

Children with complex needs on deprivation of liberty orders

What we know and emerging good practice





**We improve the lives of
children and families by
putting data and evidence at
the heart of the family justice
system.**



Get started



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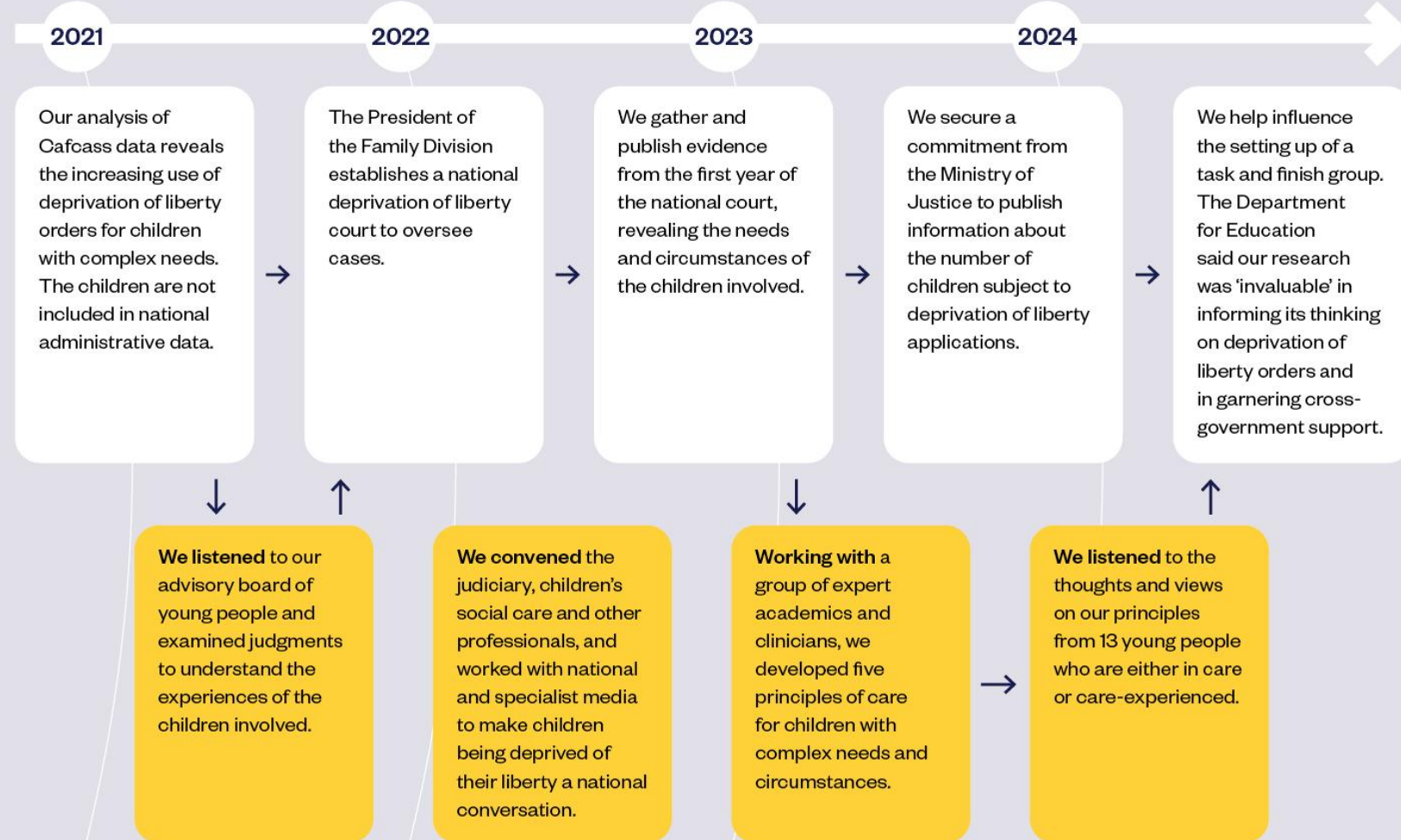
Making an impact: Our first five years in review

