



An Evaluation of The Thames Valley Police 'Act Now' Youth Knife Crime Initiative

The Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing

September 2025

1. Executive summary

The Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing (CCEBP) were commissioned in the spring of 2024 to review the Thames Valley Police (TVP) Act Now (U18) and Op Deter (Adult) knife crime programs. These two programs were very different in nature. The focus of the Op Deter initiative was sending the detainees quickly to court so that they could be held accountable. The focus of the Act Now initiative was to deliver a holistic intervention program, led by the Youth Offending team (YOT), with the goal of preventing reoffending and addressing underlying causes of the behaviour. It did not focus on getting the case to court. This report is the review of the Act Now program.

Despite the best efforts of TVP, the TVP project team and the TVP data scientist, because of pending IT changes in Force there were very substantial gaps in the available data and missing cases. The patterns in the gaps in the data were explored in detail and at length, but they could not be addressed. Ultimately the gaps were so significant that it was not possible to construct a control group (a fair comparison group) and undertake a traditional comparative analysis. This report therefore provides a descriptive analysis of the data but also sets out an approach that could now be adopted after the Force wide rollout, to gather the necessary data to support a quantitative evaluation with a control group. CCEBP have offered free support to assist the design of the process to capture this data with the new TVP data scientist when the changes to the Force IT system are complete.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, CCEBP undertook a number of interviews with staff and officers working on Act Now, including the program lead. This is presented in a thematic qualitative evaluation. This qualitative evaluation is also supported by seven detailed but anonymised case studies of young people referred to Act Now and a landscape review of the variations in youth diversion approaches across the Forces of England and Wales. This qualitative analysis particularly illustrates the added value of the work that is being done by Act Now staff and signposts the good practice that could be adopted as the force-wide rollout embeds.

The report concludes with recommendations for changes to the structure of the delivery of Act Now across the Force, and the reiteration of the offer to support the design of the data capture for a quantitative evaluation capable of meeting the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale Level 3 standard.

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3. Abbreviations and Key Terms

CCEBP	The Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing. The author of this report.
CCHI count	Cambridge Crime Harm Index, a measure of crime harm rather than crime count
CAHMS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CMG	Community Monitoring Group
GMP	Greater Manchester Police
LPA	Local Policing Area
Maryland Scale	The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale is a tool used to evaluate the rigour and quality of research studies, particularly in the context of policy impact evaluations. It's a five-point scale, with scores ranging from 1 (least robust) to 5 (most robust), based on the study's methodology and implementation quality. The scale helps assess how well a study addresses potential biases and assumptions, particularly in real-world settings.
MK	Milton Keynes
Niche	Niche RMS365 a records management system used by many Police forces.
NPCC	National Police Chief's Council
ONS CSS	Office of National Statistics Crime Severity Score
OOCD	Out of Court disposal
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
Outcome 22	A Home Office approved outcome code for a criminal investigation used in England and Wales, when someone participates in a diversionary, educational, or intervention activity, leading to no further action in the case.
PPIED	Prevention, Prosecution, Intervention, Education and Diversion. A Greater Manchester Police youth diversion initiative.
Prevalence	Prevalence of offending is how frequently offending occurs within a cohort of individuals or within a period of time.
PSM	Propensity Score Matching (a statistical modelling technique used to create a control group that is similar to the treatment group on key measures)
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial (the gold standard in experimental design)
RPA	Robotic Process Automation
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs (assessment)
YOS	Youth Offending Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team
YPDAS	Young People's Drug and Alcohol Support
YRI	Youth Restorative Intervention

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6. Introduction

The Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing (CCEBP) were commissioned to undertake a retrospective qualitative and quantitative review of the Thames Valley Police (TVP) response to knife crime for adults and juveniles. The Force had a very different approach for those arrested for possession of a knife or a knife crime aged under 18 and those 18 and over; the implications of this will be returned to in the report. This report sets out the evaluation of the under 18 pathway 'Act Now'.

The TVP approach for offenders aged 18 and over is known as Op Deter. This applies to adults arrested for possession of a knife, or bladed article or knife enabled violent crime. Op Deter seeks to deliver a more robust approach to this type of crime in order to have a more effective deterrent. The Op Deter goals are faster charging of suspects, sending more people in custody to court and 'severing' cases so that the knife possession cases can appear at court faster whilst more complicated linked cases progress through a slower route. The approach for offenders under 18 (Act Now) is very different. This report sets out the evaluation of that pathway.

The Act Now pathway focused on delivering a holistic intensive intervention led by PCC funded posts within the Youth Offending team (YOT). Act Now was piloted in Slough and Milton Keynes and subsequently rolled out across the Force area.

Act Now seeks to look at the underlying causes of offending to determine if the young person is being exploited, what challenges they are facing, and to address these whilst simultaneously encouraging them to engage to break the cycle of offending.

The evaluation sets out the eligibility criteria and process for Act Now before describing the data that was collected throughout the pilot. It then provides a quantitative assessment of the data that were available, its limitations, the insight that can be gained and makes recommendations for the data that should be captured in order that a future evaluation able to discern cause and effect could be conducted. It then sets out the methodology for the structured interviews with staff involved in Act Now and presents the findings which are themed according to, program design and resourcing, referral pathways and eligibility, delivery and practice, policy and system challenges and external interface and wider context. Finally, the report concludes summarising the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot and recommendations for adaptation and future data capture.

7. What is Act Now

The Act Now program is a multi-faceted youth intervention initiative taking referrals from police custody suites in Milton Keynes and Slough. It is designed to prevent serious violence, reduce reoffending, and strengthen the resilience of children, young people, and their families. At its core is a relationship-based practice model, where trust and consistency underpin engagement with young people, parents, and carers. A key feature of Act Now is the early identification of needs. Every participant receives a Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) assessment, ensuring that hidden challenges are recognised and addressed. Specialist support is available, including mental health provision through a dedicated CAMHS Senior Practitioner, substance misuse interventions delivered by the Young Person's Drug and Alcohol Service (YPDAS), and tailored education, training, and employment guidance. The Act Now program also works closely with partners such as Focused Deterrence within the



Contextual Safeguarding Team, creating a joined-up response to youth violence and exploitation.

The program delivers a wide range of interventions to tackle risks, build protective factors, and support positive futures. These include weapons and knife-crime awareness, emotional wellbeing support, conflict resolution, peer pressure and exploitation awareness, and safe use of social media. Alongside this, young people are encouraged to re-engage with education, training, or employment, and to take part in constructive activities such as sport, music, and dance. Families are supported through one-to-one work with a Family Intervention Worker and access to peer-based parenting programmes, helping to strengthen stability at home.

Overall, Act Now offers holistic and timely support that addresses the drivers of violence and vulnerability, while equipping young people and families with the skills, resilience, and opportunities needed to achieve safer and more positive futures.

8. Eligibility Criteria and Act Now process

Act Now applied to persons under the age of 18 arrested for possession of a knife or bladed article, or knife enabled violent crime entering the custody suites at Slough or Milton Keynes. Act Now seeks to initiate a comprehensive YOTs led intervention and supported referral program for young people, designed to address the root cause of the problem behaviour. When an eligible young person enters Slough or Milton Keynes custody Act Now should speak face to face with them in the presence of an Appropriate Adult. These meetings should take place after the criminal interview between the hours of 9am and 10pm. The Act Now member of staff could be working in the custody suite or remotely but was expected to be able to attend within 90 mins. The evaluation found that the flexible arrangement and shift pattern to ensure coverage between the hours of 9am and 10pm worked well.

There is also an additional requirement for Act Now to have a follow up face to face home visit within 48 hrs. The Act Now worker also makes referrals and keeps in contact with the young person and their appropriate adult throughout the criminal justice journey.

It is important to note that an Act Now intervention can lead to an 'Outcome 22' case closure. Outcome 22 is a diversionary, educational, or intervention activity. It is a disposal option used when an individual has been investigated for a crime, but the police decide not to pursue formal charges after the individual engages in a diversionary intervention. It signifies that while an investigation took place, the police have determined that it is not in the public interest to proceed further, often due to the completion of a specified intervention. This outcome is recorded on the PNC. For Act Now Outcome 22 is an option but all Act Now cases do not have to be closed as Outcome 22.

Act Now uses the Early Support Project (ESP), which is the Youth Diversion and Prevention service for young people in Milton Keynes & Slough. Act Now starts with screening and assessment, and then integrated thereafter within planning, tailor-made direct work and staff supervision. The program aims to wrap the young person in support to prevent reoffending and better manage the risks from ongoing knife possession. If the young person fails to engage or their offending is particularly dangerous, the criminal justice route remains the proper course of action.

9. Timeline for the data

Op Deter (18+) began in July 2022 in Milton Keynes and rolled out across the TVP custody suites. Act Now (U18) began in Milton Keynes in January 2023. Rollout for Op Deter was concluded in July 2023 (Figure-1).

