LCRP

London Child Remand Project

London Child Remand Project: Launch Conference July 2026

Notes from Roundtable Discussions

LiiA Together for London's Children
LONDON INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT ALLIANCE

ALDCS
The Association of London Directors of Children's Services

Transform Justice

At the beginning of July, we were delighted to welcome the Youth Justice Minister Jake Richards and Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime Kaya Comer-Schwartz, alongside our partners at Transform Justice and colleagues from across the youth justice system, to launch the London Child Remand Project.

It was a morning focused on a significant challenge, but also one filled with thoughtful-provoking converations, constructive discussion and a real energy to tackle this issue across the capital. Bringing together councils, police and legal professionals, there was a strong sense of shared commitment to driving change, with partners committing to a whole system approach to deliver alternatives that will reduce the unnecessary custodial remands of children.

Conference participants across nine tables of mixed-agency youth justice sector representatives were asked the following questions:

- ***How do you feel the Child Remand Project can make the most difference to remand outcomes for London's children and ensure London is reducing unnecessary remands?***

- ***What activity would you prioritise for the Child Remand Project (consider how this might address short / or longer-term remands)?***

- ***How best can you and your agency contribute to reducing unnecessary child remands in London?***

- ***How should previous learning inform our work?***

Across the discussions, there was remarkable consistency about the changes needed to reduce unnecessary child remand. Participants viewed unnecessary remand primarily as a system issue rather than an individual decision-making issue. They emphasised that professionals are more likely to make appropriate remand decisions when they have timely information, trusted alternatives to custody, consistent practice across London and confidence that children can be safely supported in the community.

Overall, the feedback suggests that the greatest opportunity for reducing unnecessary child remands lies not in changing one part of the system, but in creating a more connected, child-centred and consistently applied approach across London's youth justice, policing, courts and local authority partners.

Strengthen alternatives to custodial remand

The most consistent priority was improving the availability and credibility of alternatives to custody.

- *Expansion of specialist remand fostering across London. A pan-London remand fostering model with reciprocal arrangements between boroughs. Regional placement and fostering hubs.*
- *Greater placement flexibility to meet children's individual needs.*
- *Improved access to accommodation outside normal working hours.*
- *Reduced reliance on private providers.*
- *Stronger Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS) packages, including education, training and wider support.*

Groups suggested that accommodation should be more than simply providing a bed. Bail packages should combine accommodation with education, health, family support and other services that reduce risk and give courts confidence that custody can be safely avoided.

Improve information sharing and decision-making

Many groups felt that unnecessary remand occurs because professionals do not have sufficient information at the point decisions are made.

Faster information sharing:

- *Better real-time communication between police, YJS's, Children's Social Care, CPS and courts.*
- *Earlier notification when a child is arrested or there is a potential remand decision.*
- *Improved out-of-hours information sharing.*
- *Better communication regarding available placements and bail options.*

Groups repeatedly emphasised that professionals need to talk to one another before remand decisions are made, allowing opportunities for early intervention rather than responding once custody has become the default.

Better data sharing:

Groups recognised that information already exists across agencies but is often fragmented.

- *Developing a unique child identifier to support information sharing across agencies.*
- *Enabling YJS greater access to Children's Social Care systems where appropriate.*
- *Better integration of information from schools, SEND services, Compass, Children's Social Care and YJS's.*
- *Using shared information to identify children earlier and intervene before remand becomes necessary.*

Participants acknowledged that joining systems together will be complex, reinforcing the importance of establishing information sharing arrangements.

Create a culture that sees custody as a last resort

Participants consistently argued that reducing remand requires cultural as well as procedural change.

- *Child protection and youth justice should be viewed together rather than separately.*
- *A child in police custody should be treated as an emergency requiring an immediate multi-agency response - custody is harmful for children.*
- *Professionals should be incentivised to avoid remand wherever it is safe to do so.*
- *Children's lived experience of custodial remand should be incorporated into systems change work, eg. forming part of child remand training for magistrates.*

Groups noted that children's complex needs—including mental health, neurodiversity and long waits for CAMHS—are often not adequately reflected in remand decisions.

There was also recognition that practical issues influence outcomes, including: office hours, service accessibility, weekend arrangements, availability of decision-makers and court timetables.

