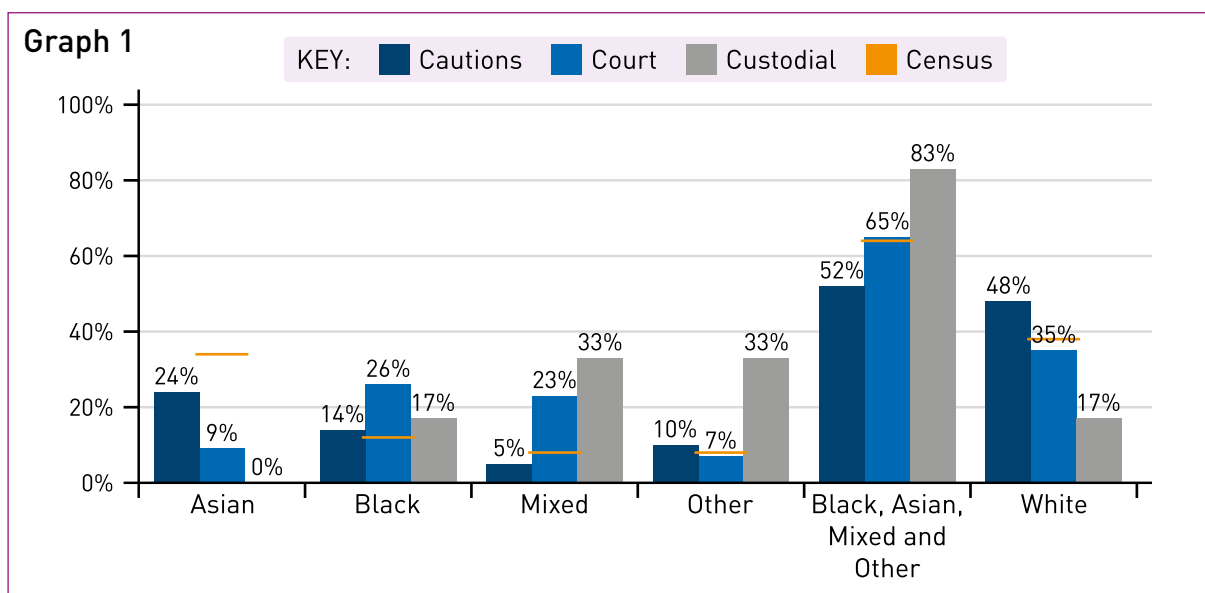
Table 1 shows the HYJS data regarding outcomes for children in the youth justice system.

Black and Asian children saw an increase in both the number and proportion of children compared to the previous year. White and Mixed ethnicities decreased in both the number and proportion of clients compared to the previous year. The data pre- and post-pandemic tells us that fewer Black and Asian children received an outcome during the COVID-19 period compared to their White counterparts that received a higher proportion of outcomes. However, we see an opposite trend for both sets of children coming out of the pandemic.

Outcomes

Black children have consistently been over-represented in court and custodial outcomes, although this has been decreasing in recent years. However, the disproportionality in court and custodial outcomes for Mixed ethnicity children





has been increasing in the last five years. Asian children are under-represented at every stage of the Youth Justice Service.

Looked after children

Looked after children are over-represented in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Looked after children and those with care experience are particularly vulnerable and often the victims of trauma and exploitation.

Table 2 shows the numbers of children open to HYJS that are on a Child in Need (CIN) plan, Child Protection (CP) plan and Children Looked After (CLA). In 2023/24, 20.9 per cent of children open to HYJS were looked after, compared with 0.88 per cent of Hillingdon's 10-17 population.

The London Reducing Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers Protocol was published in March 2021 and sets out the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved

in the care of looked after children and care leavers, in reducing unnecessary criminalisation. HYJS continue to develop its response to this, supporting care homes in managing conflict and behaviour using trauma informed approaches, and advocating for children looked after to reduce the risk of them being criminalised.

Speech and language

Children in the youth justice system are significantly more likely to have underlying speech and language needs compared to their peers. Research shows that a large proportion of these children have unmet and undiagnosed speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN), which often remain unrecognised throughout their lives. These challenges can manifest in various ways, including difficulties in understanding and using language, which in turn affects their ability to communicate effectively, understand legal proceedings, and engage with services.