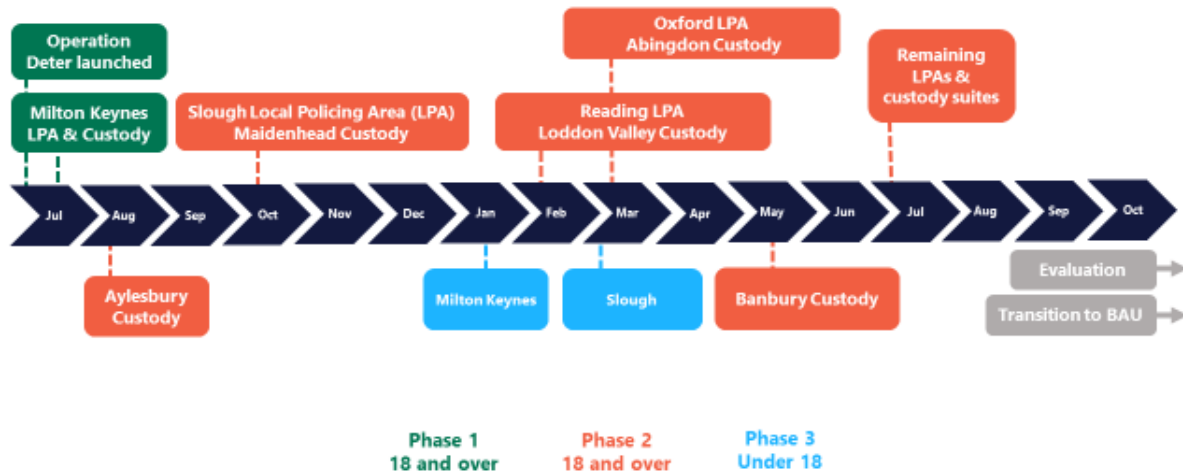


Figure 1 Op Deter and Act Now timeline.

The Force began manually collecting data in July 2022 for Act Now and Op Deter. Every day or every few days data would be manually added to a spreadsheet tracking the eligible and relevant cases that came into custody. A very detailed Excel file had been created and maintained by A/Insp Steve Kelly. This provided details of 2,660 adults and 842 young people (total 3,387) who entered TVP custody between 01/07/2022 and 26/03/2024 for violence offences that were coded as knife enabled, or for possession of knives or bladed articles. The dataset covered all the TVP Local Policing Areas (LPAs). Act Now however commenced in Jan 2023 in Milton Keynes and in March 2023 in Slough. This meant that it started nearly a year after Op Deter. This is relevant as the approach taken by Act Now was very different to Op Deter and this created, to some degree a knife edge depending on the exact age of the offender when they were arrested. Act Now also became business as usual in November 2023.

In relation to the Excel tracker spreadsheet, it recorded that 126 young people were engaged by Act Now in Milton Keynes after go-live, and 76 young people had been dealt with for similar offences before the go live date in Milton Keynes. In Slough, the Excel tracker showed that 76 young people were engaged by Act Now after its go-live in Slough and 25 had been dealt with in custody for similar offences before the go live date.

Considerable efforts were made by the TVP data scientist to improve the dataset and identify what cases were missed, but despite their best efforts the data quality was an issue and a limitation in relation to the evaluation. Discussions had been previously explored in Force in October 2023 regarding potential robotic process automation, however it was confirmed that RPA would not be possible until at least late 2024 due to the impact of the Niche upgrade on their queued work. It was not for the lack of trying, but better data could not be extracted in the lifetime of this evaluation.

10. An overview of the data

The data obtained by the TVP data scientist was generated using specific search criteria. The criteria were.

- (i) the custody record or occurrence had a knife flag, or
- (ii) the Home Office stats code was either 008/26, 008/27, or 008/62.
- (iii) the reason for the arrest was one of the following:
 - *Use another to look after / hide / transport an offensive weapon / knife / blade - Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 (recordable)*
 - *Unauthorised possession in prison of knife or offensive weapon (recordable)*
 - *Possess knife blade / sharp pointed article in a public place - Criminal Justice Act 1988 (recordable)*
 - *Possess a flick knife or gravity knife (recordable)*
 - *Manufacture / sell / hire / possess / offer a flick / gravity knife (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a private place (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with a blade / sharply pointed article on school premises (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with a blade / sharply pointed article in a public place (recordable)*
 - *Possess article with blade / sharply pointed article on school premises (recordable)*
 - *Possess article with blade / sharply pointed article on school / further education premises (recordable)*
 - *Aid / abet a person to threaten with a blade / sharply pointed article in a public place (recordable)*

During the course of the work by the TVP data scientist to extract a more comprehensive dataset that would enable a quantitative evaluation that would be capable of reporting at or approaching Level 3 Maryland Scientific Methods Scale, several issues with the data became apparent, two of which were critical. Firstly, there were individuals on the Op Deter and Act Now spreadsheet that were not found on the custody, Niche or occurrences searches for knife crime offences, and secondly there were custody records on the Op Deter and Act Now spreadsheet identified as knife crime offences that were not found on the search of TVP systems for knife crime offences.

Examining this issue in more detail, 638 records on the Op Deter sheet do not have a linked custody record from the custody search. The TVP data scientist did manage via manual searching to identify custody records for 363, however 275 had no matches from the custody record search. Some of these records were linked to offences that should reasonably pulled a match in the custody record search given the criteria used (e.g. possess an offensive weapon in a public place). The scale of the problem with the data is set out in Table -1 which sets out the number of missing custody records and their breakdown by crime type.

Table 1 Offence descriptions for records that could not be matched to arrest, occurrence or custody records from Op Deter / Act Now spreadsheet.

Offence description	Number missing custody records
Affray	16
Aggravated burglary	4
Common Assault	3
Possess a flick knife or gravity knife	1
Possess an offensive weapon in a private place	26
Possess an offensive weapon in a public place	90

Possess knife / blade sharp pointed article in a public place	93
Robbery	2
S18 GBH	6
Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a private place	10
Threats to kill	8
Use threatening / abusive / insulting words / behaviour with intent to cause fear to of / provoke unlawful violence (with a knife)	1
Violent disorder	1

This gap is likely to impact the accuracy of any results provided by this evaluation, since potentially a significant proportion of knife crime related offences are not being returned in the searches of the TVP data systems. For future evaluations it will be necessary to identify why the searches are not returning all the relevant offences.

To try to identify all the offenders and relevant events linked to them, the individual number of offenders on each sheet and how many were listed as Act Now or Op Deter were identified for each sheet. This is set out in table-2.

The original plan for the CCEBP evaluation was to complete a before and after comparison of the Act Now offenders, to identify whether knife related offending decreased post involvement in Act Now. For Act Now, the aim was to identify a comparison group to compare youths involved in Act Now with a similar cohort of youths who were not involved in Act Now. Unfortunately, due to the significant data issues, any results produced would have questionable reliability, and it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the impact of either Act Now (or Op Deter). Instead, a descriptive assessment of the offenders and their reoffending is provided, with suggestions for key considerations for any future evaluations. CCEBP have also offered to assist the new data scientist / analysts for the force with designing a process for automated data capture that will meet the needs of a quantitative evaluation.

Table 2 Breakdown of the offenders missing and identified in the different datasets.

Datasheet	Total number of records	Total number of individual offenders
Op Deter	3384	3008 individual offenders 141 individuals are identified as Act Now (through the custody suite that they are entered through identified as either Act Now or Act Now CA). 439 youths (under 18) are listed, these individuals entered custody suites not involved in Act Now at the time of entry. 2427 adults (over 18) are listed. 3 records are missing all details
Occurrences	8536 3283 of these records can be matched to those on the	6926 individual offenders 2506 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to occurrences.

	Op Deter sheet	
Custody	9299 2771 of these records can be matched to those on the Op Deter sheet	6927 individual offenders 2427 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to custody records
Arrests	7324 2713 of these records can be matched to those on the Op Deter sheet	5667 individual offenders 2009 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to the arrest records
Missing arrests	1232 offences listed these are from 364 custody records	359 individual offenders All of the custody records listed here can be match to records on the Op Deter sheet, other than one CN2324 This sheet also details whether the case in question was/wasn't Op Deter or Act Now eligible.

11. Act Now Quantitative Evaluation

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Despite the best efforts of TVP, the TVP project team and the TVP data scientist, because of pending IT changes in Force there were very substantial gaps in the available data and missing cases. The patterns in the gaps in the data were explored in detail and at length, but they could not be addressed. Ultimately the gaps were so significant that it was not possible to construct a control group (a fair comparison group) and undertake a traditional comparative analysis. This report therefore provides a descriptive analysis of the data but also sets out an approach that could now be adopted after the Force wide rollout, to gather the necessary data to support a quantitative evaluation with a control group. CCEBP have offered free support to assist the design of the process to capture this data with the new TVP data scientist when the changes to the Force IT system are complete.

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18. What is Act Now

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Overall, Act Now offers holistic and timely support that addresses the drivers of violence and vulnerability, while equipping young people and families with the skills, resilience, and opportunities needed to achieve safer and more positive futures.

19. Eligibility Criteria and Act Now process

Act Now applied to persons under the age of 18 arrested for possession of a knife or bladed article, or knife enabled violent crime entering the custody suites at Slough or Milton Keynes. Act Now seeks to initiate a comprehensive YOTs led intervention and supported referral program for young people, designed to address the root cause of the problem behaviour. When an eligible young person enters Slough or Milton Keynes custody Act Now should speak face to face with them in the presence of an Appropriate Adult. These meetings should take place after the criminal interview between the hours of 9am and 10pm. The Act Now member of staff could be working in the custody suite or remotely but was expected to be able to attend within 90 mins. The evaluation found that the flexible arrangement and shift pattern to ensure coverage between the hours of 9am and 10pm worked well.

