

# **Child Centred Policing in Greater Manchester: Frontline officers' engagement with children suspected of offending**

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## Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Aims of the research and structure of the report.....	3
3. Methodology.....	4
4. Policing children in the community .....	4
4.1 The national context.....	4
4.2 Policing children in Greater Manchester .....	6
4.3 Partner agencies and multi-agency activity.....	6
5. Frontline officers' engagement with children in the community .....	7
5.1 Knowledge and awareness of CCP .....	7
5.2 Neighbourhood teams engaging with children .....	8
5.3 Response Teams engaging with children .....	10
5.4 Review of stop and search incidents with children .....	11
5.5 Policing local communities.....	13
5.6 Lack of experience within the frontline .....	15
5.7 Focus on improving performance .....	16
5.8 Recommendations.....	17
6. The child as a suspect: frontline decision-making and working with partner agencies .....	19
6.1 Quality of understanding and decision-making .....	19
6.2 The importance of more structured partner agency input .....	20
6.3 Challenges of arranging a voluntary interview .....	22
6.4 Working with partner agencies in the community .....	23
6.5 Factors leading to children's cases not being referred for an OOCR .....	25
6.6 Recent changes made by GMP to help reduce arrests of children .....	27
6.7. Recommendations.....	27
7. Recommendations for GMP's Senior Leadership Team .....	29
Bibliography .....	31
Glossary.....	34
Annex 1: Methodology.....	35
Annex 2: Toolkit/Flowchart for Decision-Making at Point of arrest.....	36

# 1. Introduction

Child Centred Policing (CCP) is a national policing strategy that cuts across virtually every area of policing. In the latest CCP Strategy for 2024-2027, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC 2024a:6) recognises that all under 18-year-olds are children and need to be “treated as children, respecting and recognising their needs, vulnerabilities and diversity, irrespective of presented or assumed levels of maturity and age.” Based on the NPCC's '[Child Centred Policing Best Practice Framework](#)'<sup>1</sup>, Greater Manchester Police (GMP 2023a) and their partner agencies have developed a CCP Strategy and delivery plan that is aligned to the requirements set out within the Greater Manchester Combined Authorities (2022) '[Standing Together](#)' Police and Crime Plan.

When seeking to implement CCP within police custody in GMP in September 2023, it became evident that the high arrest rate of children in Greater Manchester (which had almost doubled over the preceding two years (Youth Justice Board (YJB) 2024)), threatened to undermine the strategy. Accordingly, the GMP Senior Leadership Team (SLT), recognised that in addition to focusing their attention on children in custody, they needed to know what was happening in frontline officers' interactions with children that was leading to a high arrest rate.

Research undertaken on children in custody in other police force areas has found that children can be brought into custody unnecessarily, particularly for low-level offences and where custody is used as a place of safety (Kemp and others 2023; Bevan 2024).<sup>2</sup> It is also known that, following a long period of reducing arrest rates for children nationally, these have increased over the past two years (YJB 2024). Accordingly, Kemp and Bevan are interested in examining frontline officers interactions and decision-making with children at the point of arrest. Apart from research examining 'stop and search' incidents, there is very little known about police interactions with children at this time, even though this is the main gateway into the youth justice system. Without scrutiny and challenge of police decision-making at this early stage of the criminal process, it is known that detention is authorised in almost all cases (99%) when someone is brought into custody (Kemp and others 2023). This effective rubber-stamping of frontline officers' decisions is understood to have contributed to the overrepresentation in the youth justice system of children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (Lammy 2017) and looked after children (Department for Education 2020).

With funding from the Nuffield Foundation, Kemp and Bevan are working with several police forces in piloting a Child First approach in police custody. This research also encompasses a scoping study of frontline officers' engagement with children at the point of arrest. GMP is the first police force, since the launch of the NPCC's original CCP strategy in 2015, to allow researchers access to observe frontline officers' interactions with children, and other agencies, at the time an arrest is being considered. It is important that GMP has been willing to engage in this study, not only from a local perspective but also because the findings have national implications that will have wider benefits for policing and partnership working. The NPCC (2024a) requires Child First and Child-Centred policies to be brought into policing

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<sup>1</sup> By using procedural justice theory to underpin every interaction, the framework is intended to lead to a greater level of trust and confidence between children and the police.

<sup>2</sup> The Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984, and the associated Codes of Practice, govern police powers and provide legal safeguards for those arrested and detained by the police.

nationally and scrutiny of GMP's CCP approach to children at this early stage of the criminal process will help to inform a national blueprint for change.

## 2. Aims of the research and structure of the report

The research study undertaken was broader than just looking at frontline officers' interactions with children suspected of having committed an offence. It also included examining frontline officers' engaging with children who came to the attention of the police for social welfare and/or health reasons. A brief review of children in police custody was also undertaken. A full project report addressing all of these issues was delivered to GMP in July 2024. The focus in this report is specifically on frontline officers' engagement with children who are in conflict with the law.

This report addresses two main areas relating to children suspected of offending:

- Initial interaction of frontline police officers and staff when dealing with children who come to police attention on suspicion of having committed an offence. The researchers considered how those officers engaged with children, their decision making and consideration of options, their questioning and behaviour, and what information was available to them in making informed decisions. This included evaluating officers' knowledge of CCP and what this means to them in performing their operational duties.
- Referrals for out of court resolutions (OOCR)<sup>3</sup> and other support for children in the community. This second aspect of the research involved reviewing police decision-making in relation to children, including following voluntary interview, or release on bail for a disposal decision. This encompassed analysis of officer decisions as to whether arrest was necessary, including consideration of alternative pathways, partnership working, and referral processes (both the use of OOCRs and, more recently, Outcome 22's).

The research also examined GMP's links with partner agencies and other practitioners when dealing with children who come into conflict with the law. This research study was conducted alongside an evaluation of CCP-related training by Professor Helen Lowey, which is reported on separately.<sup>4</sup>

After setting out the methods adopted in this study, the report begins by reviewing the literature behind CCP and Child First approaches. Also reviewed by way of background are both national and local factors that have implications for policing, the adoption of GMP's CCP strategy and the work of specialist policing teams, multi-agency activity and partner agency support for vulnerable children. The substantive findings are then set out in chronological order in relation to the two areas of policing studied. After each main section, there are recommendations for change which arise from the data. While gathered within GMP, these recommendations are framed with particular reference to GMP functions and strategies. However, there are areas where the issues raised reflect challenges identified for CCP nationally and, as a result, many of the recommendations will have national relevance.

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<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as 'out of court disposals' in some guidance and other documentation.

<sup>4</sup> This report was delivered to GMP in December 2024.

### 3. Methodology

This report draws on both qualitative and quantitative methods adopted during the study, which was undertaken during February and March 2024. The qualitative work included 12 shift observations of response and neighbourhood teams that took place across two districts in Greater Manchester – Area 1 and Area 2. Frontline officers are referred to by their rank (police constable (PC), sergeant or inspector) but only if relevant will the area they are from be identified for reasons of anonymity. In addition to observing frontline officers and their interactions with children, the research also considered officers' engagement with other agencies. Field interviews were held with 37 frontline officers and others from other policing teams. A further 19 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives of specialist teams within GMP and officers of external agencies providing support to children. In addition, a review of body worn video (BWV) footage was undertaken in relation to 40 stop and search incidents (23 Area 1 and 17 Area 2).

The quantitative work comprised an analysis of electronic data drawn from 435 child stop and search incidents recorded in Areas 1 and 2 in January and February 2024 and an analysis of force-wide police custody data for children from April 2023 to January 2024, alongside further statistical information provided by GMP. Analysis of the statistical data was undertaken by Dr Hope Kent, Exeter University, working as a consultant on the Nuffield funded study.

The analysis also draws on publicly available inspection reports relating to GMP, for example the GMP HMICFRS (2023a) Custody Inspection Reports, GMP PEEL Assessments (HMICFRS 2022, 2023b), and the GMP [‘Plan on a Page’](#).<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Policing children in the community

#### 4.1 The national context

Historically, the youth justice system in England and Wales has tended to be based on either a ‘justice’ or ‘welfare’ model, although in practice the two are inseparable, since providing for a child’s welfare is part of responding to their offending behaviour. Within the youth justice system in England and Wales, ‘Child First’ is now the guiding principle and strategy for understanding children who offend and for shaping youth justice responses to their offending (YJB 2022; Case and Browning 2021). Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Child First is intended to transcend traditional welfare and justice priorities, and more contemporary risk management and hybrid models of youth justice, to offer “a progressive, child-friendly, non-criminalising r/evolution in youth justice” (Case and Hazel 2023:1-2). The Child First principle, and its component tenets, have the potential to significantly develop and enhance understandings of, and responses to, offending by children in conceptual, theoretical, policy and practical terms.

Research into child development has had implications for changing the way in which children coming into conflict with the law are dealt with (Lamb and Sim 2013). In particular, there is an increasing recognition that children need to be treated differently from adults within criminal justice, including in police custody (Bevan 2024). Research has also highlighted that a child’s arrest and formal involvement in the justice system are counterproductive, and

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<sup>5</sup> See Annex 1 for further details of the methods involved.

more likely to increase rather than prevent offending (McAra and McVie 2007), which is the principal aim of the youth justice system. Whilst there have been substantial reductions in the numbers of children arrested by the police nationally over the past decade, those detained are often the most vulnerable. Greater understanding of 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACEs) (Craig and others 2017), and the development of trauma informed approaches (Hardcastle and others 2021), are encouraging a number of police forces to adopt child-centred and child-friendly policies.

The research evidence base provided by Case and Browning (2021), identifies four tenets of Child First which require the following:

1. Seeing children as children: prioritise their best interests and recognise their particular needs, capacities rights and potential.
2. Developing pro-social identity for positive child outcomes: promote children's individual strengths and capacities to develop their pro-social identity for sustainable desistance, leading to safer communities and fewer victims.
3. Collaboration with children: encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion.
4. Promotion of diversion: promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using pre-emptive prevention, diversion and minimal intervention.