Table 2

		2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
CIN/CP	#	49	38	31	31
	%	35.8	35.2	34.1	34.1
CLA	#	19	9	18	19
	%	13.9	8.3	19.8	20.9

Table 3

	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
Number of children assessed	108	64	79	84	79
Percentage of children presented with SLCN	66%	72%	71%	58%	71%
Percentage of children presented with MS-SLCN	69%	61%	61%	67%	55%

Many of these children come from backgrounds where early intervention for speech and language issues may have been limited or non-existent. Factors such as socio-economic disadvantage, lack of access to specialist services, and environments that do not support language development contribute to the under-diagnosis of these needs. Additionally, behavioural issues and academic struggles often associated with language difficulties may be misinterpreted as intentional defiance, rather than being recognised as symptoms of underlying SLCN.

As a result, these children may struggle to articulate their thoughts, understand instructions, or engage in verbal problem-solving, making them more vulnerable to misunderstandings and conflicts with people in authority. In the context of the youth justice system, this can lead to a cycle where communication breakdowns exacerbate behavioural issues, leading to an increased vulnerability to being exploited by others, or engaging in offending behaviour.

Addressing these unmet needs is crucial for breaking this cycle. Early identification and intervention can improve outcomes for these children and reduce the likelihood of them entering the criminal justice system.

Since March 2018, HYJS have commissioned speech and language therapy input. This input was initially commissioned to investigate the level of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) of children known to

HYJS. The service has now evolved so that all children known to HYJS, AXIS and Turnaround are offered an assessment of their speech, language and communication skills. Between March 2018 and March 2024, 480 children received a speech and language assessment whilst allocated to HYJS or the AXIS service.

Table 3 shows the percentage of children that have presented with an underlying speech, language or communication need (SLCN), and those with moderate-severe speech language or communication needs (MS-SLCN) over the past five years.

The data shows there is an over-representation of children with speech and language needs as compared to the general population; 15 per cent of the general population present with SLCN and 6 per cent of the general population present with moderate-severe SLCN.

Speech and language training has been delivered to police colleagues at Polar





Park custody suite, which has resulted in an increase of children being refused detention and being invited to attend a Caution Plus 3 interview at a later date. Children in custody are provided with distraction kits which are also used in interviews with children. A session has been held with magistrates where guidance was offered to consider how they communicate with children in the court room and are guided by HYJS staff attending court to ensure that children understand the process and are supported in the right way. Refresher training has also been provided to HYJS volunteer community panel members who have reported back to state that they have found it extremely useful when chairing panel meetings and communicating with children.

HYJS staff are provided with communication packs that support them in their work with children. The packs contain resources for professionals to use during sessions to support children's attention and listening, social communication and language. For example, fidget toys/objects, pens and whiteboards.

The strategic partnership is actively working on developing a disproportionality plan and has asked "How do we, as a partnership, address disproportionality experienced by children in Hillingdon within a youth

justice context?" This plan will focus on identifying the root causes of disproportionality and implementing targeted interventions to address them effectively. By working together to tackle this issue, we can create a youth justice system that is fair, equitable, and supportive for all children.

Success measures:

- The production of a disproportionality action plan by the strategic management board in consultation with children, families, community groups and other stakeholders.
- Increased training across partnerships to recognise and address bias and discrimination and develop an understanding of cultural humility.
- Increased provisions and interventions for children with protected characteristics.
- Reduction of over-representation of certain groups, particularly from children from Black and Mixed backgrounds within the youth justice system.
- Increased trust in the justice system among children, families and communities affected by disproportionality.
- Collaborate with community organisations, stakeholders, and affected communities to address disproportionality effectively.
- Develop and implement targeted initiatives and approaches to address the root causes effectively.
- Monitor the progress and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions regularly.

² Youth_Justice_Board_for_England_and_Wales_Strategic_Plan_2024-27.odt (live.com)

³ Reducing criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers | London City Hall



Priority 3: Child-centred practice

Child-centred practice focuses on the holistic needs of children and their families, promoting their health, wellbeing, and positive development. By placing children at the centre, we aim to create thriving, healthy households where every child can reach their full potential. It recognises children as active participants in their own lives and advocates for their rights, wellbeing, and development, creating nurturing environments where every child can thrive.