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20. Timeline for the data

Op Deter (18+) began in July 2022 in Milton Keynes and rolled out across the TVP custody suites. Act Now (U18) began in Milton Keynes in January 2023. Rollout for Op Deter was concluded in July 2023 (Figure-1).

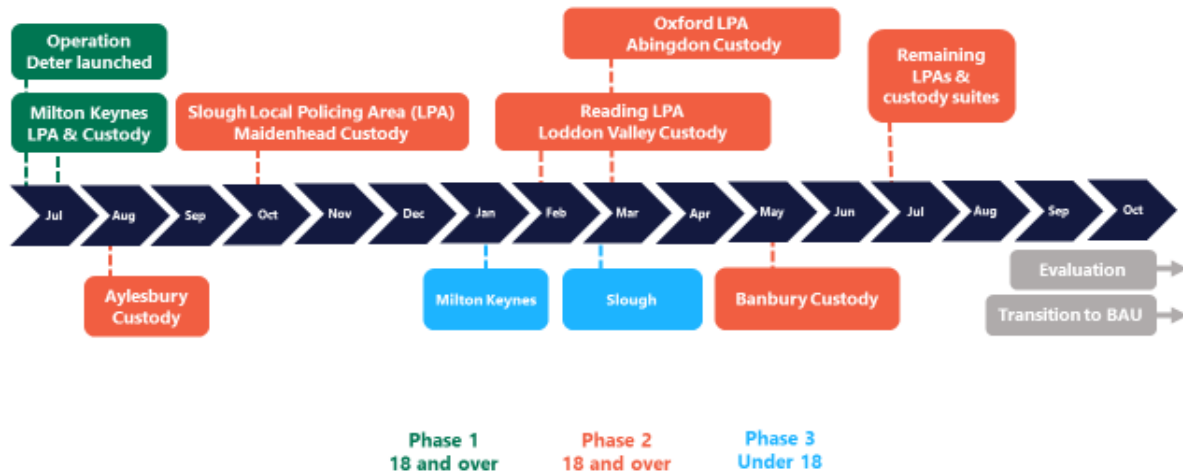


Figure 2 Op Deter and Act Now timeline.

The Force began manually collecting data in July 2022 for Act Now and Op Deter. Every day or every few days data would be manually added to a spreadsheet tracking the eligible and relevant cases that came into custody. A very detailed Excel file had been created and maintained by A/Insp Steve Kelly. This provided details of 2,660 adults and 842 young people (total 3,387) who entered TVP custody between 01/07/2022 and 26/03/2024 for violence offences that were coded as knife enabled, or for possession of knives or bladed articles. The dataset covered all the TVP Local Policing Areas (LPAs). Act Now however commenced in Jan 2023 in Milton Keynes and in March 2023 in Slough. This meant that it started nearly a year after Op Deter. This is relevant as the approach taken by Act Now was very different to Op Deter and this created, to some degree a knife edge depending on the exact age of the offender when they were arrested. Act Now also became business as usual in November 2023.

In relation to the Excel tracker spreadsheet, it recorded that 126 young people were engaged by Act Now in Milton Keynes after go-live, and 76 young people had been dealt with for similar offences before the go live date in Milton Keynes. In Slough, the Excel tracker showed that 76 young people were engaged by Act Now after its go-live in Slough and 25 had been dealt with in custody for similar offences before the go live date.

Considerable efforts were made by the TVP data scientist to improve the dataset and identify what cases were missed, but despite their best efforts the data quality was an issue and a limitation in relation to the evaluation. Discussions had been previously explored in Force in October 2023 regarding potential robotic process automation, however it was confirmed that RPA would not be possible until at least late 2024 due to the impact of the Niche upgrade on their queued work. It was not for the lack of trying, but better data could not be extracted in the lifetime of this evaluation.

21. An overview of the data

The data obtained by the TVP data scientist was generated using specific search criteria. The criteria were.

- (iv) the custody record or occurrence had a knife flag, or
- (v) the Home Office stats code was either 008/26, 008/27, or 008/62.
- (vi) the reason for the arrest was one of the following:
 - *Use another to look after / hide / transport an offensive weapon / knife / blade - Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 (recordable)*
 - *Unauthorised possession in prison of knife or offensive weapon (recordable)*
 - *Possess knife blade / sharp pointed article in a public place - Criminal Justice Act 1988 (recordable)*
 - *Possess a flick knife or gravity knife (recordable)*
 - *Manufacture / sell / hire / possess / offer a flick / gravity knife (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a private place (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with a blade / sharply pointed article on school premises (recordable)*
 - *Threaten a person with a blade / sharply pointed article in a public place (recordable)*
 - *Possess article with blade / sharply pointed article on school premises (recordable)*
 - *Possess article with blade / sharply pointed article on school / further education premises (recordable)*
 - *Aid / abet a person to threaten with a blade / sharply pointed article in a public place (recordable)*

During the course of the work by the TVP data scientist to extract a more comprehensive dataset that would enable a quantitative evaluation that would be capable of reporting at or approaching Level 3 Maryland Scientific Methods Scale, several issues with the data became apparent, two of which were critical. Firstly, there were individuals on the Op Deter and Act Now spreadsheet that were not found on the custody, Niche or occurrences searches for knife crime offences, and secondly there were custody records on the Op Deter and Act Now spreadsheet identified as knife crime offences that were not found on the search of TVP systems for knife crime offences.

Examining this issue in more detail, 638 records on the Op Deter sheet do not have a linked custody record from the custody search. The TVP data scientist did manage via manual searching to identify custody records for 363, however 275 had no matches from the custody record search. Some of these records were linked to offences that should reasonably pulled a match in the custody record search given the criteria used (e.g. possess an offensive weapon in a public place). The scale of the problem with the data is set out in Table -1 which sets out the number of missing custody records and their breakdown by crime type.

Table 3 Offence descriptions for records that could not be matched to arrest, occurrence or custody records from Op Deter / Act Now spreadsheet.

Offence description	Number missing custody records
Affray	16
Aggravated burglary	4
Common Assault	3
Possess a flick knife or gravity knife	1
Possess an offensive weapon in a private place	26
Possess an offensive weapon in a public place	90

Possess knife / blade sharp pointed article in a public place	93
Robbery	2
S18 GBH	6
Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a private place	10
Threats to kill	8
Use threatening / abusive / insulting words / behaviour with intent to cause fear to of / provoke unlawful violence (with a knife)	1
Violent disorder	1

This gap is likely to impact the accuracy of any results provided by this evaluation, since potentially a significant proportion of knife crime related offences are not being returned in the searches of the TVP data systems. For future evaluations it will be necessary to identify why the searches are not returning all the relevant offences.

To try to identify all the offenders and relevant events linked to them, the individual number of offenders on each sheet and how many were listed as Act Now or Op Deter were identified for each sheet. This is set out in table-2.

The original plan for the CCEBP evaluation was to complete a before and after comparison of the Act Now offenders, to identify whether knife related offending decreased post involvement in Act Now. For Act Now, the aim was to identify a comparison group to compare youths involved in Act Now with a similar cohort of youths who were not involved in Act Now. Unfortunately, due to the significant data issues, any results produced would have questionable reliability, and it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the impact of either Act Now (or Op Deter). Instead, a descriptive assessment of the offenders and their reoffending is provided, with suggestions for key considerations for any future evaluations. CCEBP have also offered to assist the new data scientist / analysts for the force with designing a process for automated data capture that will meet the needs of a quantitative evaluation.

Table 4 Breakdown of the offenders missing and identified in the different datasets.

Datasheet	Total number of records	Total number of individual offenders
Op Deter	3384	3008 individual offenders 141 individuals are identified as Act Now (through the custody suite that they are entered through identified as either Act Now or Act Now CA). 439 youths (under 18) are listed, these individuals entered custody suites not involved in Act Now at the time of entry. 2427 adults (over 18) are listed. 3 records are missing all details
Occurrences	8536 3283 of these records can be matched to those on the	6926 individual offenders 2506 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to occurrences.

	Op Deter sheet	
Custody	9299 2771 of these records can be matched to those on the Op Deter sheet	6927 individual offenders 2427 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to custody records
Arrests	7324 2713 of these records can be matched to those on the Op Deter sheet	5667 individual offenders 2009 individuals from the Op Deter sheet can be matched to the arrest records
Missing arrests	1232 offences listed these are from 364 custody records	359 individual offenders All of the custody records listed here can be match to records on the Op Deter sheet, other than one CN2324 This sheet also details whether the case in question was/wasn't Op Deter or Act Now eligible.

22. Act Now Quantitative Evaluation

The Op Deter / Act Now data sheet identified 141 juveniles as participating in Act Now, of this 141 individuals' custody and occurrences records could be matched for 100 of these individuals. On the Op Deter / Act Now spreadsheet, some individuals had multiple entries, e.g., they are associated with more than one arrest, occurrence or custody record. It is unclear based on the brief given if Act Now would be delivered for each of these incidences or only the first one, with the latter representing reoffending. There is also no measure available of treatment integrity, so estimating how much or if the treatment was delivered is impossible based on the current records given.