Child First now informs and shapes policy and practice across the later stages of the youth justice system in England and Wales. However, it is less embedded in policing practice and there is generally a delay before the police are able to involve other agencies, particularly Youth Justice Services (YJS), Children's Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) when dealing with a child for an offence (Kemp and others 2023). The YJS, in particular, tend not to get involved in children's cases until after an officer has decided that a child can be referred for consideration of an OOCR to be imposed. With the relatively short time in which children are held in police custody, there is also a delay in the involvement of children's services and/or health, which generally takes place, if at all, after the child has been released from custody (Kemp and others 2023). As a result, much policing activity of children is out of sight, with their becoming visible only at the time that they are drawn into formal criminal processes. CCP is an important strategy, therefore, because it requires the police and their partner agencies to work together to prevent offending and divert children from the criminal justice system (NPCC 2024a).

When introducing CCP, it is important to recognise national political and economic factors that can impact on arrest rates. From 2003 to 2008, for example, a national police target to increase the number of detections had the desired effect of significantly increasing the number of criminal sanctions imposed by the police, but this was mainly by way of OOCRs imposed on children following arrest and detention (Bateman 2008; Kemp 2014). The global financial crisis of 2008 led to a change in this policy, when it was recognised that interviewing people on a voluntary basis outside of custody, would avoid the high costs of detention (Kemp 2013). This change in policy had a dramatic impact on reducing children's arrest rates, falling by 77% over ten years to year ending March 2019 (YJB/Ministry of Justice 2021).

However, this downward trend has recently reversed, with a 7% increase nationally in the number of children arrested in 2022 and 9% in 2023; with a sharp rise in a small number of forces, including GMP (YJB 2024). Media reports of the police failing to respond to certain

crimes, particularly shoplifting (Boland 2024), are likely to have influenced such an increase. Indeed, in widescale polling and focus groups, 68% of respondents raised concerns over the police having given up on trying to solve crimes, including shoplifting and burglaries (Kimaram and others 2023). Such concerns can undermine police legitimacy, putting forces under pressure to take positive action in trying to increase public confidence in the police. It is in this national context that frontline officers' interactions with children at the point of arrest in Greater Manchester are examined.

## 4.2 Policing children in Greater Manchester

Following a critical assessment by HMICFRS of GMP's performance in relation to victim services in 2020, including the under-recording of reported crimes, the force was placed in special measures (GMP 2023b) and a new long-term plan for GMP (2021), [\*'Planning our future: Building a new GMP'\*](#) was developed. That strategy has seen a considerable rise in recorded crimes and other areas of improvement. However, it has also led to a near doubling of the arrest rate for children. As a result, HMICFRS (2023a:12) identified as an area of improvement for GMP the need to give proper consideration to the diverting of children (and vulnerable adults) away from police custody, where it is appropriate to do so.

GMP's strategic policy to increase arrests has also drawn criticism from Dame Vera Baird KC during her Inquiry into the experience of people arrested and taken into custody in Greater Manchester. The Baird Inquiry (2024) upheld serious allegations made over the treatment of some people held in GMP custody suites, particularly girls and women, and raised concerns over poor conduct in relation to people held in custody. After apologising to all those given voice in the Inquiry, and prior to publication of the Baird report, GMP (2024) embraced the need for change.

GMP has dedicated resources to achieving CCP. To support delivery of the strategy there has, since November 2023, been a dedicated Superintendent responsible for leading CCP across GMP. There are also 9 GMP CCP Pillar Leads responsible for driving CCP activity in their thematic areas. A bi-monthly CCP Gold governance board is chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable, Portfolio Lead for CCP.<sup>6</sup> The meeting also enables partners to provide input and challenge on the development of existing and new activity, and to determine prioritisation of work and, through colleagues from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE sector), ensure that the voice of children is represented. Each GMP district continues to develop its CCP plans aligned to the force strategy and delivery plan, with the CCP Lead working in conjunction with partners, communities and children and young people. Working alongside GMP, the GM Combined Authority (2023) have also identified, in their [\*'Greater than Violence'\*](#) 10-year strategy, the importance of a whole system, partnership working approach to reducing violence for children and their communities. They also have a dedicated lead for CCP.

## 4.3 Partner agencies and multi-agency activity

As with most national police forces, within GMP there are local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) (also referred to as the Bridge in some districts), where the police work in partnership with a wide range of external agencies, including social care, health, education, housing, drug and alcohol services and restorative justice services. There are Child Protection

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<sup>6</sup> This meeting is attended by the pillar leads and key partners (from youth work, children's safeguarding, the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), education and youth justice) to ensure that activity on the CCP delivery plan is being progressed in a timely way.

Investigation Units, complex safeguarding teams, and developed processes for addressing child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation. Borough Prevention Hubs have teams that work with repeat demand data to address particularly challenging issues in respect of particular locations, and children who repeatedly go missing.

GMP also work closely with local youth justice services (YJS)<sup>7</sup> when dealing with child suspects, which includes identifying appropriate OOCR options, as well as engaging support for the child. The YJS offer various forms of voluntary support which children and their families can engage with on a consent basis. These include 'Turnaround' and 'PPIED' (prevention, prosecution, intervention, education and diversion).<sup>8</sup>

There are also community and other stakeholders working with GMP to scrutinise the use of police powers. This includes having 11 external scrutiny panels engaging a wide range of stakeholders. The work of these panels has been bolstered in GMP in response to negative issues arising at the point of arrest that were being considered by the Baird Inquiry. This includes the setting up of a force-wide, independent 'Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel' for children, attended by statutory and non-statutory partner agencies. Different districts have also worked with partners to introduce local 'Stop and Search' Scrutiny Panels, Youth Voice Forums or other scrutiny arrangements involving children and young people.

There are, in addition, a number of management Boards and oversight groups, in which GMP work with a wide range of stakeholders and partner agencies, such as the Youth Justice Transformation Board, a Joint Exploitation Sub-Group, a Domestic Abuse Children's Board, and a Community Parenting Board which holds quarterly meetings with the commissioning managers and OFSTED.

## **5. Frontline officers' engagement with children in the community**

### **5.1 Knowledge and awareness of CCP**

Neither frontline officers, nor their supervisors, were familiar with 'Child Centred Policing' as a specific initiative. This was not surprising because at that time GMP had not fully rolled out its force-wide initiative, although the NPCC strategy (2015) has been in place for a number of years. Frontline officers described minimal, if any, training focused on key areas relating to children, such as the impact of natural developmental immaturity, adverse childhood experience and neurodiversity, or child-specific communication, de-escalation and restraint techniques. Even police officers seconded to YJS teams had not had specific training in all these areas.

When frontline officers were asked to identify what might characterise a CCP approach there was quite a wide variation in responses. Some officers, particularly those in neighbourhood teams, whilst unfamiliar with CCP, had a good understanding of what such approaches are trying to achieve. As a neighbourhood PC explained, "My work is about finding the best outcome for the child. I have kids and the last thing I want is for them to be criminalised." Indeed, there was widespread appreciation, both on the part of GMP officers and partner agencies, that avoiding the criminalisation of children should be prioritised and that to do so, they need to work closely and effectively together. As a CCP district lead put it, "A criminal

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<sup>7</sup> Also known as Youth Offending Team/Services.

<sup>8</sup> For more information see: [Turnaround Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/turnaround-programme) and [Prevention, prosecution, intervention, education and diversion \(PPIED\) – Greater Manchester Police | College of Policing PPIED](https://www.gmp.police.uk/turnaround-programme).



investigation isn't always in the best interests of the child and it's that partnership approach which is important."

In the main, in the absence of training, officers described drawing on their life experiences when interacting with children. Officers with children, in particular, could often recognise the damaging impact that early contact with the police could have for a child and could describe techniques for engaging effectively with children.

However, other officers who did not have such experiences to draw on, most often those on response, related, or demonstrated by their conduct, a significant lack of awareness of the aims of child-centred or child-friendly policing. A response PC said, for example, "I don't like kids. I'm not used to being around them and so I don't know how to deal with them." This lack of familiarity, in the context of minimal training, means that an officer may not recognise a child's vulnerability, appreciate the context of their behaviour or facilitate their understanding and engagement. Officers' negative attitudes when dealing with children could lead to escalation, rather than de-escalation, of a situation, resulting in the arrest of the child.

By contrast, there were some frontline officers who had gained considerable specialist child-specific knowledge and skills, including in relation to child protection, vulnerability and neurodiversity. This derived from particular life experiences, such as having a neurodiverse child, or previous job roles in specialist policing teams, schools, social care, mental health services or in the secure estate. Commenting on having been trained on autism and ADHD in his previous career, one response PC said, "It should be basic training for officers. I carry fidget toys to help make contact with the young person." While there was some evidence of informal skill-sharing within teams, these skills and knowledge were not systematically or effectively utilised in their teams.

Additionally, when observing frontline officers, multi-agency activity and engagement with partner agencies was noted to be more effective when dealing with a child who came to police attention because of their perceived vulnerability, rather than a child suspected of involvement in a criminal offence. It seems that this was mainly due to officers having to complete a 'Care Action Plan' (CAP) in the former situation, which is then sent through to the MASH and, if required, to other specialist policing teams or partner agencies. For the child suspected of offending, criminal justice processes were, understandably prioritised, but this meant that a CAP was not always completed for them, despite often comparable levels of vulnerability.

## **5.2 Neighbourhood teams engaging with children**

Neighbourhood officers described spending a lot of time engaging with children and liaising with specialist policing teams and other agencies in the community. A neighbourhood PC said about his job, "It's about problem-solving and coming up with ideas. Some of the tools we have are CBOs [criminal behaviour orders] and we refer children on to other agencies." There was an appreciation among neighbourhood officers of specialist policing teams and a wide-range of community-based initiatives for tackling crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

While some neighbourhood officers engaged well with their partner agencies, others complained that they were sometimes left on their own to deal with cases. A neighbourhood sergeant commented on this as being an important training issue saying:

“Officers need to know how the other agencies are supposed to be doing their bit. This includes mental health, social care and YJS. There also needs to be training for police supervisors.”

When another neighbourhood sergeant was asked what he felt could be done to help officers improve their contact with other agencies, he was critical of current arrangements when replying:

“It’s got to be simple. We’ve got a ‘making a difference toolkit’ with a list of contacts in a number of different agencies but it’s no good at signposting officers to the relevant agency. I’ve got my own contacts and so I’ll use them.”

It would be helpful for neighbourhood officers to have training and a local resource to help identify and link into appropriate agencies for support.