HYJS recognises the importance of listening to the voice of the child and using it to inform service delivery. Children actively participate in staff interviews and have had the opportunity to pose their own questions to candidates and have supported the successful recruitment of three YJS officers in the past year.

In 2023/24, HYJS board members received training from children open to the youth justice system called 'Walking in Our Shoes: YJS Edition', whereby children shared their experiences of the criminal justice system, facilitated activities to provide an insight to board members on the service they receive from professionals in Hillingdon and



wider partners, and presented the voices of other children open to HYJS. As a result, board members were able to consider the approaches used in HYJS, considering 'what works' in terms of the impact service delivery has on children. They also reflected on the importance of early intervention and prevention across the wider partnership, and considered how they would embed in their respective services. Following this, it has been a commitment to have the voice of the child as a standing agenda item at all board meetings. This has allowed children's experiences to be brought to the board to develop understanding of the child's journey through the criminal justice system and where any challenges/barriers are addressed to ensure there is a child first approach across the partnership.

HYJS prides itself on its collaboration with partners and has recently been awarded the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Lead Quality Mark with Child First Commendation by Microlink PC. This quality mark highlights the strong partnership working across local authority and health services in Hillingdon. In 2023/24, HYJS provided bespoke speech, language, and communication training to colleagues in the Metropolitan Police working in our local police custody suite, Polar Park. As a result, we have found reduced numbers of children being detained in custody, and increased use of Caution Plus 3 interviews. As a result of ongoing work with the custody suite, they have embedded a child-centred approach to custody. Children have access to distraction kits, custody video-books as well as access to child-friendly leaflets outlining the custody process, and possible outcomes. Custody staff have also received speech and language training which has supported custody staff to ensure that they are meeting the

speech and language needs of children in police custody.

The well-resourced health hub within the YJS combines the skills of a liaison and diversion worker, speech and language therapist and child and adolescent mental health practitioner to ensure a co-ordinated approach to meeting the health needs of children entering the youth justice system to promote positive outcomes.

The YJS education and employment officer ensures all children open to HYJS have their education, training and employment (ETE) needs adequately assessed and the appropriate provision is provided, both in the community and in custody with the support of partner agencies. This includes under-16 education and post-16 provision. In the past five years, we have experienced a reduction of ETE providers and face barriers in achieving ETE places for children. However, there are good partnerships with colleagues in Education and SEND which supports a collaborative approach in keeping children in education, and re-engaging those children who are not in education, employment or training or missing from education. HYJS is an accredited centre with AQA and provides children with the opportunity to acquire AQA qualifications as a stepping stone to further ETE pathways.

HYJS have developed the intervention 'My Support Plan' which is utilised to support practitioners in getting to know the children they are working with, understand their life experiences and how that forms part of their identity. The support plan focuses on diversity to understand the child beyond their offence. This is designed as the initial piece of work in the intervention to begin to build

rapport, get to know the child and create SMART targets, which has been evidenced in case file audits and has received positive feedback from children and families.

HYJS believes that children have the right to be heard and participate in decisions that affect them. Capturing feedback from children and families provides valuable insights into their experiences, perspectives and understanding of the criminal justice process. One of the ambitions of the YJB Strategic Plan 2024-2027⁴ is to influence and develop policy and practice of child first across the youth justice system, which includes improving the court experience and outcomes for children. We capture children's experiences of court proceedings to ensure that they are fair, transparent, and based on accurate information. This allows for a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the situation, reducing the risk of misinterpretation or bias.

Children and families are also involved in every step of their involvement with HYJS. Their participation in agreeing



interventions and reviewing their progress leads to better outcomes in terms of their wellbeing, behaviour, and compliance with court orders. When children feel listened to and respected, they are more likely to engage positively with interventions and take responsibility for their actions. Co-production and participation from children and families also helps professionals identify risks or protective factors and inform decisions aimed at addressing the children's needs and preventing further harm.

Our focus under this priority is to further develop our child first approach and support active participation and engagement of children and families to encourage co-production of intervention plans and resources.