Overview of the demographics of Act Now offenders

The Act Now offenders were predominantly male (92%), (Figure-1). They were also predominantly (52%) of white North European appearance but there was also a sizeable proportion of African Caribbean offenders (28%) (Figure-2) and the majority (82%) were between the ages of 15 and 17 years old. Figure- 3

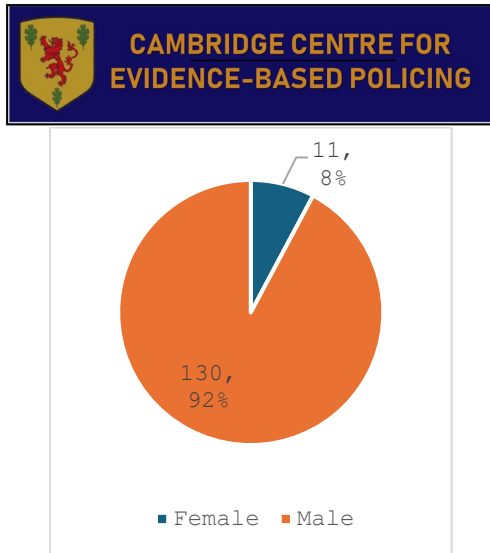


Figure 3 Gender of offenders entered into Act Now

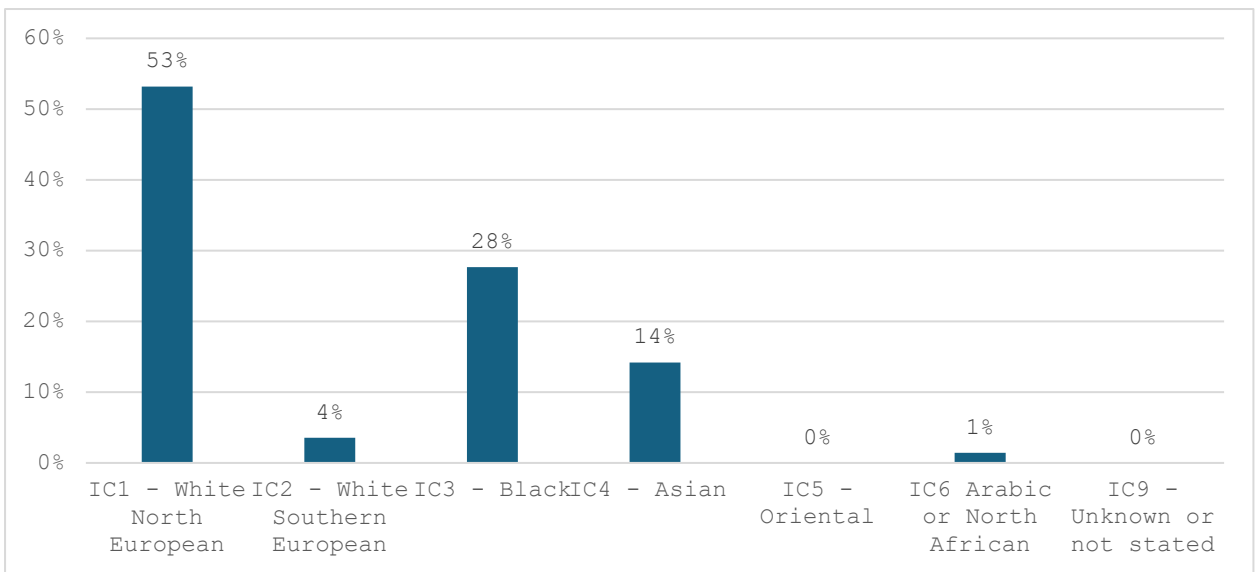


Figure 4: Ethnicities of offenders entered into Act Now. This is based on police recorded ethnicity alone.

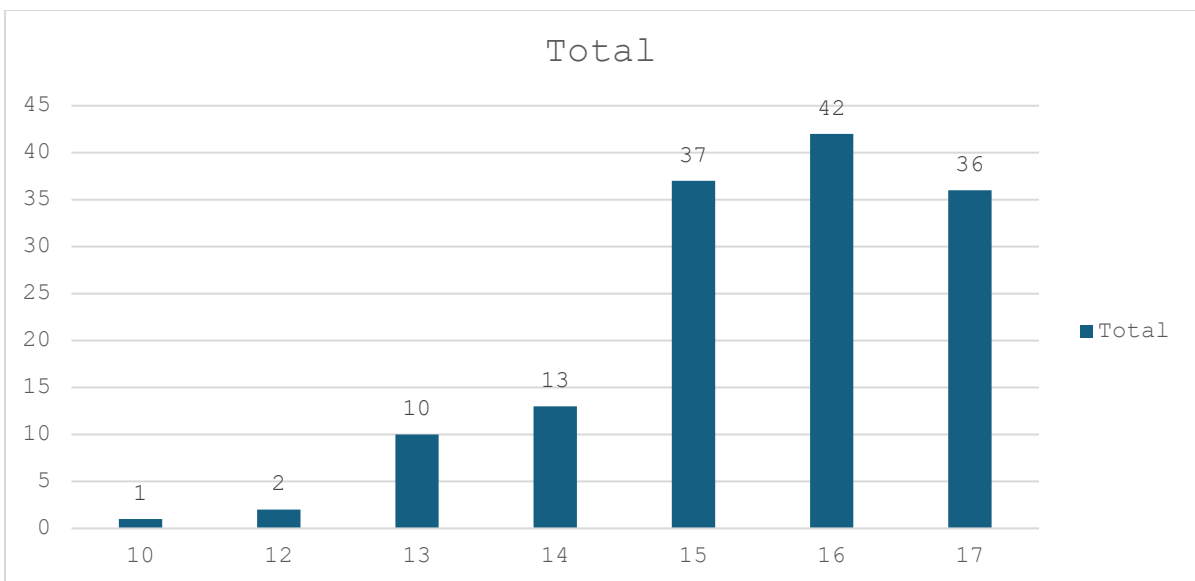


Figure 5: Ages of offenders entered into Act Now

Twelve of the Act Now offenders were also listed on the serious violence dashboard. The most common offence young people were entered into Act Now for was “Possess knife blade / sharp pointed article in a public place - Criminal Justice Act 1988” with 78 offences described as this offence (Table-3).

Some offenders had multiple offences listed on the Op Deter / Act Now spreadsheet, which is why the total number of offences is higher than the number of offenders. When the custody records from the spreadsheet were matched to the arrest sheet using NICHE ID, the offence descriptions found are different at times to those recorded on the Op Deter / Act Now spreadsheet. It is possible the initial arrest is made for one crime type which changes once the full investigation is completed, or it may be a data matching issue where NICHE ID refer to more than one offender or offence.

Table 5 The offence descriptions for offences that offenders entered into Act Now

Offence description	Number of times offence appear for Act Now
Affray	8
Aggravated burglary with intent - dwelling (Machetes & Knives Reported)	1
Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm	1
Attempted robbery	1
Possess a knife blade / sharp pointed article in a public place	10
Possess an Offensive Weapon in a Private Place	11
Possess an Offensive Weapon in a Public Place	31
Possess article with blade / sharply pointed article on school / further education premises	3
Possess knife blade / sharp pointed article in a public place - Criminal Justice Act 1988	78
Possess knife blade / sharp pointed article in public place - Criminal Justice Act 1988	1
Robbery	27
S18 GBH	12
Threaten a person with a blade / sharply pointed article in a public place	7
Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a private place	5
Threaten a person with an offensive weapon / bladed article / corrosive substance in a public place	1
Threats to kill	3
Violent Disorder	2

The spread of the disposal outcomes of the Act Now offenders is shown in Figure 4. There was however a substantial amount of missing data with 85 cases either missing data or awaiting an update; it is clear the most common outcome for this type of offence and offender is no further action (NFA). A very minimal number of cases result in a charge or caution.