**5.2.1 The importance of supervision** - new recruits into neighbourhood teams described how important it was for them to draw on the experience of supervisors when dealing with children in the community. They found it particularly helpful when supervisors went out on patrol with them. As one neighbourhood PC explained:

“It’s great when our supervisor is out with us on the street. He’s got years of experience and people in the community know him so well. We like to see him in action as we learn a lot and it helps us to engage with people better, particularly children.”

**5.2.2 Benefits of ACEs and trauma awareness training** – two neighbourhood PCs said that they had received some training on ACEs and trauma awareness and this had helped them to develop a positive relationship with children in the community. Neighbourhood officers in this area were seen to have a more positive attitude towards children, which helped them to engage better, particularly in recognising the importance of safeguarding issues. The positive impact of the training can be observed in comments made by the two neighbourhood PCs (Area 2):

“Understanding ACEs is a major part of our job. It’s about what’s happening in the child’s home life. You find that a lot of child’s behaviour is influenced by who they live with.”

“We often come across children found with drugs and they’re involved in modern slavery. You need them to tell you what’s going on in their lives.”

By contrast in Area 1, neighbourhood officers who had not received ACEs and trauma awareness training, displayed less understanding of a child’s vulnerability, particularly when engaging with neurodivergent children. Neighbourhood officers in this area were sometimes seen to adopt punitive attitudes towards children who came to their attention as suspects. For example, one PC observed, “I think locking kids up is a good thing as it helps teach them a lesson”, whilst another commented, “The police use custody as a tool to punish kids and that’s how it should be.”

**5.2.3 A sense of making a difference in the community** - neighbourhood officers in both areas seemed to enjoy working in the community, helping to prevent crime and ASB. However, in both areas officers felt that this activity was not always valued by senior officers and, in particular, was undermined by the perceived ‘positive arrest’ policy that could make their relationship with children difficult. This was starkly illustrated when neighbourhood officers were called up to cover shifts on response, as they felt under pressure to make arrests. They found this particularly uncomfortable when it involved children they later had contact with locally in their neighbourhood role. Instead, they stressed the importance of

rewarding good neighbourhood policing, although the challenge of doing so was also acknowledged. As one neighbourhood PC observed, “You can’t measure prevention.”

### 5.3 Response Teams engaging with children

Many response officers appeared to value the excitement of dealing with emergency calls, using the blue lights and the two-tone siren. As one PC remarked, “There’s nothing better than grade 1s coming through ... I like pulling cars and doing stop searches. It’s the chase I like.” A number of officers also commented on enjoying the ‘adrenaline buzz’ of not knowing from call to call what incident they would have to deal with, although recognising that in some cases this meant putting their lives in danger. In practice, the response required for many calls was described as “dull and boring”, leading to some officers feeling demoralised by their daily tasks. This was particularly so in cases where they had to step in to cover slow response times for ambulances and delays in admitting people into hospital. Some officers complained about having to wait as long as their 12-hour shift at hospital before being able to hand over someone who was experiencing a mental health episode to a clinician. Many frontline officers raised concerns over long delays experienced trying to access support from social services for children who came to their attention. As commented on below, where requests for alternative accommodation could not be met by social services this could lead to a child being arrested and taken into custody.

With response teams going into local communities to deal with specific incidents, officers do not get the same opportunity as those in neighbourhood teams to build positive relationships with children. However, response officers who had experience of working in specialist policing teams, or with children’s or other relevant services, were observed to deal with cases differently. They were able to use their knowledge of how these teams and agencies operated, and how to contact them, to provide children with immediate help and support, if required. One PC, for example, described how her experience of working in Child Protection Investigation Unit (CPIU) had given her skills to identify and address safeguarding issues that could arise when dealing with children. Being new to response, however, she was disappointed that this experience was not recognised as being of value within the team and she was not called upon by colleagues to assist when dealing with a vulnerable child.

Response officers generally did not have the same links into specialist policing teams or partner agencies as neighbourhood teams. All new response recruits receive training on how to work with other agencies, are given single points of contact (SPOCs) for specialist teams, such as the MASH and CPIU, and learn the procedures for voluntary interviews and referring children for an OOCR. Over time, however, unless routinely working with these agencies, they tended to forget these less frequently used powers/pieces of information and described reverting to arrest and detention as simply being easier and more familiar.

Where response officers did see a child frequently, for example on repeated call-outs for children going missing from care settings, they tended to express frustration about the child’s situation and, in particular, about the requirement to complete a CAP for every contact. This is unsurprising since they generally received no feedback about the impact this lengthy paper exercise had for the child.

## 5.4 Review of stop and search incidents with children

In addition to observing frontline officers engaging with children in the community, BWV footage of 40 stop and search incidents with under 18-year-olds was reviewed.<sup>9</sup> Police use of 'stop and search' in different jurisdictions has been seen to "crystallise the competing demands on the police in unequal societies: to produce order and to police with consent; to fight crime and to respect the rights of those at the margins of our societies (de Maillard and O'Neill 2024:1013). While officers were generally seen to engage reasonably well with children, there was some very significant variation in the quality of interactions. Officers who engaged well would approach children in a calm and relatively friendly manner, displaying by their attitudes an appreciation that the interaction could be alien and unsettling for the child and seeking to put the child at their ease. This more familiar approach was helpful to officers in trying to de-escalate any tensions that might arise during a stop and search and it also helped in building a rapport with a child. These officers avoided using policing jargon and took time to explain to children what they were doing. In better interactions, officers checked understanding, tried to answer children's questions and explained why they were doing what they were doing. In none of the videos observed was there any reaction from the child that suggested they were unduly concerned with the physical way in which they were searched. In several cases, at the end of a negative search, officers would thank children for their support, which was well-received, although in only one such case did the officer apologise, saying, "Right lads, sorry that I've stopped you in your tracks and enjoy the rest of your day" (Case 31).

However, there were other officers who seemed to be ill-equipped and uneasy when dealing with a child, which meant it was difficult for them to engage. Out of the 40 stop and search incidents observed, there were 11 where officers were seen to have poor interactions with children. In most of these cases, this was when the officer's authority was challenged but it also arose where officers were not alert to a child's vulnerability. In these poorer interactions officers generally approached children without displaying any appreciation of the stressful nature of this encounter. They treated them in a wholly adult fashion, did not explain what they were doing, or why, and often responded to children's questions unsympathetically, and at times in an off-hand or aggressive way. Commonly any resistance or reluctance was addressed by a threat to put on handcuffs or "lock up" the child. The following cases help to illustrate these points:

- A 14-year-old Black boy (Case 2) was subject to a drugs search. One of the officers was standing on his coat and the boy asked the officer to move. The officer ignored his comments and said, "You're being rude and disrespectful and not listening to me. If you carry on like this you'll be in handcuffs." Following the negative search, knowing his rights, the boy refused to give his details. In response, the officer said, "We can do this the easy way or the hard way. The hard way being to take you to the station and leave you in a cell until you've given us these details." The boy still refused but when the officer said he would be arrested he relented and provided the details.
- When searching a group of young males (aged 15 to 17 years) (Case 7) during an operation where officers were checking children for knives, one officer said to a boy, "If you swear once more I'll lock you up", and when another child kept moving during the search, a different officer said, "I'll take you into custody if you don't stand still." Whilst it

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<sup>9</sup> It was not always possible from the BWV footage to identify whether the officer involved was a neighbourhood or response officer.

is important to acknowledge the heightened tension involved in searching for a knife, the officers' threatening responses were liable to escalate, rather than de-escalate, the tension of the stop.

- A 13-year-old boy was chased by an officer (Case 18) after running away when the police arrived to deal with a report of boys throwing stones at a window. The boy suddenly stopped but, due to the momentum of the chase, the officer barged into him, rammed him up against a wall and took the boy to the floor, where he was handcuffed and searched. This was a negative search but, although the boy was shaking and crying, the officer did not understand how traumatic this experience had been for him. He asked the boy, "Why are you so upset? Is it because you're frightened of what your mum will say?" Sobbing, the boy replied, "No. I'm only 13." The officer told the boy that he would be "locked up" if he had thrown a stone but, when it was known that he was not involved, the officer said, "I'll take you home to mum and she can give you a bollocking." The boy asked what he had done wrong and the officer replied, "Ran off from the police and this is what you get for doing it."

From our review of these 40 cases, are several observations concerning officers' practices when stopping and searching children. These include observing a significant degree of variability in the quality of interactions between officers and children, including circumstances where officers threatened to use their more coercive powers (handcuffing and arrest) where this was either unnecessary or unlawful. The sample also included a number of cases where the grounds for stopping and searching a child were weak, including several cases where the identified grounds related to the child being in a 'hot spot' area, which was usually said to be related to illegal drug activity. In one case, two boys (14 and 15 years) were stopped on the street at 22:00. The officer said they were to be searched because, "You were acting a bit suspicious when you saw the car ... You are in an area where drug dealing is prevalent" – no drugs were found (Case 9). In a similar situation, a 16-year-old was stopped and searched because, the response PC said, "This area is a hotspot for drugs and urban street gangs" – again no drugs were found (Case 16). In a third case, at 19:00, two response officers approached a 16-year-old girl who was sitting on a bench in her local park. Explaining the grounds for the search, one PC remarked, "You're in an area that's known for drugs, and you've admitted that. You're also sat here on your own." After a negative search, the PC asked the girl where she lived and she pointed across to a nearby house (Case 37).

As discussed further below, indiscriminate searching that is based purely on the location of the child in a so-called hot spot, means that children who are already living in high-crime, often areas of high-deprivation, are also subjected to over-policing in comparison to their more advantaged peers. Such searches are likely to have a significantly negative impact on trust and confidence in the police. Given the extreme power differential between child and officer, and the wide-ranging powers enjoyed by the police, it is essential that officers are able to weigh the proportionality of stop and search powers more effectively. Without this, these interactions can escalate, leading to a child being arrested and brought into custody, and potentially criminalised, unnecessarily.

There are clearly issues arising in these cases where officers require training not only on their powers when using 'stop and search' but on how to build a rapport and engage with children in a child-centred way.

#### 5.4.1 Stop and search data analysis

In addition to the 40 stop and search incidents reviewed via BWV footage, statistics arising out of 435 stop and searches recorded against children in the two areas studied during January and February 2024 were analysed. Two additional issues arise from that analysis. First, it is interesting to note in that data that the child's 'self-defined ethnicity' is included in most cases but only in two cases out of the 40 cases reviewed were officers heard to ask children to state their ethnicity. This apparent failure of officers to obtain self-defined ethnicity from children undermines the reliability of the data gathered, with the potential to hamper efforts to address racial disproportionality. Secondly, out of 385 incidents, where known, in only 44 cases (11%) was there a positive search, with almost a quarter of these involving a small amount of drugs for which, in the main, an OOCR was imposed.