02

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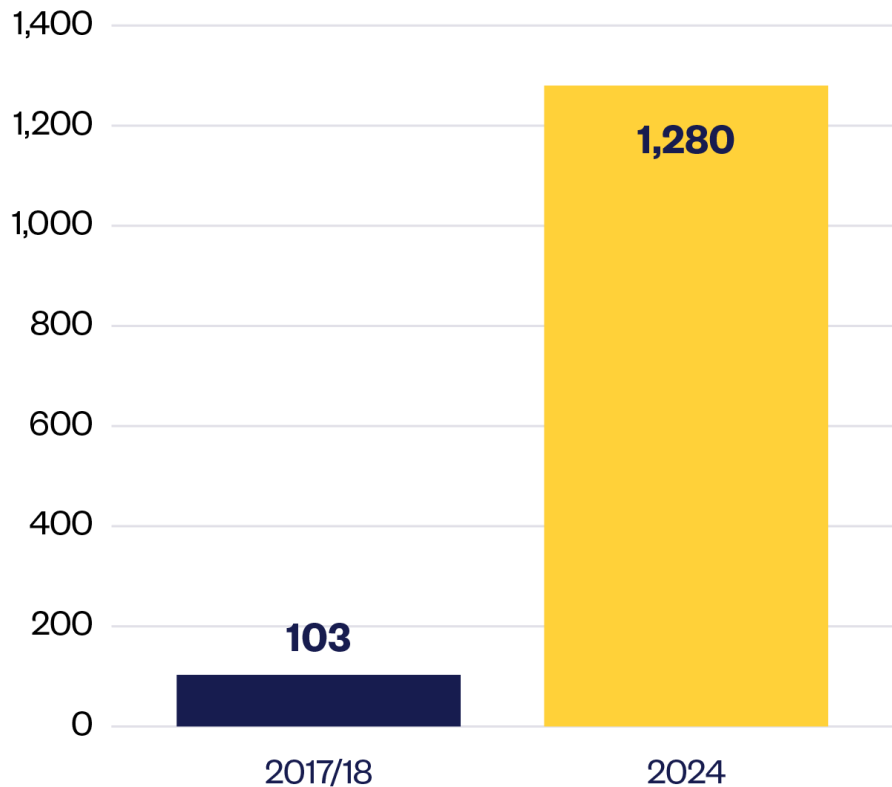
... shining a light on issues such as young people being deprived of their liberty

Making an impact: Our first five years in review



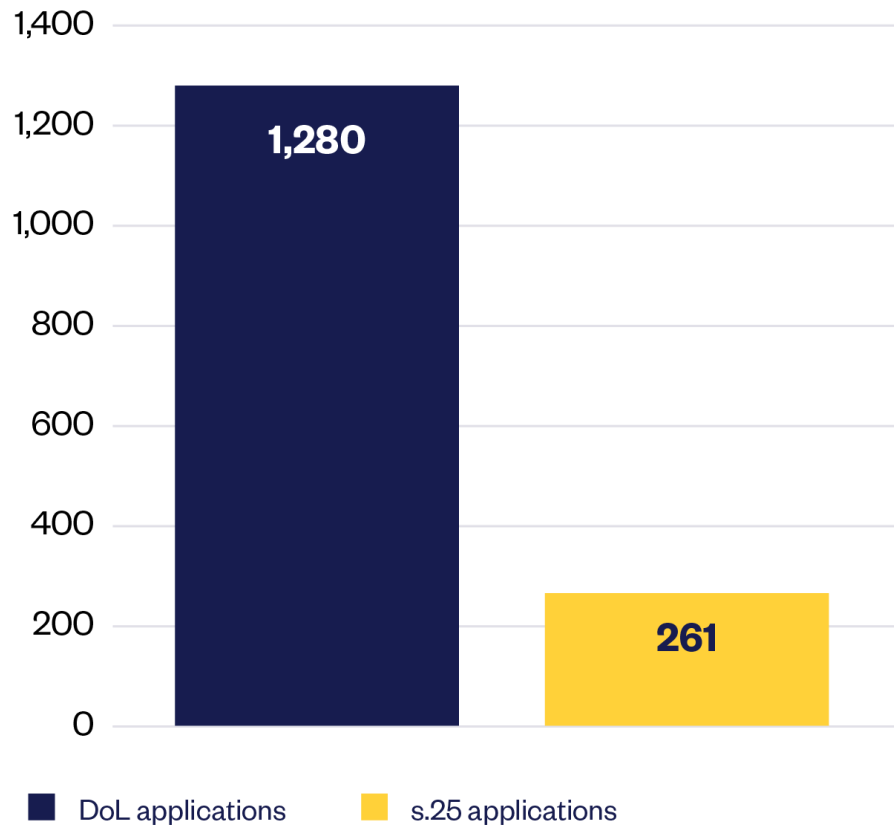
Rise in use of deprivation of liberty orders