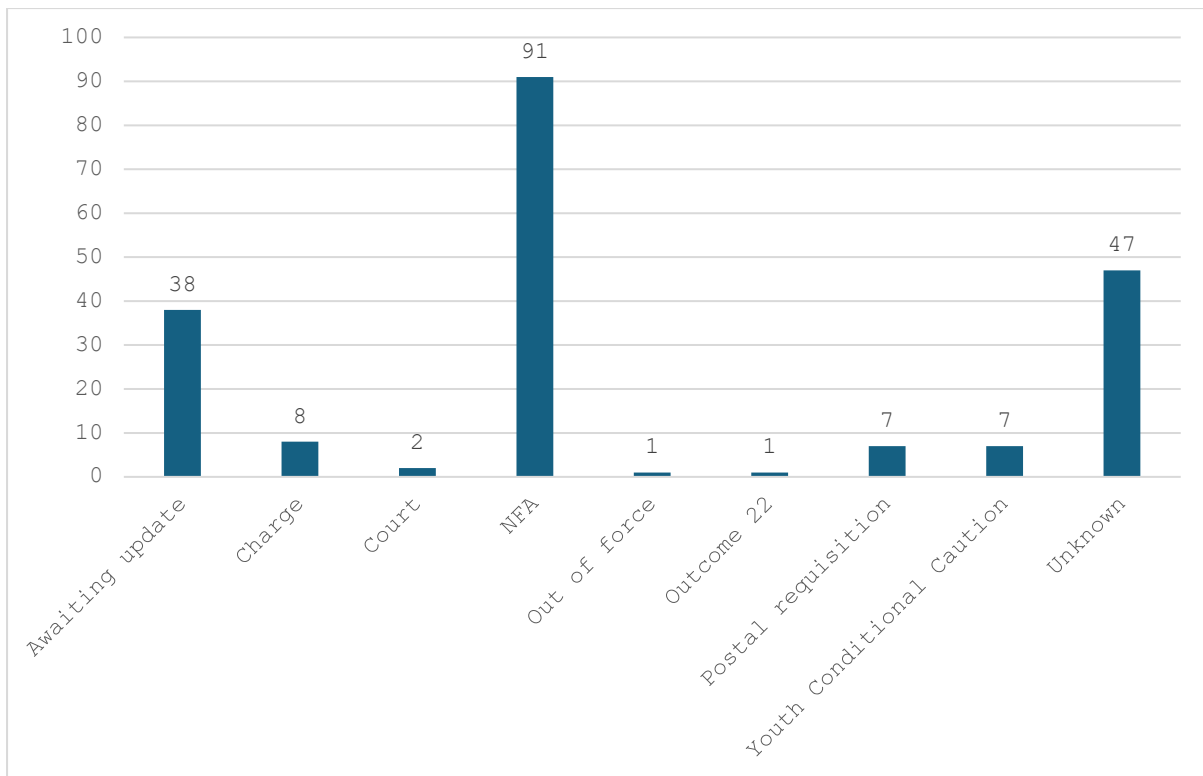


Figure 6: Criminal justice outcomes of Act Now offences

Re-offending post Act Now

The original evaluation plan had been to identify a comparison group against which the Act Now cohort would have been compared, however, due to the substantive data issues this was not possible. TVP provided three data sets from which to draw offending data; occurrences, arrests and custody events. This report will focus on arrest and custody data, rather than the occurrences data. Due to the search criteria used, only weapons related offending will be counted within the data, so there is no measure of other types of offending (e.g. violence or theft) available. None of the Act Now offenders had a full two years of data available post Act Now, so prevalence will be reported for 6 months and 1-year periods, while frequency will be reported for 6 months, 1 year and up to 2 years post Act Now. (Figure-5)

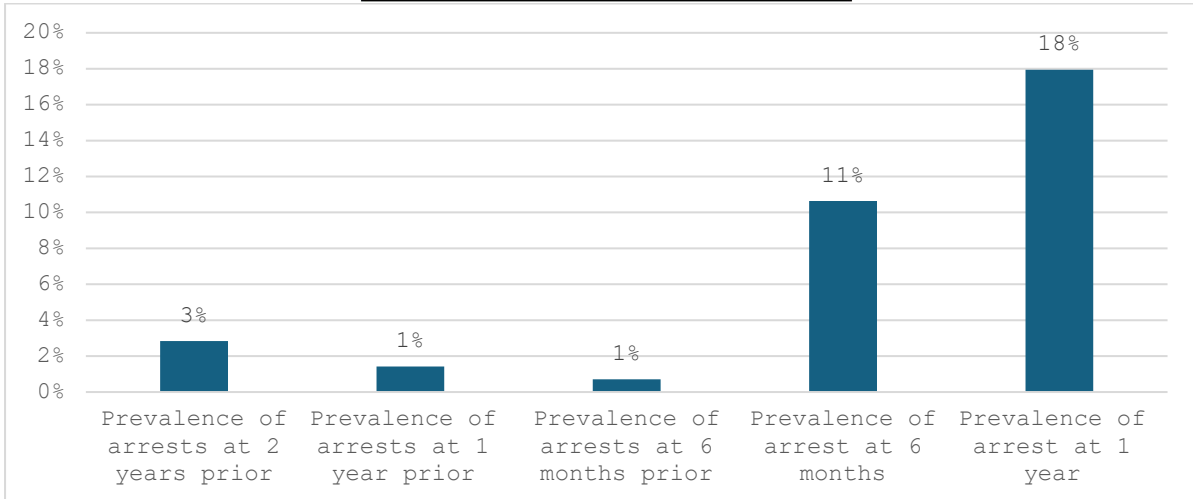
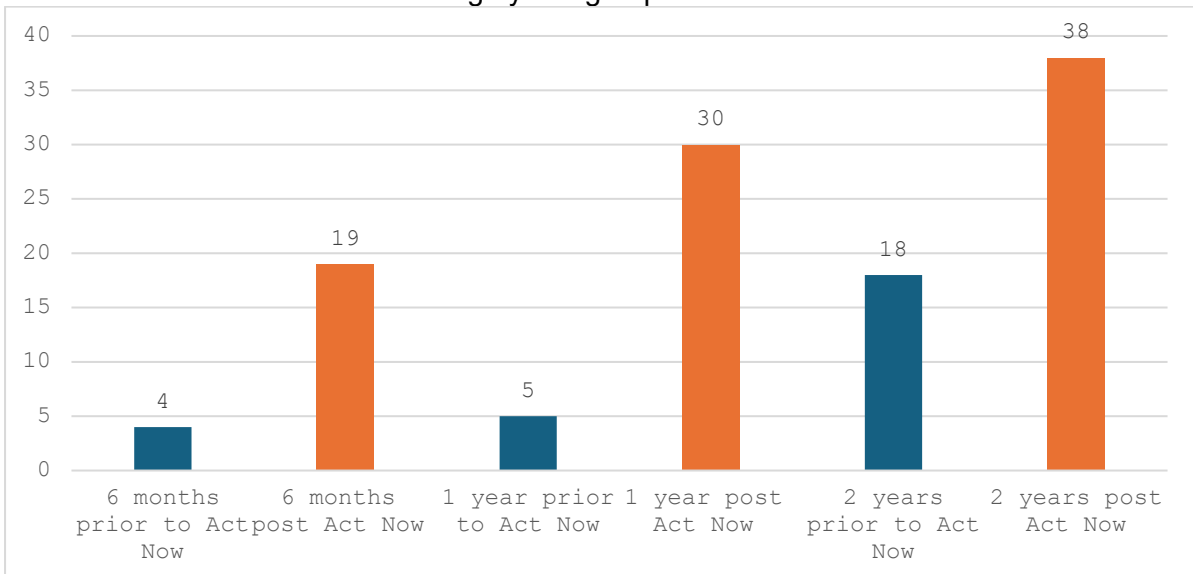


Figure 7: Prevalence of arrests for 2 years prior, 1 year prior, 6 months prior, 6 months post, and 1 year post.

Examining prevalence based on the data given, very few of the Act Now offenders had a knife crime related arrest prior to entry to Act Now within the two years before Act Now began. Post Act Now, these offenders were not particularly prevalent with regards to knife offending with 11% reoffending at 6 months and 18% at the one-year point. This is lower than the suggested reoffending rate for youth from official government publications e.g. the Youth Justice Board suggests a proven reoffending rate of 32.5%¹, although it is unclear what precisely time period they were measuring reoffending over. This is likely due to the data provided only containing knife crime offences rather than all types of offending.

Figure 6 examines the number of arrests after Act Now and indicates that post entry to Act Now, more numerous knife crimes arrests are made. This is consistent whether the 6-month, one year or two-year interval is examined; from the data provided we cannot prove if delivery of Act Now is associated with more numerous arrests. It may be involvement in Act Now places more scrutiny on these offenders and makes their arrest more likely. Or this pattern may be a due to natural escalation in offending by this group of offenders.



¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024#statisticians-comment>

Figure 8 Number of arrests associated with the person IDs before and after the date they entered into Act Now, for 6 months, 1 year and 2 years.

When custody records are examined, it is clear there are more custody records associated with the person IDs than there are arrests; this could indicate that particularly for young people, there is a policy to favour voluntary interview over arrest where possible, or the data systems could be generating multiple custody records per offence (e.g. one record for the initial offence, and then subsequent records for when the offender arrives in on bail).

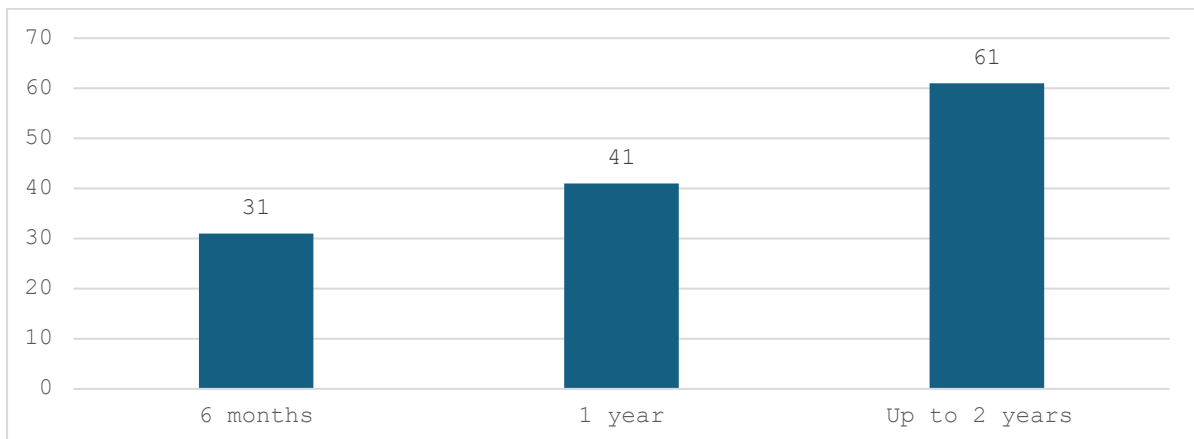


Figure 9 Number of new custody records associated with the person IDs after the date of entry to Act Now.