These findings are concerning given that research has highlighted the relative ineffectiveness of stop and search as a tactic in controlling crime, as well as a range of problematic impacts arising from the practice (Tiratelli and others 2018). Research globally has identified strong negative impacts of stop and search experiences on individuals' mental and physical health (Weisburd and others 2023). Specific concerns have been raised about the lasting effects of these encounters, especially more intrusive experiences, on anxiety levels and the mental well-being of children (Geller 2017). Of particular importance is the negative impact of stop and search experiences on trust and confidence in the police, which has been repeatedly and well-documented (Bowling and Phillips 2007; Bradford 2017). There is the additional concern that adultification, when Black children in particular can be perceived as more mature and culpable than their white peers, can result in harsher stop and search experiences. As Davis has observed, this "can lead to the rights of children not being upheld, potentially leaving them more at risk of harm, due to a dereliction of safeguarding duty" (2022:8).

If CCP is to be implemented effectively, officers need to have an awareness of the potential impact of stop and search activity on children. GMP also needs to ensure that frontline officers have the skills both to identify when stop and search is appropriate and necessary (and when the adverse effects are likely to outweigh the benefits of the search - particularly where cannabis and other low-level offences are concerned) and to reduce the negative impacts of the encounter if the search goes ahead.

#### 5.5 Policing local communities

There are areas within Greater Manchester that have high levels of poverty and deprivation, which can be extremely difficult to police. In a recent research study, it was noted that 37% of children in the North West are living in poverty, with Manchester having the third highest rate for child poverty in the UK, and with a further eight out of the top twenty deprived council areas being located in the North West (Stone 2024). Within GMP, and police forces nationally, the adoption of 'hot spot' policing can lead to high concentrations of crime being identified within poor and deprived neighbourhoods, with children living there being likely to be over policed and disproportionately criminalised (Wynne 2022). When examining the effects of 'hot spot' policing in the United States, in some areas the police were able to develop and sustain good relations with local people with community-oriented policing approaches. However, in other areas, by failing to interact with local residents in a respectful, empathetic, and fair manner, this could increase public fear (of crime and/or police encounters), exacerbate racial disparities in policing actions, and lead community members to view the police negatively (Koper and others 2023).

With response officers being required to 'fly' into areas of deprivation to deal with specific incidents, their presence could be resented by communities. It was seen to be dispiriting and upsetting for officers to be shouted at by local residents, calling them 'Pigs' and telling them to 'Fuck off'. The relentlessness of the response role also had an impact, as one PC reflected, "We have empathy fatigue. It's one job after the other." These difficult community relations, and resulting demoralisation, are likely to be contributing to the punitive attitudes some officers express towards children. Many officers maintained a professional, and often empathetic, approach, but negative experiences in the community appeared to create an 'Us and Them' attitude among some officers. This was identifiable in the derogatory or inflammatory language officers sometimes used when describing children in those areas. As a response PC starkly put it when commenting on how he deals with some children, "If they're old enough to act like a twat then they'll be treated like a twat." When talking about new recruits coming out of university, another response PC remarked, "They're not able to cope with the dross bags that we have to deal with.". There were other officers who unhelpfully used terms such as 'juvies', 'juvenile' or 'youth' when talking about children in the community. Contrary to the CCP focus on respect, acknowledgment of children's rights and the emphasis on minimum intervention, there was fairly widespread evidence, amongst response officers in particular, of negative labelling of children and endorsement of arrest and detention as a welcome form of discipline for those who were thought to have offended. As one response PC observed about some of her colleagues:

"You can see a cycle of offending within deprived communities but the problem is that people have poor relations with the cops and things can escalate and then they are arrested. Some officers like to bring children into custody and this shouldn't be allowed unless it's for a serious offence, but this isn't always the case."

The regular contact neighbourhood teams had with people living in deprived areas appeared to lead to a greater appreciation of how resentment and distrust of the police could build up over many years. This helped them to understand the negativity they received from some local communities, but it also enabled them to build positive relationships with children on a one-to-one basis. As one neighbourhood PC explained, "A lot of kids' behaviour is influenced by who they live with. We have one lad who's fine with us when he's on his own but when he's with others he'll call us Pigs." Neighbourhood officers were also more likely to be aware of some of the difficulties that children could experience at home, which can lead to low-level crime and ASB. As one PC put it, "Some families kick their kids out of the house and they're left to wander the streets. They want fun and excitement and so they'll wander round trying car doors." However, like their colleagues on response, neighbourhood officers could also become fatigued, particularly if constantly having to deal with the same child. When receiving calls about a 13-year-old with autism and ADHD who regularly goes missing or causes ASB, for example, a neighbourhood PC said, "She's feral. She doesn't care about her family. She doesn't come across as empathetic at all."

The Greater Manchester police and crime plan, 'Standing Together' (GMCA 2022:6) acknowledges that, "Tackling inequality and discrimination is one of the biggest challenges of our time." It is therefore vitally important that officers are trained so that they can interact with children in a 'respectful, empathetic and fair manner' (Koper and others 2023). The plan also recognises that an holistic approach is required to meet the challenge:

"Working as a joined up and coordinated partnership is vital. Solving the problems in communities and delivering better services demands that the police, local authorities,



health and all our public, voluntary and community services collaborate and work even more closely together.”

The importance of having more structured partner agency input into the working practices of frontline officers is considered further below.

## **5.6 Lack of experience within the frontline**

The lack of experience within response teams was seen to be a major issue in GMP, with supervisors estimating that around 60-70% of those on response have three or fewer years' experience of policing. This accords with our observations in other forces, indicating that this is clearly a national issue. Cuts to policing budgets from 2010, leading to the loss of 20,000 experienced officers, followed by the rapid enrolment of 20,000 new officers under the last Conservative Government, has resulted nationally in a young-in-service frontline.<sup>10</sup>

More experienced response officers expressed concerns over the robustness of the recruitment of these newer officers and their suitability for policing. They felt that many of the newer recruits lacked some of the skills, knowledge and experience to operate effectively in the very complex and high-pressure environment of frontline policing, resulting in poor performance and/or retention issues. Some of the experienced officers commented positively on how the rejection of their first application to join the force had led to them taking up administrative positions within policing teams or signing up as a 'Special' officer or 'PCSO'. They felt that this experience gave them a good grounding in the basics of policing before becoming a serving officer, helping them to police more vulnerable groups, including children. It was also important to these officers that when new on response, they were able to turn to experienced officers on the team for support but, for new recruits, there were no longer enough of these officers to facilitate this 'learning on the job'.

There is also a national problem that many of the 20,000 new officers were recruited during the pandemic, and therefore had to be trained substantially online. Supervisors in GMP commented on the significance of these frontline officers missing out on classroom-based teaching, that draws on real life scenarios. Instead, they had to learn basic policing skills 'on the job', which is problematic when it comes to the softer skills required of the frontline, particularly those that need to be employed when engaging with children.

**5.6.1 Supervision** - concerns were also raised that this lack of experience amongst response teams was exacerbated by the lack of experience amongst their supervisors; that there were not enough experienced supervisors from whom new recruits could do this 'learning on the job'. With response having to cover night shifts, older and more experienced officers preferred working in neighbourhood teams as this was less disruptive to family life. As one sergeant explained, "I came into neighbourhood policing because I've got a young family." On observation, what appeared particularly problematic was the lack of on the ground supervision for young-in-service response officers. Without supervisors regularly being on patrol with these officers, there was no-one with experience to model behaviour in interactions with children or to support decision-making in the context of the incident itself.

As a result, it is the recently recruited young-in-service response supervisors that new officers are turning to remotely for guidance while on patrol. This was observed, to be

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<sup>10</sup> Concerns have been raised nationally over the scale of the rapid recruitment exercise, particularly in relation to retention and in recruiting unfit candidates (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection 2023; Institute for Local Government 2023).



particularly problematic where there were countervailing demands, to both police 'by consent' and in a child-friendly way, but also in accordance with perceived performance requirements in relation to numbers of arrests and stop and searches. The need for operational supervision to streamline activity was also rather apparent. With two or three patrol cars sometimes responding to a call, there was no one to identify when some of the officers in attendance could move on to another job.

### 5.7 Focus on improving performance

Frontline officers were under the impression that policing in Greater Manchester was still being driven by a 'positive arrest' policy. This policy, which had included arrest and stop and search targets for frontline officers, had been implemented following GMP being placed in special measures in 2020, in part as a result of low arrest rates. By October 2022, GMP had come out of special measures after having shown substantial improvement in a range of areas, including more effective and timely investigations and a rise in charges and summonses over the period (GMP 2023b). At that point, GMP's Senior Leadership Team confirmed that the targets were removed, but the research suggests that this has not been communicated effectively to the frontline. Dame Vera Baird also identified in her report a similar understanding of a strategic priority to increase arrests (Baird 2024:96).

Frontline officers, and their supervisors, confirmed to researchers that they had targets to achieve 30 arrests and 30 stop and searches every four weeks, equivalent to two per officer each month. Supervisors keep tallies of the number of arrests and, in one area, there was a whiteboard listing the 'achievement' of officers in the different teams in meeting the targets. Supervisors were also observed congratulating officers for having a high number of arrests, which put pressure on other officers to improve their 'performance' in this area. As intended, this led to competition within teams, with two response PCs describing how they set their own targets, to achieve a stop and search and an arrest on every shift, a total of 16 of each per month.

Problematic, if unintended, effects of such perceived targets were frequently observed during the research. For example, one response PC, boasted about having made 30 arrests in the past month, the highest for a member in his team. Talking about the quality of those arrests, however, he said "Most were for warrants and low-level offences, like being drunk and disorderly. Nothing happens in most of my cases. 90% will get written off with an NFA [no further action]." This focus on number and not quality of arrest, and without additional support in place to process cases, raises challenges to police legitimacy. As a response PC noted, "It's wrong to go out and arrest all the time, particularly if cases aren't going anywhere." There were also concerns raised over unnecessary arrests, with supervisors saying that they were commonly seeing cases where people were arrested without the legal criteria being met. This can build up resentment, not only in police relations with children and local communities, but also with partner agencies. Such an approach also does not serve victims well. As one response inspector observed, "The problem is officers don't have time to clear up cases and this impacts badly on victims as their crimes aren't getting dealt with."

