

Appendix 1

Youth Justice Plan 2026/27

Leicestershire Youth and Justice Service

Leicestershire County Council

Foreword from the Chair of the Board

Welcome to our annual Youth Justice Strategy for 2026/27.

It is with great pride and a strong sense of shared purpose that we introduce the Leicestershire Youth Justice Strategy for 2026/27. This strategy reflects the collaborative efforts of our partners, the voices of children and families, and our commitment to building a safer, fairer community for all.

This strategy builds upon the achievements realised under the Leicestershire Youth Justice Plan 2023/26 and establishes both ongoing and new priorities for the forthcoming year. These priorities have been developed collaboratively with members of the Leicestershire Youth Justice Partnership Board, ensuring clear strategic leadership, direction, and robust governance of the plan. Key partners involved in this process include Leicestershire Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Violence Reduction Network, the Integrated Care Board, Public Health, the Youth Justice Service, Probation, Children's Social Care, and Education.

The engagement of the workforce has played an important role in the development of this plan, with valuable feedback from young people, parents and carers participating in our evaluation project helping to shape strategic priorities and focus areas for children.

In addition to enabling the Youth Justice Service to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and achieve its principal objectives, this strategy also underpins the efforts of the Leicestershire Youth and Justice Partnership Board (YJPB) towards its established strategic goals. The annual strategy is complemented by a collection of service and project plans, each providing greater detail on the specific actions we will undertake to realise the overarching ambitions set out within this strategy within the Board and across the wider partnership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.A. Cooke', is enclosed within a thin yellow rectangular border.

Sharon Cooke

Chair of the Leicestershire Youth Justice Partnership Board

Interim Director of Children and Family Services - Leicestershire County Council

Aims of the Youth Justice System

The youth justice system aims to prevent children from entering the criminal justice system, reduce reoffending, and ensure custody is used only when necessary. These aims reflect a clear commitment to safeguarding children's welfare and supporting safer communities by addressing the underlying factors that contribute to offending and ensuring responses remain proportionate, child-centred, and aligned with national expectations.

Governance, leadership and partnership arrangements

The Youth Justice Service in Leicestershire meets all the statutory requirements of a Youth Justice Service set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The service has seconded staff from Police, Probation and Health. Financial contributions are made by all statutory partners in line with national and local agreements.

The service has access to CAMHS Adverse Childhood Experiences Team, Turning Point (substance misuse), Liaison and Diversion and Care Navigators who sit within the wider Health partnership. The Service is integrated into Children and Families Services at Leicestershire County Council and has full access to Children's Social Care and Education Services.

Alongside multi-agency teams, the service contracts with external providers to support the delivery of essential statutory functions, such as appropriate adult services (The Appropriate Adult Service) and speech and language therapy. Rutland County Council commissions the service to fulfil statutory responsibilities related to youth justice and prevention initiatives.

The activities of the Youth and Justice Service are monitored and directed by the Leicestershire Youth and Justice Partnership Board, which is chaired by the Director for Children and Families Services, who provides independent oversight and scrutiny to the Board. The Board are provided with quarterly national and local data which is scrutinised. The Service continues to perform well; having a low number of children who are First Time Entrants into the Criminal Justice System and low numbers of children remanded or sentenced to custody.

In addition to its statutory partners, Leicestershire Youth and Justice Partnership Board benefits from having representatives from Education Services, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Turning Point, Youth Magistrate and a representative from the Voluntary Sector, along with the Youth Justice Board. The Partnership Board meets on a quarterly basis with good attendance from all key partners who are represented at the appropriate senior level.

The Youth and Justice Service is part of Children and Family Services at Leicestershire County Council (see appendix 1). Appendix 2 outlines the service structure and its range, while appendix 3 details staff by ethnicity and gender, where disclosed.

The Head of Youth Justice role oversees both strategic and operational aspects of Youth Justice within the Local Authority. They are accountable to the Youth and Justice Management Board, as well as various Partnership Boards. As Head of Youth Justice, they fully coordinate board activities with members and the Chair. Their additional duties include managing youth work, supporting young carers, handling cases involving low or medium risk missing children, leading youth voices, overseeing grants and funded projects related to the Service, addressing anti-social behavior, and serving as a MAPPA Panel Member for all under-18s in the county. The current post-holder also serves as the regional representative for the Association of YOT Managers.