Number of applications per year



Source: Cafcass and Ministry of Justice

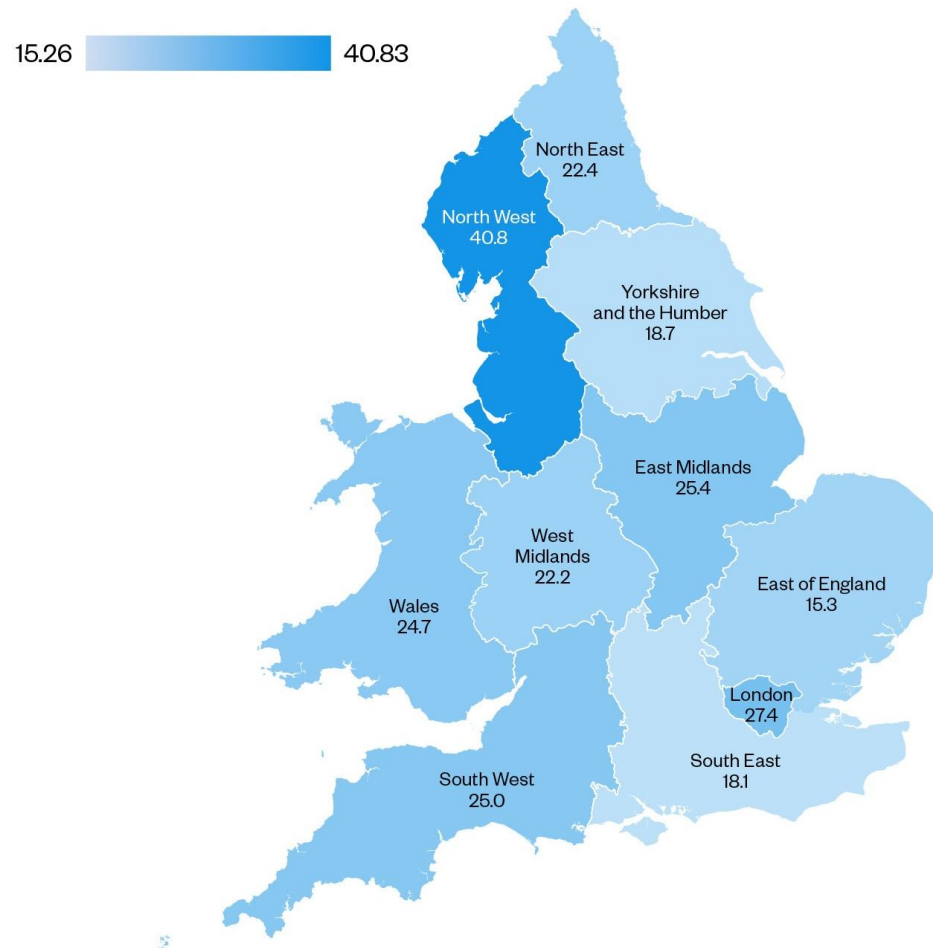
Number of DoL and secure accommodation applications, 2024



Source: MoJ (2025)

