Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 2/25

Date: 13 October 2025

Briefing paper to: Children and Young people Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: Update to Members on disproportionality

Background

Between the years ending March 2010 to 2020, Black children in England and Wales were nearly five times more likely to be arrested than White children. The disproportionate representation of individuals from some communities starts at the beginning of the criminal justice system (CJS) journey.

The CJS provides incentives for those who have committed crimes to admit guilt, to prevent the stress placed on victims. The Lammy Review (2017) found that global majority defendants are consistently more likely to plead not guilty than White defendants. This means that, if found guilty, they are likely to face more punitive sentences than if they had admitted guilt. The primary reason for this difference in plea decisions is a lack of trust in the CJS amongst some communities.

The Lammy review also found that there is evidence to suggest differential treatment against global majority offenders in both the adult and the youth estates. Individuals from these communities are less likely to be identified with problems such as learning difficulties or mental health concerns on reception at prison. The review stated that the prison system inherits some of these disparities from other services, such as schools failing to identify learning difficulties and mental health services failing to serve all communities effectively.

Medway Data

The Medway Youth Justice Service worked with 117 children between April 2024 and March 2025 and supports and oversees orders for approximately 70 children at any point.

The Medway Youth Justice data shows that there are differences across different groups within Medway and also in comparison to national figures published by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

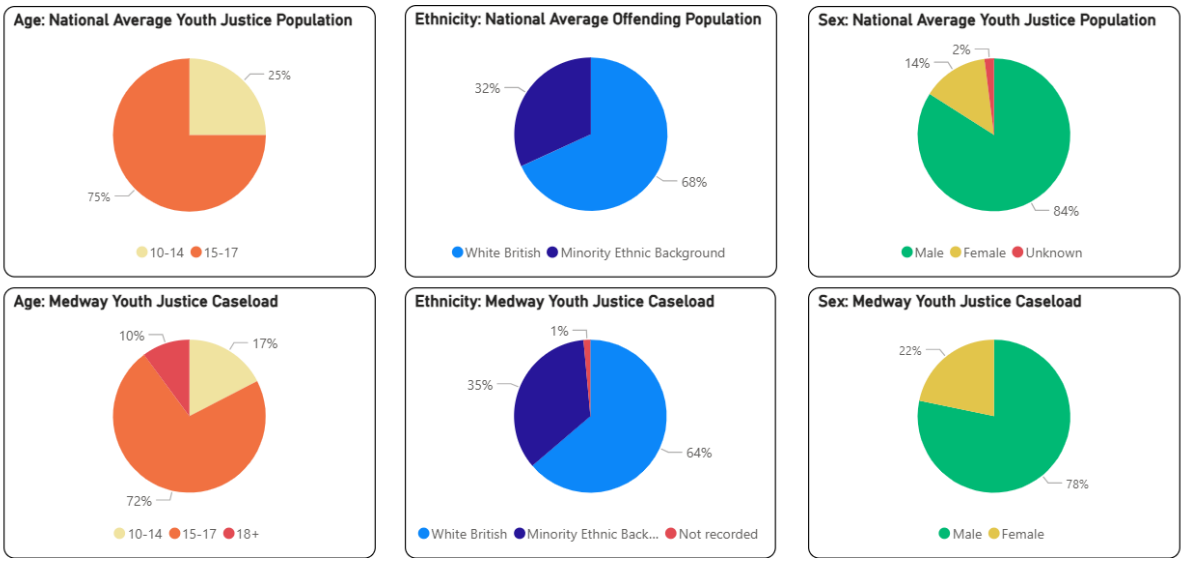
National Comparison

Medway has a higher proportion of girls (22%) in the criminal justice system than the national average (14%).

Medway Youth Justice Service has a higher proportion of children aged 15 and over (82%) compared to the national average (75%)

The ethnicity of children receiving support from Medway Youth Justice is broadly similar to national figures.