With many frontline officers feeling under pressure to stop and search and arrest, it is important to highlight how these perceived targets, without a more tailored approach for children, are antithetical to adopting CCP. Indeed, particularly for neighbourhood teams, the combination of targets and CCP is liable to produce a sort of cognitive dissonance, as the two policies are experienced as working against each other:

- Perceived stop and search targets are likely to have greater impact on children (in comparison with adults) because of their availability (presence on the streets). As one neighbourhood PC reflected, “We do important work in building bridges, but kids hanging around on the streets are visible and this helps us to make our stop and searches.” Additionally, such unintended effects drive disproportionality since they are likely to have the greatest impact on children from more disadvantaged households (or who are looked after by the local authority) and from areas subject to greater police presence.
- The impact on children’s willingness to engage with officers as a result is plain, as a neighbourhood PC explained, “It’s important for us to try and get the children to talk to us, particularly those with ACEs [adverse childhood experiences] but the current policy is undermining these positive relationships.”
- Perceived targets are encouraging frontline officers to arrest children, instead of adopting the CCP approach of taking time to find out what is happening for that child and to see if an alternative, diversionary pathway can be followed.
- Such approaches were damaging to neighbourhood teams building good relations with children in the community: “We have to work to targets and have to lock kids up. They [the children] hate us for it and we have to see them every day.”
- Where children are concerned, such encouragement to arrest and detain is liable to infringe their right to be detained ‘only as a last resort’ (as set out in the UNCRC and College of Policing (2013) ‘Authorised Professional Practice for Detention and Custody’). Dame Vera Baird makes a similar, albeit wider, observation about the dangers of such a policy giving rise to some officers using the power to arrest ‘unwisely, unnecessarily, and sometimes unlawfully’ (Baird 2024:97).

Given that CCP requires the police to prioritise the well-being of the child, instead of focusing on raw numbers of stop and searches and arrests, performance indicators for the policing of children need to be based on the quality of police interactions and on positive outcomes following such encounters. As considered further below, performance indicators should also capture the use of alternatives to arrest, including voluntary interviews and other diversionary decision-making.

## 5.8 Recommendations

The lack of CCP awareness and training identified by officers across the study, the variability in the quality of interactions with children and punitive attitudes expressed by some underline the importance of training for all officers (not only those in specialist teams). Training is needed not just on what CCP requires, but why it is so important, and effective. Ideally such training would involve the voices of children with experience of policing (particularly police custody, strip search and stop and search).

**Recommendation 1:** *For all officers and all staff in contact with children to receive training on CCP/Child First approaches: What CCP means (both the national and GMP-specific framing), the evidence that supports it and why it is important. In addition to this training, but not in substitution for it, a force wide communications exercise to increase awareness of the CCP strategy would be beneficial.*

Likewise, if officers are to be expected to operationalise the strategy, the evidence, again across the study, indicates that they will need training so that they can engage effectively with the children that they encounter.

**Recommendation 2:** *For all officers and all staff in contact with children to receive training on:*

- *Child brain development and natural developmental immaturity,*
- *Communicating effectively with children,*
- *Child-specific de-escalation and restraint techniques,*
- *Adverse childhood experiences and trauma,*
- *Neurodiversity, and,*
- *Disproportionality.*

The qualitative data reveals that some individual frontline officers have considerable specialist knowledge about child protection, vulnerability and neurodiversity which they have gained from their life experiences or from working within specialist units. However this expertise is, at present, under-identified and under-utilised.

**Recommendation 3:** *Frontline teams should regularly audit the specialist skills/knowledge of their members and identify champion (or similar) roles within teams so that those individuals can support colleagues and share their expertise in a more structured and effective way.*

Many frontline officers displayed a lack of understanding about the work of specialist teams and partner agencies in relation to children. This could limit their ability to assist a child, and explain the support available to children and their families, and victims within the community.

**Recommendation 4:** *Frontline teams should consider shift-shadowing arrangements, or secondments to other specialist units, to build the collective team understanding of the support available for children, both as suspects and victims. Training inputs from specialist teams for frontline teams would also be beneficial.*

Shift observations and BWV reviews reveal a real range of interactions with children, from those that are exemplary to some (few) that are of significant concern. Given the lack of experience and confidence in dealing with children expressed by some frontline officers, and evident in their interactions with children, there is a strong case for supervisors spending time out on response or patrol with young-in-service frontline officers to support them in developing those essential skills, as well as enhancing their wider development. There are also indications in the data that more efficient working patterns would be likely to result from in-person supervision.

**Recommendation 5:** *Supervisors of frontline teams should consider implementing on patrol, in-person supervision for young-in-service frontline officers, so that supervisors can model child-centred behaviour for these officers.*

There are a range of scrutiny panels operating within GMP, as well as supervisor reviews of footage. It was clear that frontline officers whose interactions were identified as a cause of concern would be supported to improve their practice. However, there did not appear to be any mechanism whereby exemplary interactions were identified for praise or as a learning opportunity for colleagues.

**Recommendation 6:** *That GMP consider how reflective practice can be incorporated into performance reviews and other individual supervision activities, and encourage supervisors to make space in shift briefings to identify good/exemplary practice.*

## **6. The child as a suspect: frontline decision-making and working with partner agencies**

When dealing with a child as a suspect there are three main options open to the officer: taking no formal action at all, dealing with the child in the community or arrest. The officer has a discretion as to whether to take any formal action, but this requires a considerable degree of information to be able to make this decision. Not only will the officer have to identify what level of offence has been committed, working with the Child Gravity Matrix, and potentially speaking to the complainant/victim (where relevant). The officer also needs to gather information about the child's previous contact with the police/involvement in offending and about any potential mitigating features (whether the child is looked after, has mental health/learning disability/speech and language needs/ACEs and signs of CSE/CCE).

Likewise, the officer needs to understand what more formal disposal options are available in order to distinguish between the no action route and the community pathway. The community pathway has two options – imposing a low-level disposal (or referral to the YJS) without voluntary interview, or voluntary interview. The former course can be taken for low-level offending (gravity level 1/2), where the child has not had a previous community resolution and where the officer's supervisor agrees (referral to YJS being recommended but not required). Acceptance of responsibility alone is required (not an acceptance of guilt) and for low level offences this might be recorded on BWV or in a police notebook. For gravity level 3/4 suspected offences, and in lower-level cases where the child has had previous community resolutions, then a voluntary attendance is likely to be suitable.

Finally, in the case of more serious offending the officer will need to decide between voluntary attendance or arrest. Again an understanding of the likely disposal options is important in order to weigh the proportionality of any arrest decision (Code G Note 2C). If the outcome is only ever likely to be a youth conditional caution at most, the proportionality of a custodial arrest will always be open to challenge. The decision between voluntary attendance and arrest will, to a degree, be a decision about the needs of the investigation. But not infrequently the officer will be weighing concerns around likely support in place for a child were they to invite them to voluntarily attend, such as whether they are engaging with statutory services, and may be assisted by better knowledge of the child's home circumstances. The majority of children in relation to whom these decisions will need to be made will be well known either to the YJS, or to children's services, or to both. Those partner agencies hold a wealth of information to inform that decision.

### **6.1 Quality of understanding and decision-making**

This decision-making process is complex and requires significant understanding of the Child Gravity Matrix, the various diversionary options, and the voluntary support offer, as well as knowledge of the child's characteristics and circumstances. Youth justice statistics indicate that decision-making at this point is not necessarily effective, particularly in Greater Manchester where there has been a sharp increase in the number of child arrests in recent years, rising from 2,856 in year ending March 2022 to 4,454 the following year (YJB 2024). Analysis of case outcomes for 4,616 children arrested by GMP during the year ending January 2024 reveals that in 58% of cases no further action was taken, in 27% of cases the

child was charged and in 9% the child received an OOCR.<sup>11</sup> These outcomes are similar to those found in an analysis of 2019-2021 custody record data provided by eight police forces, with 56% having no further action taken,<sup>12</sup> 21% being charged and 14% receiving an OOCR (Kemp and others 2023:44).

With a high arrest rate in GMP, and punitive attitudes seen to be expressed by some frontline officers, the decision to arrest does not always seem to be made on the basis of necessity, but may instead be driven by extra-legal, quasi-didactic purposes – to ‘teach a lesson’. One response PC, for example, remarked, “They have to go into custody to stop offending”, even though such attitudes disregard the presumption of innocence and are contrary to children’s due process rights. In addition, while some officers might believe custody is an effective deterrent, research has shown that it is more likely to have the opposite effect (Bevan 2022).

From observations of BWV footage of stop and search incidents with children, officers were seen to have wide discretion when dealing with low-level offences. For example, in similar cases involving four 16- and 17-year-olds, not previously known to the police but stopped and searched for having a small amount of cannabis, all were dealt with differently. The responses ranged from taking no action, imposing a ‘cannabis warning’ on the street (an adult disposal), arranging a voluntary interview so that an OOCR could be considered, and arresting and taking the child into police custody. It was not surprising that officers expressed a difference of opinion over how to deal with such cases. In taking no action, a response PC said, “I can’t see any circumstances in which I’m going to arrest a youth for cannabis. It’s a victimless crime. I’ll take it off them and warn them they could be arrested if they do it again.” Other officers commented on feeling under increased pressure to take formal action when dealing with a child for low-level offences. As one neighbourhood sergeant remarked, “There are too many processes now. I’ve had a kid with a £5 bag of cannabis but I can’t tell them off anymore, they have to be referred to YJS.” In a similar vein, a neighbourhood PC said that his sergeant had recently told officers, “If you see a kid on a motor bike you have to stop and search them and if they have any cannabis on them you’ve got to arrest them.” It would be helpful for officers to have guidance that requires a consistent approach to be adopted when dealing with such low-level crimes.

The GMP data also highlights issues of racial disproportionality, with Black children accounting for 16% of arrests while 7% of the Greater Manchester population of 10- to 17-year-olds are Black (according to the latest 2021 Census (Office for National Statistics 2023)). While the custody record data does not identify the status of looked after children, it is known from research that children in care are disproportionately drawn into the youth justice system (Department for Education 2020) and, as discussed below, our interviews with frontline officers confirmed this.