The development of Board Members and staff is overseen through a structured training plan that prioritises child-centered practice, incorporates insights from quality assurance activities, and includes targeted training initiatives to promote consistent and high-quality standards and builds a confident and skilled workforce.

Progress and Priorities – 2025/26

Over the past year four priority areas were given focus and activity was driven across the partnership.

1. Ensuring children are receiving a high-quality personalised and meaningful service.

In 2025/26, the Leicestershire Youth Justice Service organised a series of training sessions aimed at enhancing Child First practice among managers, practitioners, and volunteers. These sessions centered on the four foundational principles of child-first practice: recognising children as children, fostering pro-social identity, engaging collaboratively with children, and minimising stigma. This framework emphasises addressing the developmental needs of children ahead of their offending behaviour to achieve improved outcomes for children, victims, and communities. This represents an ongoing cultural evolution within the service and broader sector towards more trauma-informed and relationship-focused methodologies.

Within the Service, anyone under 18 is referred to as a child when speaking with professionals. Records are written directly to the child, using plain English, free of acronyms, and focused on analysis, so children can understand their journey, actions taken, reasons, and outcomes. The Service uses communication passports to detail how a child prefers to be addressed and communicate, key information for adults, and the child's needs. Initially launched in collaboration with Youth Magistrates,

communication passports are now standard at induction for every child. Practitioners introduce themselves through staff biographies, helping children learn about those supporting them. This approach is expanding to include details about projects and venues across the Service. Each child's Youth Justice record should feature either their photo or an image they select to bring that child to life. This is part of the journey around purposeful practice.

There has been a focus on improving the quality of assessments and interventions as part of child-first practice. In relation to assessments, this is ensuring that the assessment reflects the lived experiences of the child and portrays a rounded view of their life including the factors that contribute to their offending, the protective factors within their lives and a balance with the risks and vulnerabilities within their lives, within communities and towards victims. The intervention plan for the child should focus on addressing the needs identified within their assessment and prioritising the safety of victims, communities and the child.

The journey around improvement has been supported by quality assurance work, improvement cycle meetings and moderation meetings across the management team. This is overseen by the Youth and Justice Management Board. This work will continue to develop into the future with a focus on achieving consistency and adaptability across the workforce.

2. Improving health outcomes for children who are working with the Youth and Justice Service

Many children in the YJS have unmet health and wellbeing needs such as mental health and wellbeing worries, learning needs, substance misuse and neurodiversity, all of which are structural drivers of offending related behaviour. Addressing these needs is a crucial component in supporting children to live healthy lives.

Public Health at Leicestershire County Council have funded a Youth Justice Health Lead post to strengthen health outcomes for children, following detailed Health Needs Assessment. The role has focused on sourcing training and support for the workforce around health, for example around condom distribution, substance misuse training and specialist autism training. The Youth Justice Health Lead has connected the Service with the Liaison and Diversion Team, the introduction of Care Navigator information into the service upon every allocation and has been a specialist point of contact for involvement with the CAMHS ACES Team. This role is involved in engaging in panels focused on supporting children who are assessed as posing a high risk and providing a view on health-related support and advice that could be provided.

Over the last year, progress has been made with the Nature4Nurture Project; a wellbeing project for children linked to gardening and sustainability. The project

deliberately creates a quiet, reflective safe space which contributes positively to emotional regulation and mental wellness. Children have expressed feelings of pride in their efforts in nurturing the plans and the spaces, have appreciated learning to care and then giving back to the community when gifting their produce.

Work has been undertaken in collaboration with girls to develop a structured, therapeutic and empowering groupwork programme called 'EmpowerHer'. The focus of the programme is on emotional and mental health, healthy relationships, improving self-esteem and developing identity. Each session has an activity to help with empowerment and self-regulation such as cooking, mindfulness and creativity. The programme has a partnership focus with contributions during sessions from CAMHS, Everyone Active and Turning Point. The girls who have attended the group have shared that they have learnt to manage their emotions, feel calmer through learning new activities and share feeling safe in the group. A programme has also been developed for and with boys which provides a safe space where they can explore identity, emotions and understand masculinity and during this year this has run once so far, with positive feedback.

This year has focused on securing funding for speech and language therapy (SALT), and the commissioning process has commenced for a three-year programme. Joint working and strengthening relationship work has been undertaken between Youth and Justice and SEND services and developing data around Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). 80% of the children involved with Youth Justice have speech, language and communication needs. These actions will continue into 2026/27.