⁴ Youth_Justice_Board_for_England_and_Wales_Strategic_Plan_2024-27.odt (live.com)

Success measures:

- A commitment to continue to commission training/deliver tailored workshops to further develop practitioners' understanding of child centred practice.
- Speech and language training to be delivered to wider partnerships such as magistrates, and refresher training to be delivered to local police custody suite and YJS staff.
- Increased evidence of participation with children to inform service delivery.
- Achieving strengthened relationships with colleges and mainstream schools in Hillingdon.
- Improved pre-emptive action across the partnership to prevent suspensions and exclusions and widen opportunities for vulnerable learners.
- An increase in the availability of ETE providers for our children.
- Better collation of children's feedback regarding their experiences in police custody, court and HYJS.

Priority 4: Reducing reoffending

HYJS prioritises the best interests of children and focuses on understanding children's identities, using trauma informed relationship-based practice when working with children to divert and prevent children from offending and reoffending. This includes addressing our reoffending rates and ensuring we have the right process in place to support children's desistance against further offending. Our commitment to reducing reoffending is key to creating safe and strong communities. By providing rehabilitation, support, and positive development opportunities, we can break the cycle of offending and promote the reintegration of children into society.

The proven rate of reoffending data for the period 2021/22, published by the MoJ, demonstrated a decrease in reoffending (40.5 per cent to 37.5 per cent) when compared to the previous financial year. However, when we compared this to our local data, we saw a large discrepancy. Our local data showed a reoffending rate of 26.6 per cent. However, due to the limitations in both the local and published data sets, we estimate our true reoffending rate to be 32.8 per cent which is slightly above the national (32.1 per cent) and below the London average (33.4 per cent). The published data indicates an increase in the frequency of reoffending with an average of 2.93 further offences compared to 2.13 for the previous year. This increase was also shown in our local data. It is important to note that the 2020/21 cohort was partly tracked through the COVID-19 lockdown periods of 2020, and this is likely to affect the 2020/21 reoffending data.

The result of having a small cohort of children entering the

youth justice system is that it only takes a small increase in offending to significantly impact the percentage change. The reduction of the cohorts demonstrates the positive impact of early intervention programmes, effective triage and diversion. Those children who do reoffend, although reduced in number, are often those with the most complex needs. The YJS continues to use the YJB reoffending tracker tool, deep dive audits, quality assurance frameworks and a focus on the whole family approach to better understand this cohort and support improved outcomes.

In 2023/24, 22 children were triaged out of the criminal justice system in comparison to the 46 cases entering the system and receiving a formal disposal for the first time. In the previous year, of the 43 triages received, six (14 per cent) went on to reoffend within the next 12 months. Additionally, 24 children received a community resolution in 2023/24, with 14 of these proceeding to an intervention. In the previous year, of the 37 clients who received a community resolution, six (16.2 per cent) reoffended within 12 months.

Neither of the two children



who engaged with the community resolution reoffended.

HYJS acknowledge the following factors that have contributed to the reduction of reoffending in Hillingdon:

- stable accommodation including care placements
- early resettlement planning
- access to education, training, and employment
- collaboration between the partnership.

HYJS are committed to a strengths-based, constructive resettlement approach and ensure that our resettlement work is based on the “5 C’s”:

- constructive
- co-created
- customised
- consistent
- co-ordinated.

HYJS has a dedicated experienced champion who leads on resettlement to ensure practice and delivery continues to evolve. Continuous partnerships with health and education services support the transition from custody to the community. The review of all custody cases at the Hillingdon Access to Resource Panel ensures joint strategic oversight in planning and resource allocation.



The latest data on the Use of Custody shows that the number of children in Hillingdon receiving a custodial sentence in 2022/23 decreased to seven, compared to eight for the previous year. The rate per 1,000 of the 10-17 population use of custody data for Hillingdon in this period was 0.22. Children sentenced to custody often represent the highest risk, and the imposition of a custodial sentence by the court is in response to the offences committed. Data analysis indicates that children in Hillingdon from Black, Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic backgrounds are three times more likely to receive a custodial sentence. However, please note due to their being such a small cohort of custodial outcomes, small changes in the data will have large impacts in these figures. The Hillingdon YJSPB is committed to understanding and taking action to address over-representation with a robust disproportionality action plan and associated partnership activity.

At the end of 2023/24 there was one child remanded into Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA), compared to three children at the end of 2022/23. There were 10 remands started in 2023/24, with an average time open of 36 days. This is both a decline in the number of remands and length open when compared to the previous year, which had 14 remands starting for an average length of 63 days. As in our custody data, children from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately over-represented, accounting for 69 per cent of the remands starting in 2023/24.