A nationwide problem

**Rate of applications per 100,000 children by region, England and Wales,
July 2022 to June 2023**

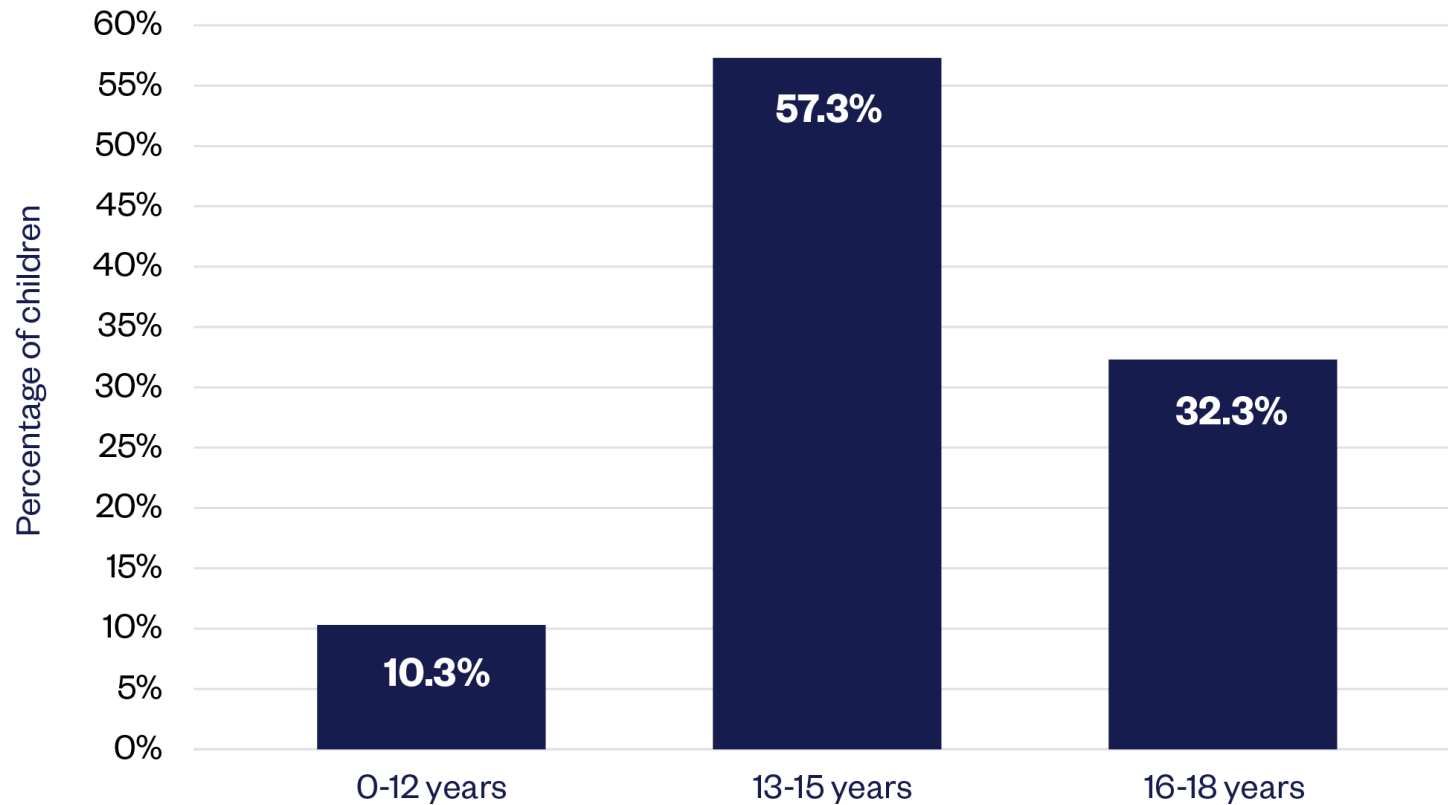


**77% of Welsh local
authorities made an
application for a
deprivation of liberty
order in a 12-month
period**

Source: Nuffield FJO (2023)