3. Ensuring victims are receiving high-quality and personalised service

Significant developments have happened during 2025/26 in relation to the work that the Service undertaken with Victims. This is to ensure that the Service is compliant with statutory responsibility with the Victim's Code and in line with the focus on victims by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

The main development has been an investment in creating a Restorative Approaches Team which includes the Volunteer Development Officer, Restorative Approaches Co-ordinator and a new Restorative Approaches Worker Youth Worker Post. The Team is led by a Senior Youth Worker.

The Team have created a full victim offer for child victims and a referral pathway to support services for both adult victims and child victims for ongoing support. The victim impact statement (VIS) has been redesigned to enable the victim to express emotional impact, describe the ongoing effects for them, identify what they need to feel safer and enable their voice to be better represented in decision making. This document, and the screening tool, help identify the ongoing support needs for victims and gain consent for referrals to onward services where appropriate.

The data element of understanding the demographics of the victims engaged in the Service has taken a considerable amount of work. This has involved the reconfiguration of Core+, our case management system, and the building of tableau dashboards, which present the data extracted from Core+. Partnership work is underway with the Police to improve the process around gaining consent from the Leicestershire Police and improved demographic data for victims. Wider partnership work has commenced around the offer to victims across Leicestershire, including practice sharing opportunities.

This is an area of practice that will continue to be developed to ensure that the best services are provided to victims.

4. Developing the process and offer around out of court and diversion

During 2025/26, considerable work has been undertaken in collaboration with Leicestershire Police to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children, where appropriate.

A significant change was the introduction of a Leicestershire Joint Decision and Resolution Panel (JDRP), from the previous panel which was a collaboration with a neighboring Youth Justice Service. The JDRP is jointly held with the Police and attendance is secured from Children's Social Care and the Restorative Approaches Team, on behalf of victims. The JDRP is held weekly to ensure the timely hearing of children who meet the criteria. All children who are heard at the JDRP have a full YJB approved assessment completed with them and the allocated practitioner attends panel to introduce their child and provide a brief overview of their assessment findings and plan of work.

In collaboration with Leicestershire Police, the Panel can utilise Outcome 22 as part of a Deferred Caution Scheme (DCS), this means that if a child engages with intervention well, their agreed outcome is resulted as no further action (NFA). During 2025/26, a Deferred Prosecution Scheme (DPS) was introduced enabling children who had committed low level driving offences to receive intervention and for their offences to be categorised as no further where they engaged well in sessions. Prior to this development, children would have attended Court and received penalty points and a fine with no statutory involvement with Youth Justice Services. This outcome would mean that children were classified as First Time Entrants (FTE) in the criminal justice system and research identifies that children who are FTEs are more likely to have increased contact with the CJS, have their education, employment and future opportunities impacted negatively and face increased stigma and labelling.

During this year, the Service has been involved in the Whole Area Model Pilot which is a Youth Endowment Fund project focused on developing consistency and rigor around

this area of work, including measuring impact. This Project and area of focus will continue into 2026/27.

In relation to performance for 2025/26, when compared to the national average, Leicestershire Youth Justice Service (YJS) consistently performs well against the three main performance indicators, having a lower number of first-time entrants, a lower reoffending rate taking over the long term and a lower number of custodial sentences and remands. Risks, issues and performance are monitored quarterly by the Youth and Justice Partnership Board.

The YJS is compliant with all statutory returns to the Youth Justice Board (YJB).

Voice of children, parents and carers

The Service recognises that building strong relationships helps children develop resilience and reach their potential. Feedback from all interventions consistently shows that relationship building is a valued strength among children, parents, and carers. Voice work and participation work within the Service is underpinned by the Lundy Model of Participation.

During 2025/26, new processes were introduced to capture voice and feedback more consistently and a forum developed to evaluate the impact of the feedback received.

Children have commented:

“My worker helped improve things at school”

“I had someone to listen to me”

“They helped with my anger”

“Eco-map helped me know which people support me”

“Get to talk about everything”

“My Dad says I’ve grown up”

“My worker put a police marker on me so the police were aware I had a learning disability”

“Its helped me think about my actions”

“I needed help and help was there and I was supported through it all”

“Helped me find my own place”

“Helping me know what options I have for after school and getting me on a college course”

“Silver lining”

“So I didn’t get a charge and a chance for education”

“It’s Improved my mental wellbeing and my family noticed this”

“Listened and cared. Provided me with easy-to-understand education and I was able to reflect. The support my worker provided means I am prepared for the future and have a deeper understanding.”