## **6.2 The importance of more structured partner agency input**

Where the option to take no formal action, or to deal with the child in the community is available, officers having the information and confidence to make the decision is key to adopting a child-centred approach, which focuses on developing the child’s pro-social

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Other’ outcomes were recorded in 6% of cases.

<sup>12</sup> It is anticipated that the ‘no further action’ rate will be higher because in 5% of ‘other’ cases, the case outcome had not been decided over a year after children had been ‘released under investigation’.

behaviours. The officer needs, for example, an understanding of what statutory and voluntary support options are open to the child and their family.

The issues raised in respect of decision-making indicate that substantive engagement of partner agencies is vital at or around the point of arrest, to support frontline officers both with their expertise around the available options and with particular information about the child (where they are known) to enable them to take the least intrusive course of action. It is unsurprising that response officers (and their supervisors) are not always making the best decisions, given the current lack of involvement of other agencies at this early stage and also the level of understanding required, and the breadth of information which would assist decision-making. Whilst training for officers on diversionary options and using the Child Gravity Matrix, on 'ACEs' and trauma-informed approaches, will help to improve the quality of decision-making and challenge officers' negative attitudes towards children, advice from youth justice specialists and access to Social Services at this point would also be of substantial assistance.

However, despite its critical significance, there is no substantive partner agency involvement required at the point of arrest. Whilst the YJS indicate that, in office hours, they would be willing to provide information to officers were that to assist, there is no structure in place to enable that contact. So youth specialism is rarely engaged at this key decision-making moment. The expertise of the YJS, on working with children at risk of (and engaged in) offending, on the range of services they can offer, and on the likely interventions which could be put in place is not utilised before the officer makes a decision on how to deal with a child. Neither is the YJS's knowledge about the individual child (where relevant) and their involvement with services. Both the OOCR officers and the police officers seconded to YJS teams indicated that a response officer could contact them direct for assistance but it is clear that, given the emphasis on the Youth Referral Form (discussed below), they rarely do. While some information might be available on police databases, fuller information on a child's engagement with children's services, Early Help and other support can be hard for frontline officers to access, especially out of hours.

In particular, the involvement of social services could help to prevent the arrest and detention of children in the not insignificant number of cases where the police are called to deal with 'domestic' arguments in a child's home. When attending such a call-out, if they cannot obtain support or alternative accommodation from children's services, an officer can end up arresting the child so that they can remove them from the family home to help them calm down. This can lead to the child being brought into custody, even for low-level offences, with detention being used, effectively, as a place of safety (Kemp and others 2023:58-59). Frontline officers in GMP were experiencing these same difficulties, with several officers complaining about receiving repeated calls from private care homes. As a response PC explained, "children are assaulting staff on a daily basis but the home won't support prosecution." By calling the police, it seems that care home staff are looking for some respite, while the child is arrested and taken into custody. A neighbourhood PC described this as a 'vicious cycle', "We phone EDT [emergency duty team of social services] but what's really needed is a secure unit or [the child having] a one-to-one with a social worker to help calm them down. There's no need for us to be involved but we know social services are strapped." Even getting through on the telephone to social services was a challenge. As one neighbourhood sergeant observed, "The EDT number is open to everyone,



including the public. We need a dedicated line so that we can get through to them when dealing with a child.”

The ‘Right Care, Right Person’ (RCRP) initiative, recently implemented in Greater Manchester, is intended to assist GMP by requiring partner services to take on their statutory responsibilities. This will help to relieve pressure on the police who were having to respond to a significant number of ambulance and mental health call-outs. The RCRP framework does not typically address some of the issues flagged in respect of children. However, the data identified here suggests that this could be a very fruitful area to explore, particularly since the local authorities have a statutory responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.<sup>13</sup> An innovative expansion of the RCRP initiative to encompass the challenges arising in relation to children could be extremely effective in reducing the burden on GMP and ensuring that children in difficulty are engaged with by the most suitable professionals.

### **6.3 Challenges of arranging a voluntary interview**

Response officers reflected in detail on the challenges of arranging a ‘voluntary attendance’ (VA) for a child to be interviewed and this appeared to have an impact on how regularly such a course was chosen. As one response PC observed: “It’s easier to arrest than it is to VA.” There were some indications that this might be because an arrest enabled the officer to hand over paperwork and investigation to the Detainee Investigation Team (DIT) or another team. There are also significant issues around finding an appropriate time to interview a child, given the officer’s shift pattern. The issue of deciding where that should best occur, arranging for an appropriate adult and lawyer (if requested) to be present, and the greater duty on the interviewing officer to deliver rights information, assess fitness for interview and record the interview itself.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, there was some suggestion that there were difficulties actually logging a VA onto PoliceWorks and that some officer IDs were not accepted by the system. These difficulties raise the prospect that, where a VA is appropriate, such a task might be better dealt with by other policing teams such as neighbourhood teams or the DIT.

Arranging a lawyer<sup>15</sup> for VA seemed to cause particular difficulties for frontline officers, especially since not all officers knew how to access the ‘defence solicitor call-centre’. Additionally, a lawyer does not always prioritise attendance for a VA and there might be long delays before they arrive. There was also some uncertainty amongst response officers as to whether assessment by L&D could be achieved for a child who was VA’ed. Although the GMP VA guidance makes plain that this assessment is available and should be considered by the officer.

Alternatively, there was the danger that a child might be encouraged, indirectly, to submit to an interview without legal advice at their home, since some officers appeared to have found this approach a preferable way of circumventing partner agency difficulties. As a response officer explained, “Generally we interview children at home if they’re happy not to have a solicitor. It helps to get things done quickly if they don’t have a solicitor, rather than having to wait a week or two.” Interviewing a child at home is discouraged because of the likelihood

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<sup>13</sup> The statutory responsibility falls under section 11 of the Children Act 2004.

<sup>14</sup> GMP guidance ‘Voluntary Attendance Interview: Procedure’.

<sup>15</sup> Legal representatives attending will commonly be solicitors or police station representatives. The term lawyer is used here for ease.

that it will inhibit the involvement of a lawyer. The national guidance (NPCC 2024b) states that if an interview is to take place at the child's home then this should require the authority of a supervisor, who must be satisfied that necessary arrangements for attendance of an AA and lawyer have been made. There is a pressing need for clearer guidance around arranging legal advice and AA attendance for VA interviews, to improve uptake and to ensure that it is implemented in a way that does not undermine key protections for children.

These partner agency issues, on top of the other challenges of arranging a voluntary interview, mean that there appears to be a distinct disinclination, particularly amongst response officers, to use VAs. This results in a child being more likely to be arrested if they are being dealt with for anything other than the very lowest level of offence. When examining the proportion of VAs as a share of total volume of people interviewed by the police, it does seem that arrest is the preferred approach of GMP officers. From April 2022 to March 2023 inclusive, for example, based on 27 forces, GMP had the lowest ratio for children – with 245 voluntary attendances compared to 4,454 arrests (Bath 2023:12).

There is a pressing need for the GMP guidance in relation to voluntary interviews to be updated in light of the new NPCC (2024b) guidance and to address the issues raised, particularly in relation to legal advice, AA attendance and an L&D assessment. This is necessary to improve uptake and to ensure that VA is implemented in a way that does not undermine key protections for children.

## **6.4 Working with partner agencies in the community**

### **6.4.1 Decision-making in the community following police interview**

For those children who are voluntarily interviewed, or those who are released on bail pending a decision on disposal, their outcome depends substantially on whether they make admissions in interview. In order to identify an appropriate OOCR for a child, the officer in the case must complete the Youth Referral Form, which is processed by their supervisor and the OOCR officer within the district before being reviewed at a weekly Youth Justice Panel (new cases are reviewed on a four-weekly cycle). Each YJS also has a Youth Justice Seconded Police Officer who reviews the referral form once submitted and sits on the panel.

This approach was observed to have a number of obvious advantages. The investigating officer does not need substantive understanding of all the options available. He or she simply provides relevant information about the circumstances of the offence, the approach taken by the child in interview, and the views of the complainant/victim, and the outcome is decided upon by the panel. The structured process enables partner agencies to be brought together in an efficient way to achieve a holistic assessment of the child and the appropriate disposal. The lapse of time before the referral is considered allows for the collating by the YJS of all relevant information about the child and their home circumstances. At the same time, the YJS keep sight of all diversionary activity, particularly community resolutions.

However the research identified a number of disadvantages of the referral form approach:

**6.4.1 Deskillng** - the emphasis on the use of the Youth Referral Form means that response officers, in particular, are not encouraged to develop any particular understanding of the YJS and diversionary options. This was encouraged by one YJS manager who said, "I keep saying to them – they don't need to know the disposals. Just send it through and we'll decide what's the best outcome based on the assessment." At the same time, YJS workers raised concerns about the low level of understanding amongst response officers. As one explained:



“they (response officers) haven’t heard of CCP and they don’t know about gravity scores. So it’s a lot about explaining this to them so they can go out and have informed discussions with victims and the wider community to talk about the implications of an offence.”

An OOCR officer similarly remarked, “Some officers don’t know what they’re doing or why they’re doing it.” Indeed, some frontline officers have so little appreciation of diversion that they might not engage at all with the referral form and process. One response PC remarked, “I’ve not had a crime go through to YJS in four years. It can go to CPS but I don’t bother with YJS.” In the absence of partner agency input at the point of arrest, this is likely to deter response officers from making diversionary, less intrusive, decisions at that stage. Officers were also less likely to be able to explain to complainants/victims about the support that could be put in place for a child coming to attention, rendering them more likely to press for arrest or charge. As noted above, because neighbourhood officers regularly engage with specialist teams and other agencies, they tended to appreciate the expertise of those agencies, often knew how they worked and who to contact to draw on their support. As a neighbourhood PC explained, “We talk to the child about what action can be taken to deal with the offence. We can also go through the YJS and our prevention team as they can help us decide what to do.”

**6.4.2 Lack of feedback** – in not every case is the officer who dealt with the child informed of the outcome of the OOCR panel, although it remains possible for them to identify what happened on the case log. Whilst such feedback is not always required, it means officers do not build an understanding of what disposals are given for particular offences, and whether the child engages. Officers therefore are unable to build a picture of how often OOCRs are used, or of their effectiveness. This means that they have no positive understanding of these interventions to fall back on when they are making decisions at the point of arrest, speaking to complainants, or considering whether to refer to the YJS.

