

Drug Interventions Programme

Drug Testing on Arrest:

Class A drug tests in Merseyside Police custody (2025/26)

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KEY FINDINGS (YEAR ENDING MARCH 2026)

- Merseyside Police recorded 4,382 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on adults across its custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (96.8% were Merseyside residents). This is similar to the previous year (1.5% decrease) and the second highest number of tests of the ten-year period presented in this report.
- Just over two-thirds (68.7%) of the successful tests resulted in a positive test. Over three in five (63.2%) were cocaine only, while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (33.3% both cocaine and opiates, 3.5% opiates only). Cocaine only positive tests are becoming increasingly prevalent, increasing from 42.5% in 2016/17 to 63.2% in 2025/26.
- Over four in five (83.0%) of the positive drug tests were following a trigger offence. Specifically, there was a similar proportion of theft and Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (31.6% and 31.3% respectively), accounting for a total of 62.9% of all positive tests in the year. Notably, the proportion of theft in the year ending March 2026 was the highest since the year ending March 2019, which may be attributed to the removal of the targeted drug testing approach for shoplifting.
- There were slightly more positive tests for opiates metabolites than cocaine only for those who were drug tested following theft (51.2% versus 48.8%), while there were higher numbers of cocaine only than opiate metabolites for burglary, MDA offences, violence and other offences. This was most prominent for violence-related offences (77.1%), followed by MDA offences (65.2%).
- Men continue to account for the majority of adults drug tested in police custody, representing around four in five (80.6%) individuals in the year ending March 2026; however, there is an increasing female representation in recent years.
- The average age was 39 years, which is the oldest average age of the past ten years.
- Adults aged 18-29 years were three times more likely to be represented in the cocaine only cohort than opiate metabolites (22.2% versus 7.4%), while of those aged 50 years or over, around a quarter of the positive tests were opiate metabolites, more than double the cocaine only cohort (25.5% versus 12.2%).
- In the year ending March 2026, 182.9 per 100,000 adult population in Merseyside had a positive test for specified Class A drugs, compared to 189.1 per 100,000 in the previous year. Of the five Local Authority areas, Liverpool residents had the highest rate (249.2 per 100,000), followed by residents of Knowsley (183.7), St Helens (181.6), Wirral (140.1) and Sefton (135.1).
- Just over one in five (22.1%) Merseyside residents who tested positive for opiates and/or cocaine in the year ending March 2026 subsequently re-presented and were drug tested again following their initial positive drug test during the twelve-month period.
- Of the 480 individuals who re-presented between April 2025 and March 2026, around four in five (78.3%) were men and the average age was 40 years.
- Around half (51.0%) who re-presented tested positive for cocaine only at their initial positive drug test in the twelve months ending March 2026. Liverpool was the only area where there was a majority of individuals testing positive for opiate metabolites at their initial positive test (54.4%).

A strong association between drug use, particularly Class A drugs, and acquisitive crime is well known (Bennett et al., 2008; Bond and Sheridan, 2007; Gossop et al., 2005; Hayhurst et al., 2013; McIntosh et al., 2009), with almost half of acquisitive crime estimated to be associated with drug use (Black, 2020).

The Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) has an overarching aim to identify and engage with adults in the criminal justice system who use drugs and/or alcohol and divert them to appropriate treatment services where a range of interventions can be delivered in order to reduce acquisitive crime (Collins, B.J. et al., 2016; Collins, P. et al., 2017; Cuddy et al., 2015; Home Office, 2011; Public Health England and Ministry of Justice, 2017).

A key route into DIP is Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA), where adults are tested for specified Class A drugs (currently crack/powder cocaine and/or certain opiates) in police custody following an arrest for a trigger offence, which are typically acquisitive crimes, as defined by the [Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000](#) (Home Office, 2025). Following a non-trigger offence, a drug test can be carried out where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the offence was linked to the use of a Class A drug, though authority is required by a police Inspector or officer of higher rank (Home Office, 2010 & 2025).

In Merseyside, if an individual tests positive they can be served with a Required Assessment (RA) by the police, whereby an appointment is made with the local treatment provider. An assessment is carried out to determine whether further intervention is required to address their substance use and its related offending.

In 2015, Merseyside Police established targeted drug testing, which involves a set list of questions around Class A drug use and drug-related offending that are considered before a decision is made on whether an individual is drug tested. This process reduced the number of negative drug tests, thus saving time and money, while allowing people who offend and use Class A drugs to continue to be drug tested and referred to treatment services through the RA process. Notably, in March 2024, it was decided to remove the targeted approach for shoplifting offences; therefore, all arrested for shoplifting are subject to undergo a drug test.

This report from the Public Health Institute, Liverpool John Moores University, shows trends of Merseyside Police DToA records over a ten-year period up to the year ending March 2026. A demographic overview of this cohort and figures for residents of each of the five Merseyside Local Authorities are also provided¹.