HYJS recognised a need for improved transitions work with Probation, which has been a priority for 2023/24. We continue to deliver our transitions work without a seconded probation officer which could have significantly impacted on transitions; however, we have worked to ensure alternative interim



arrangements have been established whilst a longer term solution is secured. HYJS aims to ensure all transition plans are personalised and we have had the added benefit of welcoming a pilot project in AXIS focusing on the transition ages (18-24) where other support services will drop, leaving young people at risk of gang affiliation and risk of further serious violence. We recognise that transitioning to adulthood is a journey not an event, and every young person will experience this journey differently. Having this focus requires practitioners to think beyond child/adult silos and consider the needs of each individual, and how they can be protected. We aim to build on the support and resources already available across the partnership to ensure all children are effectively supported into adulthood.

Success measures:

- A continued reduction of our reoffending rates.
- Increased resources to address critical transition periods, such as leaving custody, transition to adulthood.
- HYJS to continue to strengthen relationships with the youth custody service and custodial establishments to ensure children are receiving the right services in custody.
- HYJS to continue to review the effectiveness of interventions.

Priority 5: Victims and restorative justice



Victim and restorative justice (RJ) focuses on the needs of the victim, providing them with an opportunity to heal and recover from the harm they have experienced. It gives victims a voice and an active role in the justice process, empowering them and helping them to regain a sense of control over their lives. RJ holds children accountable for their actions in a meaningful way, promoting a deeper understanding of the impact of their behaviour. HYJS strives to provide high quality services to victims in line with The Victims' Code.⁵ The code sets out the 12 minimum standards that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations in England and Wales.

In the year 2023/24, HYJS successfully contacted 21 victims, a slight increase from 20 the previous year (see Table 1). Of the victims that wanted to engage with restorative justice, 71 per cent (15) requested a letter of apology and 29 per cent (4) agreed to a face-to-face RJ conference. Whilst the number of victims reached has reduced, we have increased our engagement rates with victims which is positive.

49 children completed an RJ screening in 2023/24. A health screening and speech and language assessment is completed with all children prior to their RJ screening to ensure that the process is delivered in a bespoke and meaningful way (such as the delivery of RJ and victim awareness work with autistic children is carefully considered). As a result, 30 children agreed to engage in RJ and feedback from children and families

regarding this process, and the victim empathy sessions has been positive.

All victims are offered home visits unless they are corporate victims or reside outside the borough of Hillingdon. The home visits consist of victims speaking about the impact of the crime, discussing RJ and choosing the reparation project(s) the child will complete to help repair the harm caused. HYJS have an extensive reparation leaflet which includes 15 projects that cater to children's diversity and communication needs. All victims are asked if they require additional support and if so, a referral is made to Victim Support who provide practical, emotional and advocacy support.

If a victim does not want to receive further support from Victim Support, the RJ team will complete a victim safety plan with them to address any risk posed. This plan can also be shared with police if the victim agrees.

The victim safety plan includes:

- scenarios/places where the victim feels safe and unsafe
- safe words
- trusted adults and services they can contact
- emergency contacts
- external services that can provide support.

Victims are provided with an effective and inclusive approach to addressing harm and resolving conflicts within our communities. They promote healing, accountability, and reconciliation, leading to safer, more resilient, and

Table 1

	2021/ 2022	2022/ 2023	2023/ 2024
Number of victims reached/contacted	33	20	21
Percentage of victims consenting to RJ	33%	50%	90%

more cohesive communities. Feedback received from victims illustrates how powerful RJ is, and the impact it has had on them:

You're very helpful. I was nervous and anxious before the conference, but the conference went well. I came out feeling better in myself because it had been spoken about.