Not only teenagers

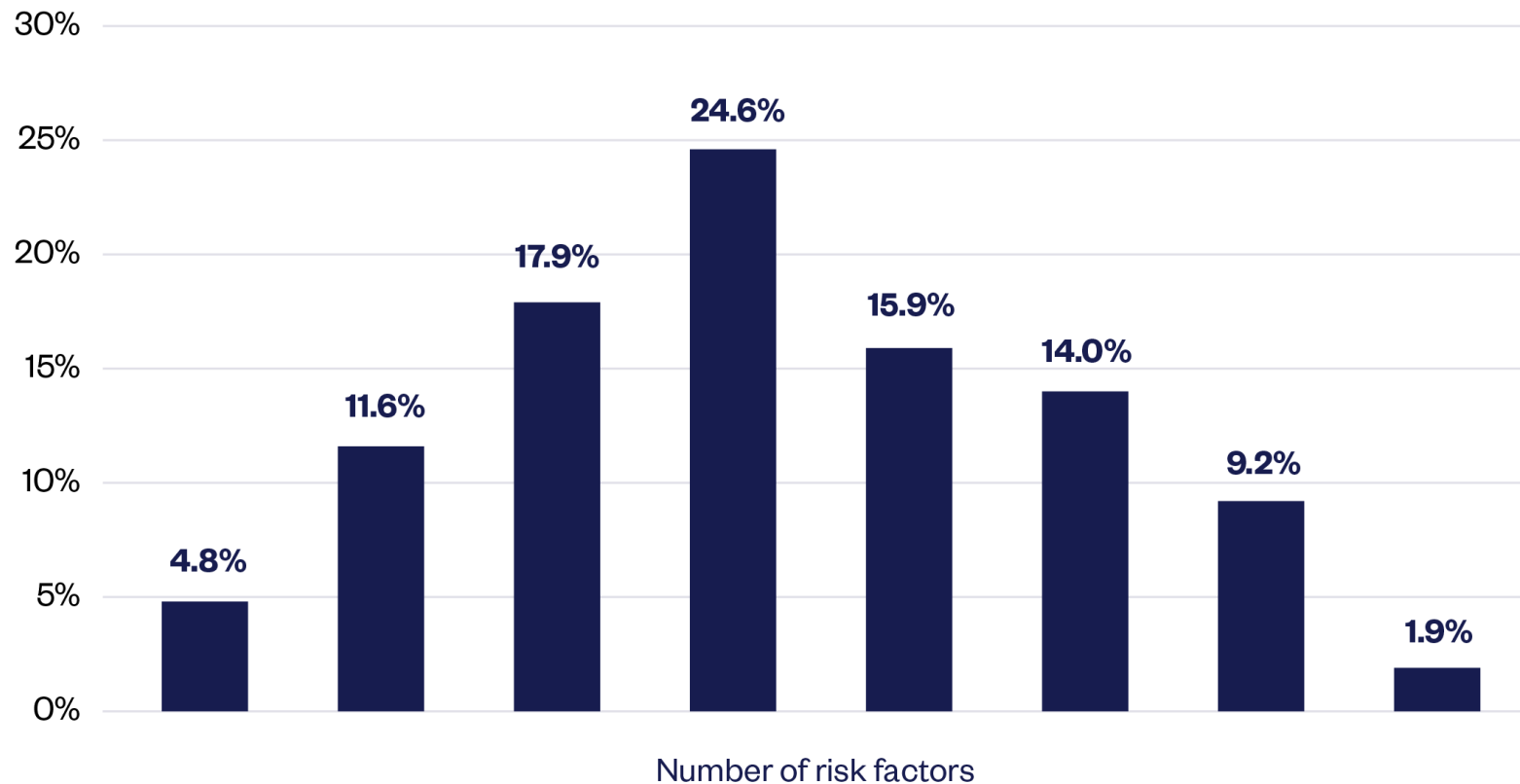
Age of children subject to DoL applications in 2024



One in ten is under the age of 13

Complex lives not complex children

Aggregate number of risk factors present in all cases

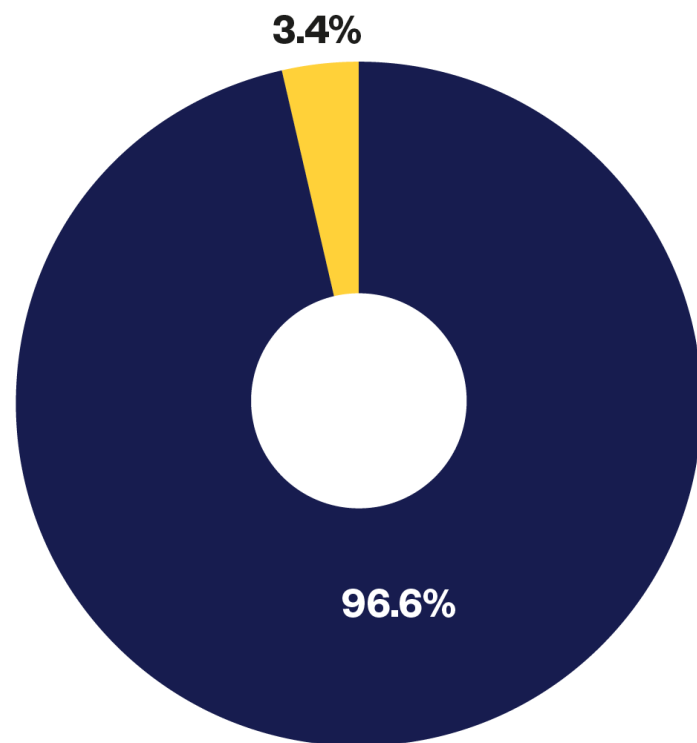


Source: Nuffield FJO (2023)