**6.4.3 Delay and understanding the scope for police decision-making** - some officers raised concerns over how long it took the Youth Justice Panel to make a decision, particularly when seeking an informal disposal for a low-level offence. The panels meet weekly, but new cases were reported to take at least four weeks to be heard once they had been submitted, and submission itself was often delayed by the need to obtain authorisation. Officers complained that from a child’s perspective such long delays could lead to them changing their mind about resolving an offence (by way of an apology and/or reparation, for example). If this happened, they then had no choice but to record ‘no further action’. A neighbourhood PC remarked, “The delays in sending cases to the YJS team make it quite hard for us to deal with cases.” Research evidence suggests that timely intervention is key in terms of having an impact (Murdoch 2015).

Allied to this issue was a misunderstanding over the requirement for YJS referral for community resolutions. While local (GMP’s ‘*Youth Community Resolution*’ guidance) and national guidance allows officers to impose a first community resolution without making a YJS referral, this was not the understanding of the police, including OOCR officers. Frontline officers commented on not being able to give a child a community resolution and there was uncertainty about whether this disposal could be used following a conviction. A response PC said, for example, “I used to deal with a young child by sitting them down and they apologised for what they’d done. Mum was happy but we can’t do this anymore, the case

has to go to YJS.” The legislation<sup>16</sup> does allow an officer to make this decision, on the authorisation of their supervisor alone, if it was the child’s first community resolution, and details of the outcome are then sent on to YJS.

An OOCR officer commented on the formulaic approach adopted in relation to children, “Referrals have to be in the correct format. We’re in a production line, however much you might not like it.” However, he also accepted that in managing a high volume of cases the process needed to be streamlined when saying, “The supervisors are drowning under high volumes of paperwork ... the YJS are snowed under.” Agreeing with this comment, an inspector remarked, “Out-of-court disposals are involving supervisors in huge amounts of paperwork, it’s like a production line. YJSs are snowed under too.” While the detailed work of the panel is important when deciding if a case can be diverted from court, a more flexible approach, particularly when dealing with low-level offences, could help to reduce the time officers spend on cases, as well as helping by making quicker decisions.

GMP officers are not currently utilising their discretion and full powers to respond to a child’s behaviour without formally referring them to a full Youth Justice Panel. Adopting a ‘fast-track’ approach for low-level offences, supported by input from the YJS, as promoted in GMP’s *‘Alternative to arrest and police custody framework for children and young people’*, would reduce the volume of cases to be reviewed by the panel.<sup>17</sup> It would also mean that a community resolution or Outcome 22 could be imposed within a few days of an offence having been committed. This would help reduce the number of cases where, following a delay, children change their mind and are no longer prepared to engage in an intervention. However, early input from the YJS at point of arrest would likely require additional funding.

## **6.5 Factors leading to children’s cases not being referred for an OOCR**

There was some evidence that the OOCR triaging process operated in an unduly restrictive way, preventing diversion in cases which might be suitable. Frontline officers were informed that there could be no second community resolution within a year, no second caution/conditional caution within 2 years, and no OOCR for similar offences within 5 years. Not only are such time spans very long where a child is concerned but these limitations are not in line with the more flexible approach to OOCRs set out in legislation. Decisions are now required to be based on individual cases rather than having a tariff-based approach that can soon end up with a child going to court. It was also not clear that frontline officers were always aware of, and factoring in, child-specific provisions when making the decision whether to refer a child. These include the 10-point checklist for looked after children and the CPS and NPCC guidelines on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences.<sup>18</sup>

**6.5.1 The need for an admission or ‘acceptance of responsibility’ for an OOCR** - there was evidence that frontline officers, and indeed more senior and specialist officers as well, did not appreciate the distinction between the level of acceptance of offending required for an OOCR. Whilst a youth caution and a youth conditional caution requires a formal admission to be recorded (typically in a police interview in custody or on a voluntary basis), a community resolution requires only an ‘acceptance of responsibility’, and an Outcome 22 requires no

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<sup>16</sup> Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO).

<sup>17</sup> GMP has developed an alternative framework to the arrest and detention pathway. This includes a flowchart to help guide officers’ decision-making to help avoid bringing children into custody, requiring supervisors to be notified of alternative steps taken.

<sup>18</sup> CPS/NPCC, Guidelines on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences, [Guideline on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences v5.0 \(college.police.uk\)](https://college.police.uk/guidelines/guideline-on-the-cautioning-and-charging-of-knife-crime-offences-v5.0)

form of acceptance at all.<sup>19</sup> Without a formal admission from the child, officers were under the impression that an OOCR could not be imposed and instead ‘no further action’ (NFA) was often taken. A response sergeant encapsulated the general understanding, “They’ll make ‘no comment’ or deny it and we then have to write it off as an NFA.” Under the impression that they were not able to refer these children to the YJS, this limited what officers felt they could do, leading to some preferring to make an arrest because this was seen to deliver a measure of punishment: “Our hands are tied. We can give them a bollocking at the scene or there’s custody to teach them a lesson” (Response PC).

While there is no published data available nationally on OOCRs imposed in the community, police custody record data (discussed above) reveals that the majority of children detained by the police have ‘no further action’ (NFA) taken against them. To help reduce the high number of NFAs in children’s cases more generally, the police nationally are encouraged to use Outcome 22, which does not require any form of acceptance for the offence, unless the disposal is being used as a deferred prosecution (NPCC 2022). This distinction was not always appreciated by officers; indeed the guidance provided under the *‘Youth Offending Flow Chart Following Admission’* perhaps reinforces this misapprehension. For example, an OOCR officer remarked, “We need an admission when using OOCRs, including community resolutions and Outcome 22”, and an inspector observed, “YJS won’t touch it if there’s no admission.”

There is also a significant issue nationally with children making no comment responses in the police interview and, in the absence of an admission, being charged and sent to the youth court (Kemp and others 2023). A GMP OOCR officer reported that magistrates were increasingly returning cases to the YJS for an OOCR to be considered after the child indicated at court that they were willing to accept responsibility for the offence. In one day, he reported that 25 cases were sent back from the court in this way. It is clearly important for the full extent of OOCR availability to be exploited in these circumstances before charge is considered. Guidance for officers about OOCR options in the absence of a full admission, particularly community resolutions and Outcome 22, and training to reinforce the learning, might obviate some of these difficulties.

With racial bias having been identified in the criminal justice system, it is acknowledged that Black and mixed heritage children may not have confidence that the police will treat them fairly, or trust in the advice given to them by their lawyer (Lammy 2017; HMIP 2021). This can lead to more Black and mixed heritage children than their white counterparts exercising their right to silence during the police interview, which then leads to a higher proportion of these children being prosecuted (Ofori and others 2022). To help address the overrepresentation of Black and mixed heritage children at the early stages of the criminal process, it is important that a flexible approach is adopted when allowing ‘an acceptance of responsibility’ to be sufficient to divert a case from court, rather than requiring a full admission during a police interview.

With GMP custody record data indicating that there is racial disproportionality at the point of arrest, it is important, when training frontline officers, that CCP focuses on structural inequality, racism and discrimination, recognising the need for flexibility when referring Black and mixed heritage children to the YJS for consideration of an OOCR. This includes in cases where ‘no comment’ responses were made to police questions but the child accepts

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<sup>19</sup> NPCC (2023).

responsibility for the offence, as this will help to reduce racial disparities found within the youth justice system.

## 6.6 Recent changes made by GMP to help reduce arrests of children

The number of children arrested by GMP has reduced significantly over recent months. In July to October 2024, for example, 1,235 children were arrested, compared to 1,501 during the same four months in 2023, a fall of 18%.<sup>20</sup> There are two recent initiatives, developed by GMP during the course of the research, which are likely to have contributed to this positive progress.

**6.6.1 Custody Coordination Unit (CCU): triaging children** – the CCP ‘Child in Custody’ initiative, set up in September 2023, is helping to turn around the recent rise in the number of child arrests, with restrictions being placed on a child coming into custody. This has substantially been achieved through the work of the new Custody Co-ordination Unit (CCU) triaging child arrests, and flagging those who should appropriately be dealt with by other means. Some frontline officers felt that the CCU is helping to reduce the number of children brought into custody at night. As a response PC observed, “If we have a child who comes to notice after 11:00, then a VA is now our first port of call.”

To bolster the role of the CCU, it would be helpful for officers within the Unit to be able to call on the help and support of other agencies when deciding how to deal with cases. In relation to children, for example, it would help enormously if they could have early contact (virtually or over the phone) with a YJS officer so that their expertise when working with children in the youth justice system, and their specific knowledge of children already engaging with them, can be used to help avoid bringing children into custody unless it is necessary to do so. It is also important for the CCU to have early contact with Children’s Services so they can help in finding alternative accommodation when custody is being considered for the child as an effective place of safety.

**6.6.2 The role of supervisors in overseeing arrest and detention of a child** - since July 2024, GMP requires supervisors to have oversight of the arrest of a child and the decision to bring them into police custody. Under the ‘Supervisory Notification of Children Arrests – Guiding Principles’, supervisors have to consider whether the arrest complies with Code G and that all appropriate alternatives to detention have been fully explored. They also have to assess the severity of the offence based on the Child Gravity Matrix.<sup>21</sup>

## 6.7. Recommendations

There are indications across the study that actions short of arrest are not being fully considered, or that officers feel less confident to take them. The observations revealed a lack of clarity amongst frontline officers, and within GMP more broadly, with regard to the range and availability of OOCRs. GMP have recently produced useful guidance for frontline officers to support wider use of these diversionary measures, notably: the ‘*Youth Offending Flowchart on Admission*’, the ‘*Community Resolutions*’ guidance document and the ‘*Alternative to arrest and police custody framework for children and young people*’.

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<sup>20</sup> More recently, while 1,703 children were arrested in March to June 2024, this compares to 1,235 child arrests from July to October 2024, a fall of 27%.

<sup>21</sup> There are other requirements under the Guiding Principles: consider whether it is necessary to arrest based on preservation of evidence; consider the threat, harm and risk of bringing a child into custody; consider all aspects of the child’s vulnerabilities and welfare in reaching a decision; and consider the impact of the crime/incident on victims, community impact and the public interest.