The key findings, in as far as they can be extracted from the available data are that very few of these offenders had a previous knife crime offence before entering Act Now. The prevalence of knife crime re-offending in this cohort appears to be lower than more general offending and more frequent arrests occur after entry to Act Now, compared to the period prior to entry. Due to methodological limitations, it cannot be proved that any increase is due to the participation in Act Now i.e. there is only correlation not causation.

Limitations of the data

There are different groups of data missing from the Act Now dataset. Cases missed included where Custody did not inform Act Now, where young people were taken to different custody suites even though they may have been arrested in the Milton Keynes or Slough area, and Slough and Milton Keynes young people arrested outside of TVP or cases dealt with by way of caution not under arrest if the matter arose within a school.

The exact sizes of these groups of missing cases are not known. It is possible that they may have different reoffending outcomes. The likely size of these groups for Milton Keynes (MK) are set out below along with their assessed likely relative size as it may be useful for designing a more robust data collection process:

- Young person from MK seen in MK custody and followed up as per full treatment by Act Now (the largest group).
- Young person from MK not seen in MK custody (as Act now not notified) but followed up as per full treatment by Act Now (medium sized group).
- Young person from MK dealt with outside of custody (schools?) and followed up by Act Now (small to medium group).
- Young person from MK dealt with in custody in different Force / different area of TVP and referred to Act Now in MK (small group).



- Young person not from MK or TVP, seen in custody, can't be followed up by Act Now so a referral is made (medium group). This different Force may make very differing usage on an enhanced and timely referral package.

23. CCEBP recommendations for future data collection

Given that it has not been physically possible to gather a suitable dataset to qualitatively evaluate the Act Now program, CCEBP are setting out the most realistic and achievable approach that could be adopted. Notwithstanding the conclusion of this contract CCEBP would be willing at no charge to support the force in the design and set up of a new collection process and to also run the analysis independently. The most achievable and realistic approach would be to undertake a Propensity Score matching process.

Propensity Score Matching (PSM) is a quasi-experimental design. PSM works by creating a comparison group that is statistically similar to those referred to Act Now IOM, thus enabling a more credible estimate of the program's impact. At the point of referral to Act Now a nominal would have their demographic and offending data recorded. This would then be put to one side. At the same, time nominals who met the same criteria (either historically or from another Force) would have the same demographic data recorded. This too would then be set aside. At a two year follow up point, data would then be resampled for the subsequent offending for both cohorts. This would produce the offending pattern and profile of offending for both groups before and after one half of them entering Act Now and would be broader than just knife crime offending. Both groups would be compared by the frequency and seriousness of the offences they had committed. Seriousness could be measured by the allocation of the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI) score, or the Office of National Statistics Crime Severity Score (ONS CSS) for each offence.

The suggested criteria to record and match against are set out below:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Date of first offence
- Time and dates of the offence that triggered Act Now.
- Most recent offence by category (that led to Act Now referral)
- Number of offences and arrests
- Number of violent offences

The strengths of a PCM process are that it makes fairer comparisons than simple before/after or unmatched group comparisons. It is transparent and replicable. It can also be adjusted for multiple covariates. TVP could engage with a '*Most Similar Force*' without any comparable Act Now program similar to YOTs business as usual approach, and data gathering would be a slow burn task that could be reviewed periodically.

The limitations of this approach are that it can only match for observable characteristics — unmeasured factors can still bias results. The matching quality depends on data completeness and variable selection and access to the data of another Force. PCM also requires large datasets to find good matches and preserve statistical power but this would not necessarily be a problem in a neighbouring Force. It would be necessary to run the data collection for an

extended period to find statistically significant results, but as the Act Now program is force wide this would be less of an issue.

If it was not possible for TVP to secure data from another Force to conduct a comparison with a Home Office *Most Similar Force* (Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Avon and Somerset, Staffordshire or Devon and Cornwall), an alternative option would exist from the time prior to the start of the Act Now pilot for juveniles who had reached the age of 18 and were not longer eligible for Act Now.

Act Now started in Jan 2023 in Milton Keynes and March 2023 in Slough. The pilot concluded in November 2023 but then continued as business as usual in Milton Keynes and Slough. The remaining Local Policing areas in TVP have also now adopted the Act Now approach. This means that there is a cohort of young people who, post COVID, went through business as usual in TVP and were not impacted on by Act Now. The implications of this are that it should be technically possible to construct a control group using TVP data.

24. Case studies of Act Now interventions

Seven case studies of young persons referred to Act Now were obtained. Their case studies represent a diverse set of circumstances, carrying the knife / blade for protection, use in an assault, use to steal and possession for likely self-harm.

Whilst the case studies represent only a small sample, a number of themes were apparent. The young people presented with multiple and overlapping challenges, including poor mental health, substance misuse, communication difficulties, neurodiversity, and disrupted relationships with parents or carers. These needs often went unidentified before referral to Act Now. The young people had difficulties engaging with education, whether due to exclusion, poor attendance, or strained relationships with schools. Peer pressure and coercion were also recurring risk factors and several young people were influenced by peers who normalised offending or weapon carrying. As part of the Act Now interventions, all of the young people engaged in structured sessions on weapons awareness, exploring the law and risks of knife carrying and there was evidence that these sessions assisted in changing the attitudes of the young people in relation to knife carrying. The diversionary activities were either explicitly arranged through Act Now (first aid) or more generally through others (e.g. sport). A consistent theme in the success illustrated in the case studies and from the interviews was the importance of staff building and maintaining trusting relationships with the young people, so they were more likely to engage and reflect on their behaviour rather than be defensive. It was also apparent that where family members (parents) engaged with Act Now, outcomes were improved, and peer support was more effective.

Case Study 1

A teenage boy was referred following arrest at school for knife possession. Initially, he was defensive and resistant to intervention, influenced by negative peer groups and online content that normalised carrying weapons. He showed little remorse and expressed that knife carrying was necessary for protection.

Act Now designed a 12-week intervention for him, combining weapons awareness, legal education, and reflective exercises on victim impact. He undertook a "Stay Safe" workshop focusing on decision making and youth violence. The intervention also addressed triggers for aggression, peer pressure, and the consequences of further offending. His caseworker provided intensive mentoring to counterbalance the influence of peers.

Although initially disengaged, over time he began to open up and challenge his own beliefs about carrying knives. With support, he re-engaged in education via an alternative provision and, after demonstrating progress, successfully returned to his mainstream school. His mother reported significant improvements in his behaviour at home and credited the positive relationship built with his mentor. His attitude toward peers and authority has noticeably improved.

Case Study 2

A 14-year-old boy was referred for assault and robbery. He was living with his family but struggling at school, where teachers reported disruptive behaviour. He was undergoing an assessment for ADHD and had low self-esteem. His social circle included peers linked to anti-social behaviour.

The Act Now intervention involved structured work on community safety, child exploitation, peer influence, and building self-confidence. Emotional wellbeing sessions focused on coping strategies, anger management, and reflective exercises on the impact of offending. To encourage pro-social behaviour, the caseworker introduced him to positive diversionary activities such as football and Muay Thai.

Over time, he engaged more openly, developed insight into his behaviour, and spoke about pressures from peers. His caseworker noted that he developed trust quickly, which supported meaningful discussions around friendships, exploitation, and resilience. His intervention plan was completed successfully, with recommendations for ongoing support around emotional wellbeing, SLCN, and neurodiversity assessment.

Case Study 3

A 17-year-old boy was referred for common assault. He lived with his mother, who was supportive and involved in his casework. He had experienced challenges related to neurodiversity, low confidence, and irregular school attendance. These issues were compounded by difficulty managing anxiety in social situations.

Act Now provided flexible support, often meeting him at home where he felt comfortable. The intervention included wellbeing resources such as apps, online tools, and mentoring sessions tailored to his interests. He was encouraged to build a “communication passport” that he could share with teachers and professionals to explain his needs and strengths. He was also introduced to substance misuse services and provided with opportunities to develop new skills, such as first aid training.

Although engagement fluctuated at times due to his confidence levels, he completed his plan successfully. His communication improved, his mother reported increased self-confidence, and he began to consider future education and training pathways. He remains at home, supported by his family and professionals, with reduced risk of further offending.

Case Study 4

A 17-year-old boy was arrested for multiple offences, including affray, assault, criminal damage, and theft. Despite these offences, he was in steady employment and described as having clear aspirations for work and travel. His offending appeared to stem from impulsivity, poor decision making, and substance use.

His Act Now intervention focused on reflecting on choices, the law, and the consequences of crime. He participated in sessions exploring how alcohol and drugs could affect decision



making and escalate risk. Caseworkers encouraged him to connect his long-term goals—employment, independence, and travel—to the risks posed by reoffending.