“I felt comfortable with the team, and they helped me with everything”

“She treated me like an adult and respected my thoughts”

“Talked about relationships with parents and friends. Talked about my emotions. What makes a good healthy relationship. How my mental health impacts on me. Help with education. I identified my insecurities and how I can work towards being a better version of myself.”

Parents and carers have commented:

“Made my daughter feel confident and able to talk again”

“The support brought us closer”

“Supported our child through a time that he needed it and we appreciate that thanks”

“Just reflecting as a family and looking how to deal with difficult situations in a different manor”

“Giving us knowledge and supportive tools to prevent another situation from happening.”

“I think this is a good service to help children learn from any mistakes they might make and give them better options rather than just punishment this will help guide them in the right direction.”

“My daughter’s worker has made my daughter think about her future and want a better life for herself and helped guide her back on to the right path.”

“His worker was personable and genuinely caring about our circumstances and difficulties. She worked quickly to understand my son and used appropriate methods to engage him in often sensitive conversations.”

“Understanding his needs and getting the assessment and support he needed”

“All of my son’s workers have gone above and beyond”

“Just wanted to say a huge thank you to my son’s worker for her support. She is a real credit to the service. We really valued her sessions with my son. From the first meeting it was so easy to see just how passionate she is in supporting young people and their families. We valued her commitment and her input. We couldn’t think of a more suitable person to have worked with our child. The worker made my son and us, feel listened to and heard.”

During 2026/27, the Service will be developing the feedback and evaluation offer to include 3 and 6 monthly follow up calls where parents and carers have provided consent.

Priorities and Developments for 2026/27

This year the partnership has chosen to focus on the five key priority areas:

➤ **Improving education, employment and training outcomes for children involved in Youth and Justice.**

This year the partnership will drive robust oversight and scrutiny around educational performance of the children engaged in Youth Justice. Consideration will be given to data that is available across the partnership to help improve outcomes for children. The Board will ensure that practitioners and children have access to timely specialist support based on the needs of children. During 2026/27, a project will be undertaken considering the feasibility of developing a social enterprise focused on supporting children in to education, training and employment.

➤ **Strengthening the support for children concerning their health and wellbeing involved within the Youth and Justice Service.**

This year, the partnership will assess health needs to measure progress and set future priorities. Board Members will ensure children in diversion programs have the same access to health services as those in police custody or court. In 2026/27, the Service will introduce a social prescribing model for youth justice participants and seek ongoing funding.

➤ **Improve support for victims in Youth and Justice Service through coordinated partnerships, better access to tailored resources, and regular evaluations to meet their specific needs.**

This year, the partnership will focus on driving improvement around consent rates for victims and improved data sharing to support the Board confidence that the offer for victims meets their needs. The Board will understand the voice of victims and use this insight to inform service and strategic delivery, ensuring that feedback and lived experiences directly shape support pathways.

➤ **Ensure children who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system have appropriate pathways to support.**

The Youth and Justice Partnership Board will ensure that there are robust pathways and offers in place for children who are at risk of contact with the youth justice system with a focus on prevention. The partnership will work with the Violence Reduction Network to embed Young Futures Prevention Panels as part of this approach. During 2026/27, the Service will develop a triage process for all children who have had contact with Leicestershire Police. There will be an increased focus on the vulnerabilities which propel children into the youth justice system, such as anti-social behaviour and the Service response to this.

➤ **Ensure a coordinated partnership response to children at the highest risk of harm and exploitation, and/or serious violence.**

The Partnership Board will oversee compliance with the new knife crime duties placed on Youth Justice and the partners during 2026/27. The Board will ensure that the services available to children work operate a joined up and child first approach to reducing harm both strategically and operationally. This will focus on prevention offers of support and early identification. The Partnership will be fully compliant with the new knife crime legislation when it is launched on 1st April 2026, and Board will monitor compliance and record any reasoning against any cases that depart from the guidance.

Throughout the five priorities and all other business covered by the Partnership Board, Members will focus on reducing the over-representation and disproportionality of children in the Youth Justice System by strengthening partnership data to ensure fair and equitable responses across all agencies and challenge, where this is not happening.

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