-
- being a risk to others
 - going missing
 - self-harming
 - having poor mental health
 - having a neuro-developmental disorder
 - having a disability
 - being sexually exploited
 - being criminally exploited
 - misusing alcohol/drugs
 - having a placement breakdown
 - being out of education

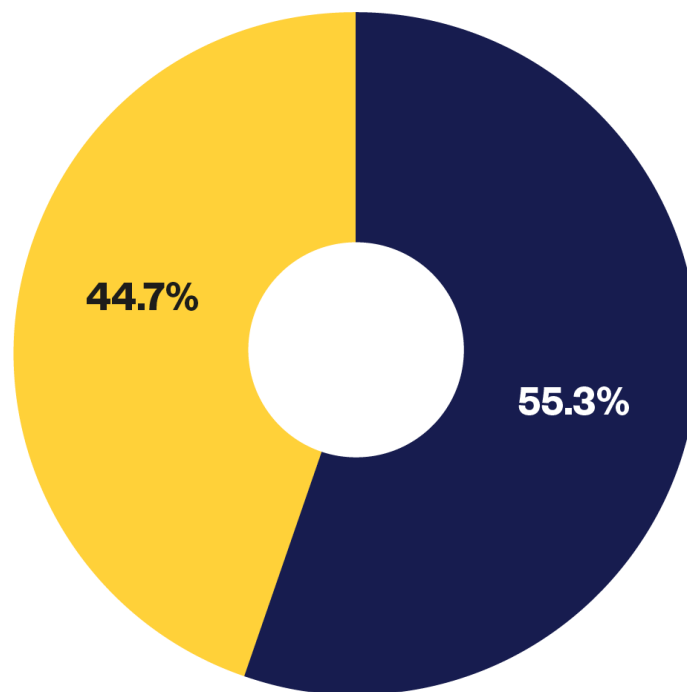
With systems unable to respond to their needs

Most children are in care



■ In care ■ Not in care

Disrupted care history



■ Multiple placement breakdown ■ Stable placement

Of 208 deprivation of liberty applications, only 10 children had recently come to the attention of the local authority

Source: Nuffield FJO (2023)