He engaged consistently, demonstrated insight into his behaviour, and spoke openly about lessons learned. His family remained a strong support network, and his employment provided routine and stability. He successfully completed the program and is considered to have a much-reduced risk of further offending.

Case Study 5

A 17-year-old was arrested for serious offences including kidnap and grievous bodily harm. He had grown up in a home environment affected by parental substance misuse and neglect. He was heavily influenced by older peers and exploited in contexts of violence and crime.

Act Now developed a highly tailored plan including emotional regulation, life skills, peer relationship work, and conflict resolution. The 17 year old was introduced to a positive mentor who acted as a consistent role model. Sessions explored peer coercion, exploitation, and pathways out of harmful friendships. Caseworkers also supported him to explore education and training opportunities, building a sense of structure and future direction.

He engaged well, building trust with his mentor and caseworker. He began to reflect on his experiences of exploitation, improved his emotional regulation, and distanced himself from negative peers. He expressed aspirations for further education and employment, signalling a significant shift in his outlook. His case highlights the value of intensive and holistic support for young people facing multiple layers of vulnerability.

Case Study 6

A 16-year-old boy was referred after being found in possession of a knife. His intention had not been to harm others, but to use the knife to self-harm, reflecting underlying emotional distress. He had no prior criminal history but was struggling with exclusion from mainstream education, periods of poor mental health, and increasing cannabis use with peers. His relationship with his parents was strained, and he expressed feelings of being misunderstood and isolated.

Through Act Now, he underwent a Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) assessment, which highlighted some communication difficulties. He engaged with the CAMHS Senior Practitioner for one-to-one sessions on emotional regulation and self-harm risk. Weapons awareness and conflict resolution work was delivered in short, structured sessions suited to his learning style. His caseworker also advocated with his school, ensuring that despite earlier exclusion he was supported to complete his GCSEs.

The boy gradually reduced his cannabis use, improved communication with his parents, and re-engaged in education. He completed his exams successfully and secured an apprenticeship with a local employer. He continues to access informal mentoring support, and his risk of reoffending is now assessed as very low.

Case Study 7

A 16-year-old boy was arrested for carrying scissors after being caught committing criminal damage (tagging) in an underpass. He had grown up in an environment of neglect and instability, with long-standing difficulties in his relationship with his mother. His school attendance was poor, and professionals described him as vulnerable to peer influence. A

SLCN assessment showed moderate difficulties affecting his ability to express himself, which contributed to his frustrations and conflict at school.

Act Now provided structured sessions on weapons awareness and the law, alongside reflective work exploring consequences of offending and personal responsibility. He received targeted input on communication skills, designed to support him both at school and at home. The Family Intervention Worker supported his mother, helping to stabilise their relationship and reduce conflict at home. The team also worked closely with education colleagues to advocate for adjustments to his learning programme and to improve attendance.

As a result, the boy re-integrated into school, re-established positive peer relationships, and began vocational training. His attendance and engagement improved, and his relationship with his mother became more stable. He is preparing for a college placement and is now considered to have a low risk of reoffending.

Overall learning from the case studies

Whilst only a small cohort of seven cases, Act Now appears to be particularly effective where interventions are holistic, addressing not only the offending but also underlying emotional wellbeing, education, family dynamics, and peer relationships. The evidence suggests that combining practical support with relational, therapeutic, and diversionary elements offers the best chance of helping young people move away from knife crime and other harmful behaviours.

25. Interviews with staff and partners

Semi-structured interviews took place, predominantly in April and May with staff in Police, Local Authority and Act Now workers. All interviewees were informed that the interviews would be anonymous and were not being recorded, although contemporaneous notes were made. All interviewees were informed that there would be nothing in the report unless at least multiple people were saying the same thing. The interviews were almost exclusively conducted online on Microsoft Teams. They usually lasted between 45 and 50 mins. At the conclusion of the evaluation the preliminary findings were also discussed with the program lead. She also provided her personal evaluation of the journey of Act Now. This material is set out separately.

The themed findings and recommendations from the interviews are set out below in five groups: program design and resourcing, referral pathways and eligibility, delivery and practice, policy and system challenges and external interface and wider context.

1. Programme Design and Resourcing

Findings

- Integration with YOTs in Milton Keynes created resilience and sped up staff induction.
- The Act Now staff tended to be relatively inexperienced (first job post qualification) but enthusiastic and committed.
- Extra staffing capacity was believed to speed up YOT and CJS decision-making.

Recommendations

- Embed Act Now staff within YOTs where possible to maximise resilience and cross-learning.

- Develop structured induction and training for Act Now staff to build confidence and skills quickly, given many are new graduates.
- Monitor workload balance to ensure Act Now staff are not diverted excessively into non-Act Now activity at the expense of the programme.

2. Referral Pathways and Eligibility

Findings

- Variability in how many eligible young people in custody were referred (estimates up to 50% missed).
- Slough only accepted custody referrals, while Milton Keynes also took non-custody cases.
- Referrals relied on custody staff notifying Act Now, not officers in the case (OIC).
- Coverage gaps occurred when young people were taken to custody suites without ACT Now presence.
- Disagreement over whether to expand scope beyond knives to other weapons.
- Weaknesses in “knife-enabled” categorisation, with automated capture estimated at only 45%.

Recommendations

- Standardise referral pathways across LPAs, ensuring clarity on custody and non-custody eligibility.
- Strengthen OIC accountability by making referral notification part of their responsibility, supported by training and monitoring.
- Explore solutions for custody coverage gaps, e.g., cross-LPA agreements or remote referral protocols.
- Pilot expanding referral criteria to include wider offensive weapon offences, with evaluation of feasibility and impact.
- Improve data recording by reviewing and updating “knife-enabled” categories to ensure accurate monitoring and performance reporting.

3. Delivery and Practice

Findings

- Custody interviews were seen as powerful intervention moments.
- 79% of home visits were completed within two days, showing strong timeliness.
- Intelligence referrals to TVP were made monthly on average.
- 90% of appropriate adults in custody were family members.
- No cases were reported where release occurred before Act Now staff arrived.

Recommendations

- Preserve and strengthen custody interviews as core “teachable moments,” with clear guidance on best practice.
- Maintain performance standards on timeliness of home visits and monitor against agreed benchmarks.
- Formalise intelligence-sharing protocols so Act Now intelligence referrals are systematic and consistently acted upon.
- Engage with appropriate adults to ensure they understand the purpose of Act Now and can reinforce diversionary messages at home.

4. Policy and System Challenges

Findings

- TVP were late adopters of deferred prosecution compared to other Forces.
- Internal policy prevented OOCs for under-18s, limiting flexibility.
- Rigid adherence to the gravity matrix constrained discretion for diversion.
- Op Deter charging policy was sometimes incorrectly applied to young people at the start of the pilot.

Recommendations

- Review OOC policy for under-18s to increase flexibility, aligning with national best practice.
- Encourage proportionate use of the gravity matrix, providing guidance to allow professional discretion in borderline cases.
- Ensure clearer operational alignment between Act Now and Op Deter, with staff training to prevent misapplication of charging policies.
- Share learning with other Forces to benchmark and adapt policies more effectively.

5. External Interfaces and Wider Context

Findings

- Milton Keynes reported three school incidents weekly, though links to Act Now were unclear.
- Other Forces reportedly had more flexible approaches to diversion and deferred prosecution compared to TVP.

Recommendations

- Strengthen links with schools to identify and assess referrals earlier, ensuring potential Act Now cases are captured.
- Benchmark against other Forces to identify best practice in youth diversion and deferred prosecution and adapt TVP's policies where appropriate.
- Enhance community engagement, ensuring parents, schools, and young people are aware of Act Now and can support referrals.

Views of the program lead

The Act Now Program Lead, who has extensive knowledge of youth justice partnership working and suspended prosecution innovation, assessed that the program has clearly demonstrated the value of strong collaboration between TVP, the OPCC, Youth Justice Services, and other partners. She reported witnessing many individual examples of successful engagement, but acknowledged that the absence of robust data limited the ability to evidence these outcomes quantitatively in the evaluation despite her best efforts. In her view, the program represented a very good collaborative model that supported the whole child, not just the offence, and provided a strong example of how early intervention can build resilience, reduce harm, and promote long-term change.

Reflecting on case studies, and with access to the unsanitised data behind them, she also observed that the early trust and rapport established between Act Now workers and young people were central to successful engagement. Her view was that this trust created the

conditions for more open discussions around peer pressure, exploitation, and emotional wellbeing. She also underscored the importance of the trauma-informed and holistic approach, which, based on her discussions with partners, had been particularly valuable. Additionally, the project lead fed back that the tailored support plans that addressed neurodiversity, emotional regulation, and family dynamics (while also focusing on identity, resilience, and long-term aspirations) were seen as both innovative and well received. Pro-social activities such as sport, first aid training, and mentoring were also regarded as effective in reducing risk-taking behaviours and reinforcing positive outcomes.

Finally, she observed that Act Now had been successful in identifying and addressing unmet needs that often contribute to offending, such as undiagnosed learning difficulties and housing instability. Addressing these issues was viewed as a critical factor in supporting progress and reducing risk.