However, the data indicates that these documents are not being widely used as yet and that there is particular uncertainty around Outcome 22: when it should be used, whether Outcome 22 must operate as a deferred prosecution/deferred caution in every instance, and who can decide to impose an Outcome 22 (and on the basis of what information). This lack of clarity reflects national challenges in achieving consistent understanding and application of OOCRs, and the need for national guidance on the use of OOCRs for children. This is being progressed by the Centre for Justice Innovation, with support from the Youth Endowment Fund. GMP have accepted an offer to work with the Centre for Justice Innovation in developing clearer guidance for OOCRs, including Outcome 22, and it is hoped that this collaboration will feed into the development of national guidance.

Additionally, the evidence suggests that GMP officers are not utilising their discretion and full powers to respond to a child's behaviour without formally referring a child for a full OOCR panel. Adopting a 'fast-track' approach for low-level offences, supported by input from the YJS, as promoted in the alternative pathway guidance for children, would reduce the volume of cases to be reviewed by the panel. It would also mean that a community resolution or Outcome 22 can be imposed within a few days of an offence having been committed. This would reduce the number of cases where children change their mind and are no longer prepared to engage in an intervention. Additional funding will be required to enable the YJS to be involved early on in cases, although there will be cost savings as a result of reducing the number of cases to be referred to the OOCR panel. This 'point-of-arrest' diversion is recognised as a distinct and substantially different response to formal 'out-of-court disposals' by the YJB's National Standards (Ministry of Justice/YJB 2022:8).

**Recommendation 7:** *GMP to work with the Centre for Justice Innovation and YJS partners to:*

- *Produce guidance for GMP and local partners (and potentially nationally) on the use of OOCRs, including Outcome 22s; and*
- *Review and promote GMP's alternative to arrest pathway as a protocol for point-of-arrest diversion. This would enable a decision to be made by an arresting officer and their supervisor, with input from the YJS, that a child need not be arrested and interviewed, and can be dealt with informally, given a community resolution by the police or referred to the YJS, or other partner agencies, for a voluntary intervention (without the need for a full referral for consideration by the OOCR panel).*

For those cases in which a police interview is required, frontline officers identified significant challenges in relation to organising a VA, as an alternative to an arrest. GMP's 'Voluntary Attendance Interview: Procedure' (as updated April 2024) contains very helpful guidance for frontline officers which should address some of the concerns raised by frontline officers on shift observations. However there are several areas where additional material is required.

**Recommendation 8:** *That GMP update the voluntary interview guidance as follows:*

- *To ensure compliance with NPCC's (2024b) 'Voluntary Interview Guidance';*
- *To reflect the importance, where the suspect is a child, of considering VA in the first instance, as an alternative to arrest;*
- *To include a process by which the interviewing officer can facilitate timely engagement of a lawyer (including duty solicitor) (where the right to legal advice is exercised);*
- *To include the assessment of the individual's fitness to be interviewed by the interviewing officer, and,*

- *To reflect accurately GMP guidance on 'Community Resolutions'.*

The observations also illustrate that the production of guidance documents for pre-arrest diversion is insufficient to ensure that diversion (or VA) does in fact occur in line with that guidance. It is clear that updated guidance documents will need embedding through training, and reinforcement from supervisors. Additionally, it was plain on observations that, even with guidance available, the process is complex and it can be difficult for a frontline officer to know how to divert a child who has come to attention and to take action short of arrest. They would, it appears, be assisted by a toolkit/flowchart to support decision-making at that point.

**Recommendation 9:** *That GMP provide to frontline officers a toolkit/flowchart to support diversionary decision-making when a child comes to police attention as a potential suspect in an offence. (See example Toolkit/Flowchart at Annex 2)*

**Recommendation 10:** *That training be provided to frontline officers, and their supervisors, on maximising opportunities for diversion and utilising new/updated guidance documents and toolkits. This should be accompanied by refresher training on powers to search and seize items without the need for arrest, and on utilising police protection powers under s46 Children Act 1989.*

**Recommendation 11:** *As part of the ongoing RCRP initiative, that GMP explore with partners, particularly Children's Services, Residential Placement Providers and YJS teams, a child-specific expansion of RCRP. This will require clear protocols between GMP and those partner agencies/bodies to help ensure that children are not arrested and detained for low-level offences, to prevent custody being used, effectively, as a place of safety.*

## 7. Recommendations for GMP's Senior Leadership Team

The data reveals that GMP's investment in CCP has resulted in some significant advances in making GMP a child-centred force. However, there remain some sizeable challenges embedding the strategy. For GMP to continue to make advances in this area, and potentially to lead the national work on CCP, CCP needs to be embedded within the force's overarching strategy and force delivery plan (for example within GMP's 'Plan on a Page') and emphasised at the very highest level by senior leaders.

Additionally, there is evidence, both in GMP but also nationally, that performance indicators, and other improvement initiatives, which do not distinguish between the policing of children and adults, are liable to frustrate CCP initiatives. At present, frontline officers in GMP are operating under the perception that there are performance indicators for arrest and stop and search. This is undermining the efforts made by frontline officers to build relationships with children in the community that support desistance and foster positive relationships with the police and authority more generally. The current approach focuses on the quantity of engagements with a child rather than ensuring the quality of those interactions and that positive outcomes are being achieved. This has led to higher arrest rates for children, although recent changes seem to be having the desired effect, with CCP helping to reduce the number of children arrested.

**Recommendation 11:** *That CCP be championed in force communications and referred to explicitly in GMP's overarching strategic planning documents and future versions of GMP's 'Plan on a Page'.*

**Recommendation 12:** *That separate performance indicators for the policing of children are developed, to value and promote child-centred approaches. These indicators would focus not on the raw number of stop and searches and arrests, but on the quality of interactions with children and on positive outcomes following such encounters, including the use of alternatives to arrest (such as voluntary interview) and diversionary decision-making.*



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## Glossary

AA	Appropriate adult
APP	Authorised Professional Practice
ASB	Anti-social behaviour
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CCP	Child-Centred Policing
CCE	Child criminal exploitation
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
CCU	Custody Co-Ordination Unit
CAP	Care Action Plan
CPIU	Child Protection Investigation Unit
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
DIT	Detainee Investigation Team
EDT	Emergency Duty Team
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.
HMIP	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (also called the Bridge)
NAAN	National Appropriate Adult Network
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OOCR	Out of Court Resolution
OOCD	Out of Court Disposal
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
PW	PoliceWorks
SPOC	Single Point of Contact
UNCRC	Unit Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VA	Voluntary attendance/attendee
VCSE	Voluntary, community and social enterprise
YJS	Youth Justice Service/Youth Offending Service/Youth Offending Team

## Annex 1: Methodology

The report draws on the following fieldwork:

- Response and neighbourhood shift observations: 12 shifts (16 observation logs) across 2 policing districts – Area 1 and Area 2. Researchers accompanied frontline officers (Response and Neighbourhood) on shift, observing interactions with children (under 18s) in the community who came to attention. Researchers also spoke with frontline officers' supervisors and managers within policing teams. Fieldnotes were kept of the observations and informal discussions with police participants.
- Field interviews with front line officers: 24 response officers, 9 neighbourhood officers, 4 other officers (from the Detainee Investigation Team and Child Protection Investigation Unit). The interviews were conducted as duties allowed during the shift and were informed by a topic guide. Discussions explored, in greater depth, the officer's understanding of CCP, their decision-making in relation to the arrest and detention of children and considered, with the officer, the factors driving the use of custodial arrest and the barriers to the use of alternative approaches, including engagement of partner agency support.
- 19 semi-structured interviews with representatives of specialist teams within GMP and officers of external agencies whose services are, or could be, made available, to support children and their families at the time a child comes to police attention. These interviews lasted approximately 40-60 minutes and were conducted virtually via Teams or face-to-face depending on the interviewee's availability. Interviewees included: L&D workers, YJS workers/managers, AAs, call handlers, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Inspectors, a mental health nurse, YJS officers and OOCR officers.
- Review of BWV footage in relation to 40 stop and search incidents (23 Area 1 and 17 Area 2) and analysis of electronic data drawn from 435 child stop and search incidents recorded in areas 1 and 2 in January and February 2024.
- Data analysis: Force-wide police custody data for children April 2023 - January 2024.
- The analysis also draws on publicly available inspection reports relating GMP, for example the GMP PEEL Assessments (HMICFRS 2021, 2023a), the GMP HMICFRS Custody Inspection Reports (HMICFRS 2023b) and the GMP ['Plan on a Page'](#).

The qualitative data has been thematically analysed, using NVivo, and subjected to an iterative review process to clarify themes. The quantitative data has been cleaned and subjected to descriptive statistics, logistic regression and multiple linear regression.

## **Annex 2: Toolkit/Flowchart for Decision-Making at Point of arrest**

See overleaf.

## Have you fully assessed the child's circumstances and vulnerability?

- What are the child's home circumstances/ Is the child 'looked after'?
- Are they known to YJS or Children's Services? Contact YJS/Children's Services/EDT to understand current engagement/support

## Point of arrest flowchart for frontline officers

Yes

No

Contact relevant services/family members for

Consider the [Child Gravity Matrix](#), taking into account aggravating and mitigating factors

Score

1 - 2

Score

2+

### Does any formal action need to be taken?

Consider, can the child:

- be removed from the location?
- be spoken to with parent(s) or carer(s)?
- referred to YJS on a voluntary basis?

Yes

### Suitable for community resolution by police?

Consider:

- GMP guidance (link)
- contact YJS or OOCR officer for advice

No

### Can child be VA'ed?

Consider:

- a child is unlikely to abscond
- VA enables attendance with AA and solicitor at a time suitable to all
- VA interview more likely to be fruitful (than interview in custody) where multiple or complex allegations

No

If considering arresting to reduce Threat, Harm and Risk, consider:

- seeking alternative safe accommodation working with Children's Services.
- use of Police Protection powers (s46 Children Act 1989) where removal required to safeguard from significant harm.

### What are the Code G grounds?

Remember:

- Arrest should be a 'last resort' for children (UN Convention on Rights of the Child) as per College of Policing's APP.
- Best interests of the child must be a primary consideration
- Duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (s11 Children Act 2004)
- Investigative convenience is **not** necessity
- Timing - if evening, what will be achieved overnight?
- Where forensics/samples/search required Custody Officer should consider bail once achieved

Consider impact of crime/incident, including view of the victim, community impact, and public interest. Ensure that the victim compliance code is considered