Medway Youth Justice Service - Contextual Data as of 10 August 2025



White British includes: White English, White Welsh, White, Scottish, White Northern Irish and White British - **Source: ONS Census 2021**

Minority Ethnic Background includes all Ethnicities other than: White English, White Welsh, White, Scottish, White Northern Irish and White British - **Source: ONS Census 2021**

Youth Justice National Data - **Source: Youth Justice Annual Statistics: 2023 to 2024**

National Average Offending Population - **Source: Youth Justice Board Ethnic Disparity 2024-2025**

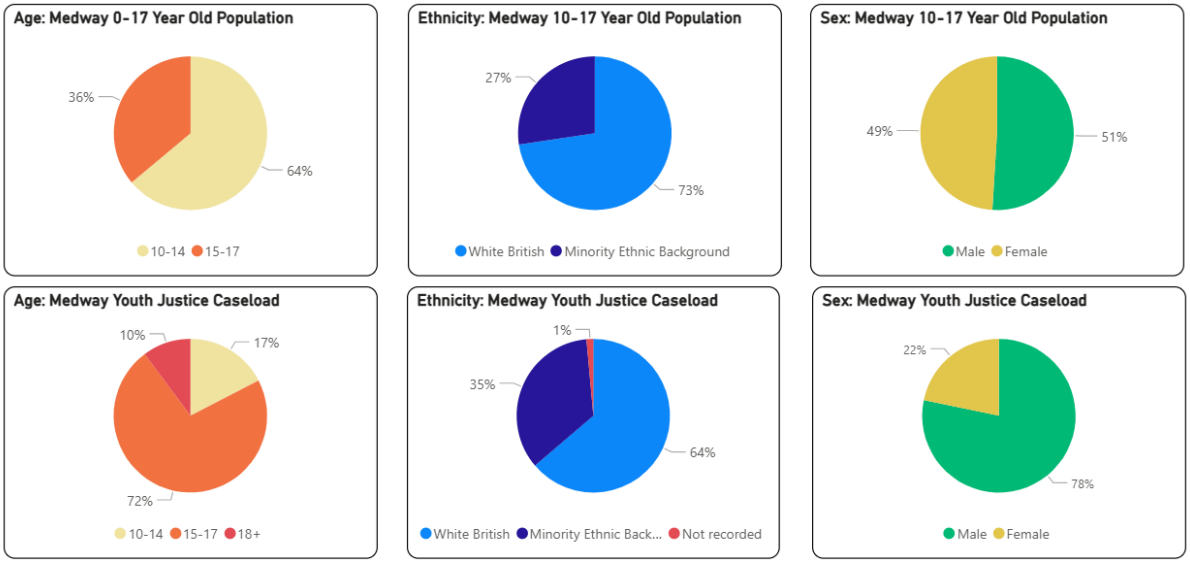
Medway data

Using data from the Office for National Statistics' Census (2021), there is a notable disparity in the representation of children from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds within Medway's criminal justice system compared to their White British peers. While children aged 10–17 represent 89% of Medway's population supported by the Youth justice system, the children from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds account for 35% of those involved in the criminal justice system. Medway's figure of 35% exceeds the national average, where children from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds represent 32% of the offending population**.**

Currently, data on children from deprived communities involved in the criminal justice system in Medway is not available via Power BI, which limits our ability to analyse trends and correlations. However, plans are underway to develop and report on this data. This will enable us to draw direct connections between children's home addresses, identified areas of deprivation in Medway, and outcomes for those engaged with the Youth Justice Service.

A report from the University of Liverpool (2025) which looked at children from across England and Wales found that, 'exposure to poverty and family adversity either singly or combined throughout childhood significantly increased the likelihood of violence and criminal justice involvement during their teenage years….. those who had been exposed to persistent poverty and poor parental mental health… as teens they were more than 5 times as likely to be arrested or taken into police custody, 3 times as likely to be warned or cautioned by the police, and twice as likely to be stopped and questioned by them.'

Children receiving support from the Medway Youth Justice Service are disproportionately older than those in the Medway population. This possibly reflects the fact that offending amongst children peaks around the ages of 16 – 17, but more may be done to identify and support children at a younger age to divert them away from the criminal justice system.



Conclusion

The data presented in this report highlights levels of disproportionality within Medway's Youth Justice Service, particularly in relation to ethnicity, gender, and age. While some patterns mirror national trends, the overrepresentation of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and older age groups in the youth justice system calls for targeted and proactive intervention.

These disparities underscore the importance of early identification, culturally responsive support, and trust-building within communities. Medway must continue to strengthen its preventative approaches, work collaboratively across services, and ensure that all children, regardless of background, are given equitable opportunities to thrive and avoid criminal justice involvement.