

***‘The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system:  
meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending’***  
**a joint inspection by inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HMICFRS**  
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**Avon & Somerset PCC response dated 10 December 2025**

Diverting children away from the criminal justice system is an important step we can take to prevent lifelong harm and reduce reoffending. Early intervention, combined with the use of out-of-court disposals, allows us to address the root causes of offending behaviour. These approaches give children the chance to learn, make amends, and access support services that tackle underlying issues such as family challenges, education gaps, or mental health needs. By focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment, we not only protect, often, vulnerable children but also build safer communities for everyone.

It should be noted that I have a legal duty to respond to inspection reports within eight weeks of their publication. However, the Constabulary have longer to address recommendations. There was one recommendation for Chief Constables discussed below.

**Recommendation 11**

Improve how out-of-court disposals are managed by:

- working with YJSs [Youth Justice Services] 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.

## Response

The Avon & Somerset Policing area covers five separate YJSs (as they are aligned to Local Authorities). The Constabulary will start the process of reviewing the current data-sharing arrangements and checking if they are fit for purpose; working with YJSs to try and bring consistency across the area.

Outcome 20 is when action is taken by another agency or body other than the police. Outcome 21 is a police decision not to take further action as it is not in the public interest. In the last year, where the suspect/offender was identified as a child, outcome 20 accounted for 3.4% of all crime outcomes and outcome 21 accounted for 9.3% of outcomes. The Constabulary will work with their Force Crime Incident Registrar and their Crime Standards team to, firstly, check the local guidance against the national guidance then establish a process for auditing to check how those outcomes are being applied.

The use of the child gravity matrix and recording of rationale about it is not consistent across the force. In order to help investigators' decision making, last month the Constabulary launched an app for the use of out-of-court disposals with children. This app is built around the child gravity matrix and asks a series of questions about the crime and the suspect and then provides a recommendation as to whether an out-of-court disposal is suitable, the type of disposal available and the interventions that can be used with this. Now the app has been launched the Constabulary will need to promote its use and ensure that the decisions are properly recorded in the crime recording system.

Out-of-court disposal panels already exist across the five Local Authority areas including the police and YJS and have standing senior decision makers. The Constabulary will check and test to ensure these panels have the appropriate level of attendance.

In relation to the legal rights, Appropriate Adults and safeguarding referrals these are things that should happen as a matter of course. However, the Constabulary will check their current procedures and guidance and understand how data on this is recorded and overseen to understand if there are any gaps in practice and how to close these gaps if they exist.

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