Reducing unnecessary remand therefore requires changing both organisational culture and operational practice.

Increase confidence in decision-making

Several discussions focused on improving professionals' confidence to support bail.

- *Custody sergeants may fear serious consequences if a child is bailed and something subsequently happens.*
- *Magistrates often have to make rapid decisions with incomplete information.*
- *Courts need confidence that accommodation and support packages will actually be available when required.*

Suggestions included:

- *Making available alternatives more reliable and visible.*
- *Improving confidence in accommodation pathways.*
- *Specialist training for police, CPS, magistrates and judges.*
- *More consistent quality of practice from duty solicitors, who are often inexperienced and assume processes for children were the same for adults.*
- *Disseminating examples of good practice across London, such as some LA's ensuring the Director of Children's Social Care attends bail hearings at court.*
- *Better understanding of adolescent development and child welfare.*
- *Clearer guidance on available community options.*

Several groups questioned whether decisions are sometimes driven by uncertainty rather than actual risk.

Improve consistency across London's systems

Groups identified considerable variation between boroughs and agencies, suggested improvements included:

- *Agreed London-wide practice principles*
- *Consistent bail offers*
- *Standard court paperwork and templates*
- *Common data standards*
- *Shared operating procedures*
- *Centralised court user groups alongside local forums*
- *Better sharing of effective practice*

There was also concern that current systems perform less effectively outside normal working hours.

Examples included:

- *Saturday courts operating with limited information*
- *Delays accessing placements*
- *Uncertainty about responsibilities across agencies*
- *Police holding children while waiting for decisions*

Groups felt London should develop a more consistent out-of-hours response.

Strengthen accountability, scrutiny and learning

Groups wanted stronger oversight of remand decisions.

- *Remand scrutiny panels*
- *Peer review of decisions*
- *Quarterly reviews of police overnight remands*
- *Recording why bail was opposed*
- *Collecting demographic information*
- *Reviewing themes and disproportionality*

There was strong support for improving London-wide data collection, with groups wanting to understand:

- *Why children are remanded / bail opposed*
- *Which alternatives were available*
- *Variations between boroughs*
- *Differences in decisions made by Youth/Adult courts*
- *Racial disproportionality*
- *Outcomes for different groups of children – demographic analysis*

Groups emphasised the need for ongoing pan-London analysis, rather than isolated snapshot exercises.

Strengthen multi-agency working and family involvement

Groups consistently suggested that reducing remand requires stronger partnership working.

Priority partners included:

- *Police, CPS, YJS's, Children's Social Care, Education, Health, Schools and SEND services.*

Schools were recognised as holding valuable information about attendance, behaviour and emerging concerns that could support earlier intervention.

Groups also noted that families should play a much greater role.

Many children return home after leaving custody, yet wider family members are often not involved in planning alternatives to remand. Earlier engagement with parents and carers could improve bail planning and provide children with more sustainable support.

Cross-cutting operational issues

Groups highlighted several system barriers that require particular attention:

- ***Out-of-hours decision-making remains a significant weakness***
- ***Saturday courts frequently operate with insufficient information***
- ***Accommodation is not always available when courts require it***
- ***Police sometimes focus on the end of detention rather than the child's welfare throughout the custody period***
- ***Court delays and wider criminal justice pressures can influence remand decisions***
- ***Children with mental health needs often cannot access timely support***
- ***Better early intervention could prevent many children reaching the point of remand***

Groups also encouraged the project to learn from successful approaches elsewhere, including Greater Manchester's work on safeguarding, culture change and reducing harm.

LCRP
London Child Remand Project

Feedback on LCRP priorities can be grouped into five strategic project aims:

01

Better alternatives to custody

Develop a remand fostering offer, improve access to supported accommodation and ISS with built-in education packages so credible bail packages are consistently available

02

Better decisions

Improve out-of-hours information sharing, access to systems, communication and training so professionals can make informed remand decisions

03

Better accountability

Introduce scrutiny panels, improve data collection, standardise documentation and review remand decisions systematically

04

Better partnership working

Create consistent London-wide practice through shared protocols, joint training, stronger multi-agency collaboration and reciprocal placement arrangements

05

Better outcomes for children

Ensure every child has access to appropriate accommodation, education, family support and culturally responsive services, with a continued focus on reducing racial disproportionality