Children and carers have limited voice

9.6%

Children attended at least one hearing in their case

4.8%

Children spoke to the judge directly before the hearing

5.8%

Children had written to the judge to share their views

88.5%

Parents and/or carers were not legally represented at any hearing in a DoL case



Life under a DoL order

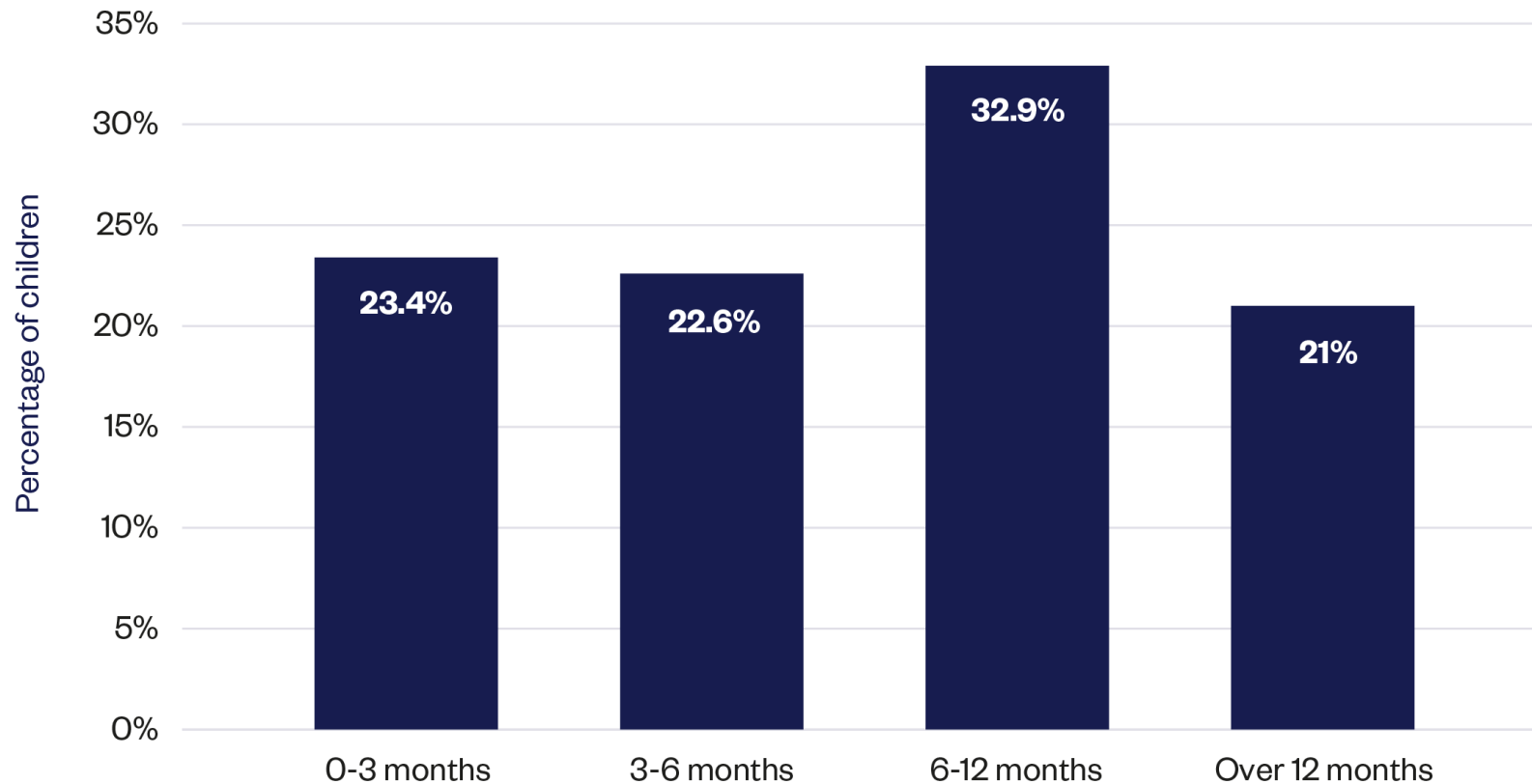
- Socially isolated
- Out of education
- Unmet mental health needs
- Short term plans
- Inexperienced staff
- Limited agency



Sources: Nuffield FJO (2024); Office of the Children's Commissioner (2024)

Severe, long-term restrictions

How long are children subject to DoL orders?



Source: MoJ (2025)

Each child was subject to an average of 6 different types of restriction, including in almost all cases constant supervision.

The use of restraint was permitted in over two-thirds of cases.

Restrictions were rarely relaxed.

Source: Nuffield FJO (2023)

What does good care involve?

1. Stable valued, trusted relationships
2. Holistic assessment, formulation and tailored plan of intervention
3. Long term support
4. Highly experienced multidisciplinary teams
5. Agency and respect

Source: Nuffield FJO (2023)



Change is coming...

The Peer Collaborative is made up of:

- Newcastle and Gateshead
- Greater Manchester
- Warwickshire
- Somerset
- North East / North Central London
- West Midlands