Victim

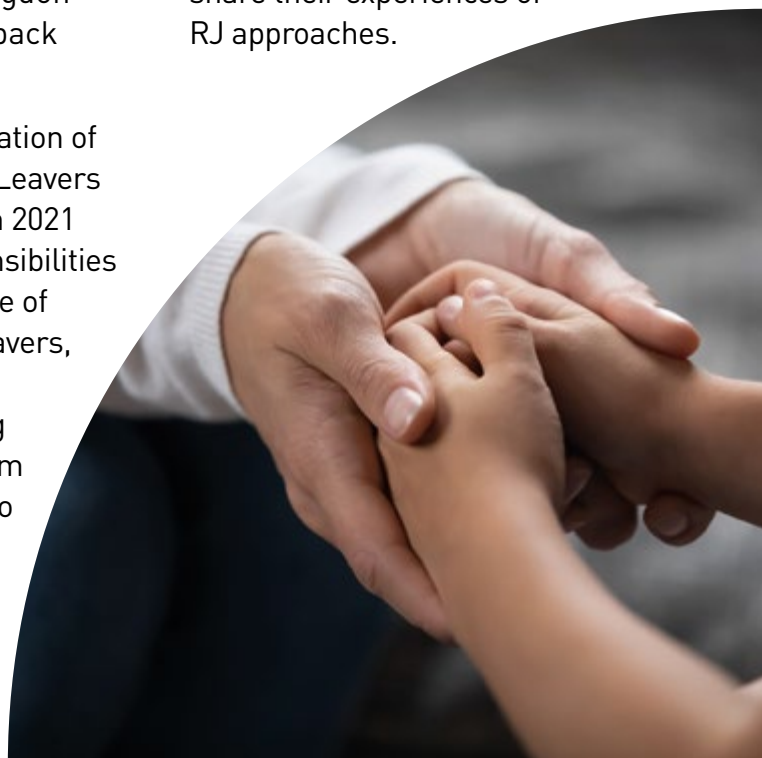
From a parent's perspective, you included my daughter and gave her a voice. You could have just listened to what I said, because she's a child and I'm the parent but you didn't, you gave her a voice in the process. Going into that conference, I didn't realise how much it affected me. By sitting in the conference, I could let it go; it felt done and dusted. It felt like there was justice within the conference. You are in a vulnerable situation and once you walk out of the conference, they are left with the thoughts and feelings that you have shared. You are no longer the only one walking around with those thoughts and feelings.

Victim's parent

In addition to the direct work with victims, our Victims and Restorative Justice offer extends to supporting our partners address conflict and harm in a more positive way. In the year 2023/24, we have provided RJ training to all secondary schools across Hillingdon and have received positive feedback from those that attended.

The London Reducing Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers Protocol⁶ was published in March 2021 and sets out the roles and responsibilities of all agencies involved in the care of looked after children and care leavers, in reducing unnecessary criminalisation. The joint working with the Corporate Parenting team has led to increased RJ support to social workers and residential care homes/semi-independent placements. In addition to delivering RJ training in schools, HYJS has also delivered RJ training to our

care homes which aims to support front line staff in managing behaviours and incidents in a positive way and helps to reduce incidents in the home. Following the training, HYJS has begun facilitating quarterly forums for staff to reflect and share their experiences of RJ approaches.





Success measures:

- HYJS to maintain a high engagement rate for victims.
- HYJS to streamline the collation of data, including qualitative data on the impact and effectiveness of restorative justice practices.
- HYJS to continue to provide restorative justice support to wider services in the partnership.
- Reparation activity to evidence a clear link to offences, where children are making amends to victims.
- HYJS to review existing victim awareness and victim empathy interventions to improve confidence amongst YJS officers and utilise the support of the RJ coordinator if needed.
- HYJS to promote best practice to build on the knowledge of YJS officers' understanding of victim safety.

⁵ Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁶ Reducing Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers | London City Hall

Conclusion

This youth justice strategy is firmly anchored in a child-first approach, placing the wellbeing and development of Hillingdon children and victims at the heart of all initiatives. Through a strategic focus on prevention and early intervention, we aim to identify and mitigate the root causes of child involvement in the justice system, intervening proactively to divert them from offending. Central to our approach is the commitment to equity and fairness, striving to eliminate systemic biases that unfairly impact certain groups within our community, ensuring every child receives equitable treatment and opportunities.

focus on victims and restorative justice reflects our recognition of the importance of accountability, empathy, and healing for all parties affected by crime, promoting reconciliation and resolution within our communities.

This strategy seeks to foster long-term positive outcomes for our residents, cultivating safer, more inclusive environments where children can thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. By staying true to these principles and remaining adaptive to evolving needs, we are confident in our ability to effect positive change and build a brighter future for generations to come.

By implementing child-centred practices, we ensure that the needs and rights of children are at the forefront of our approach, fostering the right environments conducive to their holistic development and empower children to make positive choices. Additionally, our