26. Variations in delivery models around England and Wales

There is no single model of delivery. Forces tend to operate within common national guidance but differ on who leads, who's eligible, how fast they engage, what they assess, and which interventions they offer. The strongest programmes typically combine rapid, point-of-arrest engagement, proportionate decision-making, needs-led assessment (incl. SLCN like TVP), robust restorative options, and tight multi-agency links (Violence Reduction Units / schools / YOTs).

The variation apparent in the Forces in England and Wales from open-source searching is set out below including where there are example(s) (excluding TVP) of the variations cited

The me	Variations	Example
Leadership & governance	Police-led point-of-arrest diversion versus YOT/YJS-led triage; degree of joint panels and scrutiny.	National guidance allows both models; YJB Case Management Guidance defines point-of-arrest diversion as distinct from formal OOCs. https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms/media/8858/yjb-case-management-guidance-final-feb-2024.pdf (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-management-guidance/how-to-use-out-of-court-disposals?)
Eligibility & thresholds	First-time entrants only vs. broader eligibility; discretion where prior contacts exist.	YEF/Centre for Justice Innovation (CJI) guidance notes local discretion on who is eligible for informal diversion. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/delivering-diversion-effectively/ , https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024/cji_vyd_6thed.pdf

<p>Offence scope (weapons/drugs)</p>	<p>Some forces route lower-harm weapon possession into diversion; others prioritise charge/remand; drug possession often handled via diversion pilots.</p>	<p>Merseyside – Operation Inclusion: deferred prosecution for youth linked to violent/drug offences, with support serviced in five themed areas: families, substance misuse, housing, finance, mentoring and mental health.</p> <p>https://yjresourcehub.uk/operation-inclusion-in-collaboration-with-merseyside-violence-reduction-partnership-july-2025/ https://www.merseysidevrp.com/preventing-offending/</p>
<p>Speed & touchpoint design</p>	<p>“Custody teachable moment” with immediate contact vs. later clinic/home visit; time to first contact/home visit benchmarks vary.</p>	<p>YEF practice guidance stresses rapid early engagement; areas differ in how quickly a child is seen post-arrest.</p> <p>https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/YEF_Diversion_Practice_Guidance_FINAL.pdf</p>
<p>Decision tools & discretion</p>	<p>Use of the child gravity matrix and how strictly it’s applied; when to use Community Resolution, Youth Caution/Conditional Caution vs. informal diversion.</p>	<p>National CMG/NPCC materials emphasise proportionality and avoiding unnecessary criminalisation.</p> <p>https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms/media/8858/yjb-case-management-guidance-final-feb-2024.pdf https://www.gov.uk/guidance/case-management-guidance/how-to-use-out-of-court-disposals</p>
<p>Assessment depth</p>	<p>Universal vs. targeted screening (e.g., SLCN, MH triage); timing (in custody vs. follow-up).</p>	<p>YJB prevention/diversion assessment tool promotes consistent, needs-led assessment.</p> <p>https://yjresourcehub.uk/prevention-and-diversion-assessment-tool/</p>

Intervention menu	Restorative-only models vs. blended offers (weapons awareness, MH/SLCN, family work, contextual safeguarding, focused deterrence).	Surrey's long-running Youth Restorative Intervention (YRI) is frequently cited; several forces add serious-violence/focused-deterrence strands. https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s10371/item%2010%20-%20Annex%201%20Youth%20Justice%20Plan%202013%2014%20final.pdf https://restorativejustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/files/kn1b_info_packs%20%282%29%20yot.pdf
Partnership architecture	Strength of VRU/VPP links, school pathways, hospital navigators, community referrers.	Greater Manchester – PPIED/Engage: data-based multi-agency panels flag “invisible” youth for early intervention. https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/greater-manchester-using-police-data-support-invisible-children-risk-offending https://www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices/prevention-prosecution-intervention-education-and-diversion-ppied-greater-manchester-police
Information-sharing & recording	What gets recorded as “diversion”, “OOC”, or “knife-enabled”; consistency of intel referrals to partners.	YJB case management guidance (Feb 2024) updates recording requirements; many areas still working to standardise categories. https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms/media/8858/yjb-case-management-guidance-final-feb-2024.pdf
Evaluation & benchmarking	Local outcome tracking (re-offending, ETE, wellbeing) and cost-benefit; cross-force comparison maturity.	CJI toolkit and YEF evidence reviews/tools support consistent monitoring and cost-benefit analysis. https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024/cji_vyd_6thed.pdf https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NCB-YEF-Diversion-Evidence-Review-for-Publication.pdf https://yjresourcehub.uk/valuing-youth-diversion-a-toolkit-for-practitioners-calculating-cost-benefit-of-diversion-the-centre-for-justice-innovation-and-lancashire-child-first-pathfinder-updated-2022/
Community & school engagement	Visibility of diversion offers to parents/schools; proactive school-based diversion versus custody-only routes.	Ofsted/JTAI thematic work and YEF toolkit stress multi-agency approaches and early identification in schools. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children/multi-agency-responses-to-serious-youth-violence-working-together-to-support-and-protect-children https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/

27. Conclusions and recommendations

TVP rolled out Act Now to the remaining Local Policing Units after the evaluation data were obtained and the remit of Act Now was extended on 4th November 2024 to include young people arrested for any weapons offences, robbery and assault with injury offences. This is therefore not included in any recommendations.

As Act Now is embedding in the other Local Policing Areas after being rolled out, the key recommendations begin with starting to capture reliable data for a quantitative evaluation. It will be necessary to develop a more robust, automated tracking process that identifies individuals at the first point of receiving the Act Now programme. The existing manual processes and post program crime recording tracking has proven to be inconsistent in obtaining this data. The program should also expand further the support services and positive activities available to Act Now detainees and develop a process to track the outputs and outcomes of the Act Now engagement. This improvement in tracking engagement is not just simply to measure performance but also to better understand the workload and resource implications for staff when more cases are identified, as well as to support future funding bids.

Reliable data is needed for a quantitative evaluation

The principal quantitative evaluation recommendation is that reliable data needs to be available to assess the impact of Act Now. This will need to be in place for at least three years across the Force before sufficient youths will be offered Act Now, and there to be a long enough follow up period to assess the impact.

Identification and Tracking of the cohort of eligible youth offenders

This review identified that youths were not referred to Act Now for a multitude of reasons including human oversight, not being processed through custody and automated searches on Niche not identifying the case. A key strength of Act Now is the in-custody visit. A process needs to be identified to trigger a real time notification to an Act Now worker. Additionally, a back-up plan is needed for when no arrest is made and an appointment for interview is made. This identification of the target group can then be used as a basis to track them through the Act Now journey.

Develop Output and Outcomes tracking

It will be important to know not just that there was a referral to Act Now but whether there was engagement, what services were accepted by the young person and how much of that service they used. This detail is important in order to start to understand what tactics drive the positive outcomes and which may not be working. Enhance data collection on key outcomes (education, wellbeing, offending, resilience) to demonstrate impact more systematically would also be useful. A robust outcomes framework would support future funding bids, even if the data were not yet available. This will ensure long-term sustainability.

Maintain and Expand Holistic Support

Continue to provide integrated in-house services (SLCN, CAMHS, substance misuse) and ensure these remain accessible without waiting lists. It may also be worth deepening the collaboration with schools and local education services to ensure early identification of at-risk pupils (prior to custody events) and to smooth reintegration following exclusion. There is also

value in increased access to family interventions, recognising that engaging parents and carers amplifies the effectiveness of work with young people.

Broaden Access to Positive Activities

Given the evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund and College of Policing evaluation of diversion schemes and the feedback from the seven case studies plus the observations for the interviews, it is recommended that the Force strengthen links with community organisations to widen opportunities for sport, arts, and vocational activities for Act Now youths. Providing young people with structured alternatives not only diverts from offending but builds long-term resilience and skills.

Resourcing and workloads

The Force should also consider reviewing the implications of the expanded remit for Act Now and improved identification of eligible youth offenders. Capturing more of the eligible offenders and increasing the remit will have an impact on the amount of time available for the Act Now worker per client. This may impact the current funding model and future opportunities.

Simon Rose

19/9/2025

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There is no single model of delivery. Forces tend to operate within common national guidance but differ on who leads, who's eligible, how fast they engage, what they assess, and which interventions they offer. The strongest programmes typically combine rapid, point-of-arrest engagement, proportionate decision-making, needs-led assessment (incl. SLCN like TVP), robust restorative options, and tight multi-agency links (Violence Reduction Units / schools / YOTs).

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Eligibility & thresholds	<p>First-time entrants only vs. broader eligibility; discretion where prior contacts exist.</p>	<p>YEF/Centre for Justice Innovation (CJI) guidance notes local discretion on who is eligible for informal diversion. https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/delivering-diversion-effectively/, https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024/cji_vyd_6thed.pdf</p>
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Partnership architecture	Strength of VRU/VPP links, school pathways, hospital navigators, community referrers.	Greater Manchester – PPIED/Engage: data-based multi-agency panels flag “invisible” youth for early intervention. https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/greater-manchester-using-police-data-support-invisible-children-risk-offending https://www.college.police.uk/support-forces/practices/prevention-prosecution-intervention-education-and-diversion-ppied-greater-manchester-police
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