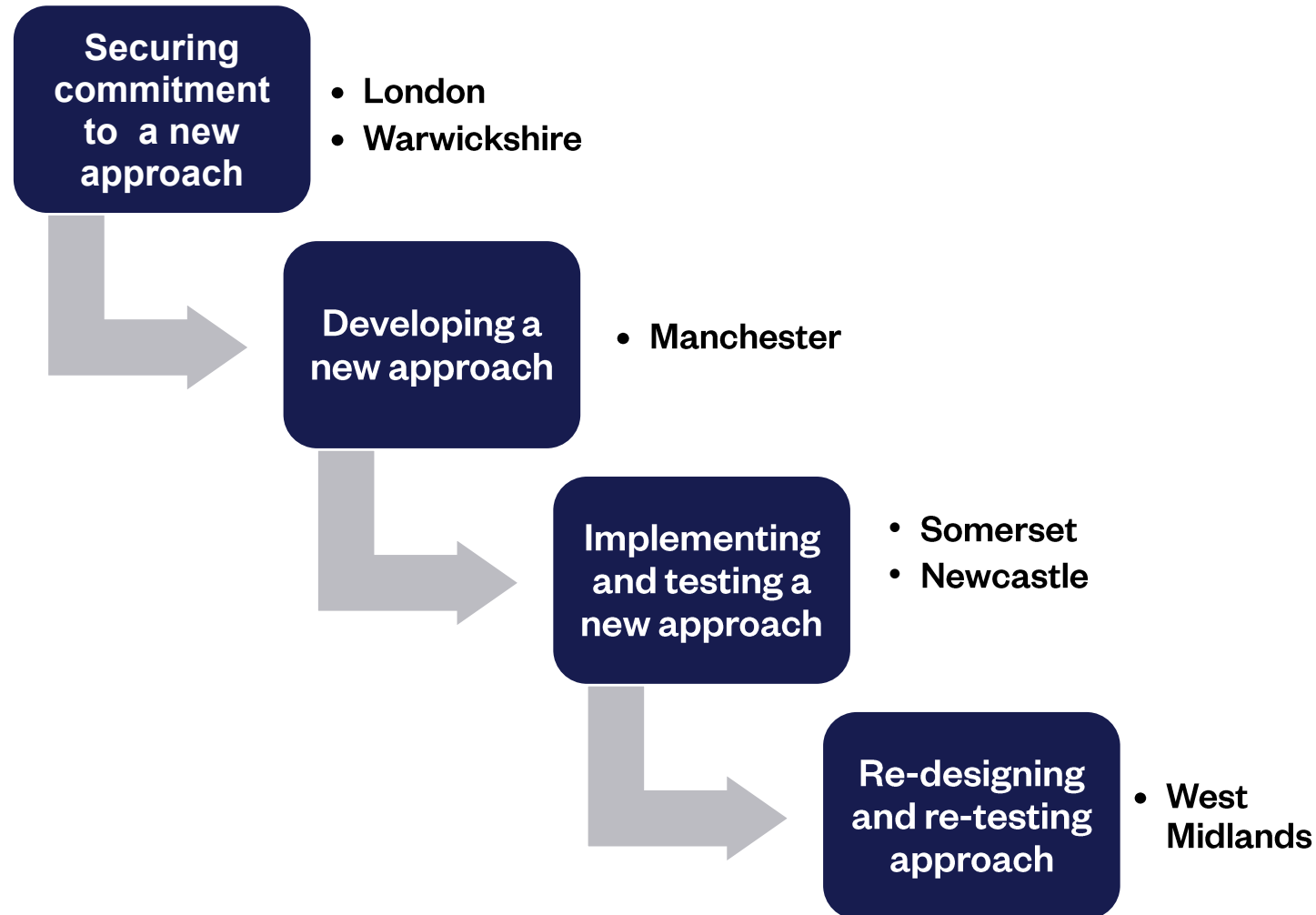
But lots of other good practice too...



Members of the Peer Collaborative

1. Newcastle & Gateshead: Jointly funded LA / ICB. Integrated multi-disciplinary team supporting caregivers and professionals working in residential care, special guardianship orders, kinship placements, and across youth justice and contextual safeguarding teams.
2. Intensive Residential Outreach Care (IROC): Pilot service sits under the Tier 4 CAMHS provisions, hosted within the regional West Midlands CYP Provider Collaborative. Multi-agency team supports professionals around the child and child directly. Focus on integration with residential care providers.
3. Somerset: 10-year partnership. 10 new family-sized homes for children, 20 specialist fostering households, and a therapeutic education service on 2 sites delivered by social care, mental health and third sector provider.
4. Greater Manchester: 10 councils jointly funding 10 new homes for children with complex mental health care needs, transition from residential to foster care, adolescents with complex needs and children at risk of criminal exploitation. Plans for an integrated clinical team to provide indirect and direct support.
5. London: Provider collaborative currently exploring local authority partners in North-East and North Central London for two residential homes to reduce high-cost placements and inpatient stays. Plus a community team.
6. Warwickshire: Local authority exploring integrated mental health offer with mental health trust for one new residential home to reduce high-cost placements and inpatient stays.

At different stages of the journey



Some common features

- Partnership between children's social care and children's mental health – relationships are key
- An iterative journey
- Multi-disciplinary team supporting team around the child ('a service to the system')
- Holding and sharing risk
- One team, joint formulations, co-funding, co-leadership
- Child at the centre
- Trauma informed

What next?

- The Peer Collaborative's view of what change is needed
- A growing network of organisations and individuals sharing learning
- The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

Join the network

Back to their Futures Network