Expansion of Drug Testing on Arrest

The Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2026) confirmed the expansion of Drug Testing on Arrest as part of the Crime and Policing Act 2026, with the aim of directing more people into treatment. The expansion includes:

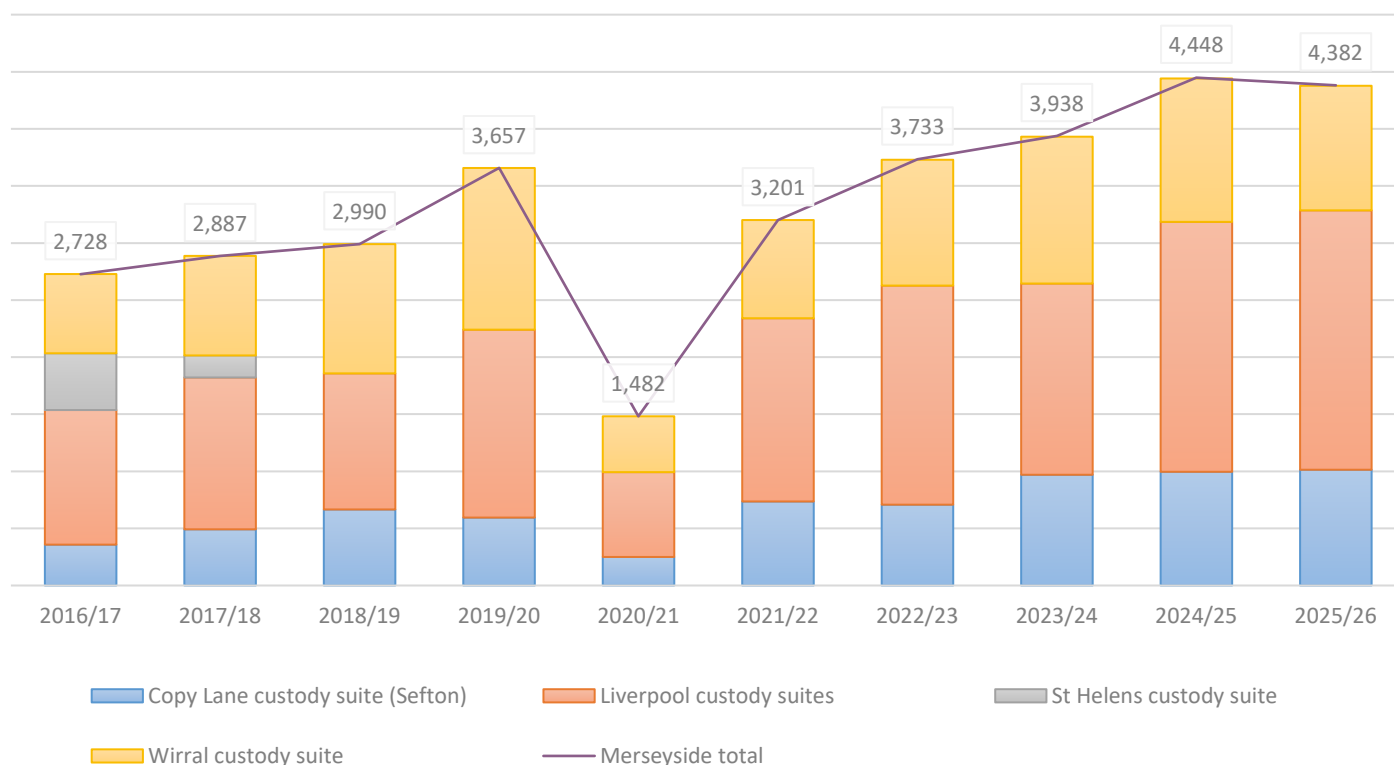
- A wider range of controlled drugs, including specified Class B and C drugs.
- A revised list of trigger offences; to include a number of violent crimes linked to illicit drug use, while some offences where the link to drug use is no longer clear have been removed.
- The power to take an additional sample to test for a wider range of drugs where the initial sample is unsuitable or insufficient.

¹ Notes to accompany this report are available in [Appendix A](#) (page 42). Furthermore, there are comparisons for the year ending March 2026 presented in charts in [Appendix C](#) for Merseyside residents (page 44). Where comparisons have been made with Merseyside figures, these are totals for Merseyside residents only and not totals of tests carried out by Merseyside Police, which include all residents.

OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, Merseyside Police recorded 4,382 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on adults across the force's custody suites. This is similar to the 4,448 attempted tests in the previous year (1.5% decrease), which is higher than pre-pandemic levels (*Figure 1*)². The increase in the volume of testing in recent years is likely attributable to improved processes to ensure drug tests are being carried out through the targeted approach, rather than a growing prevalence of Class A drug use among adults who offend. Liverpool's custody suites continue to account for the highest number of attempted drug tests, representing an average of 47.0% of all attempted tests in Merseyside during the ten-year period.

Figure 1: Attempted drug tests by custody suite area and year, 2016/17 - 2025/26^{3,4}



Of the attempted drug tests in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026, where recorded, 4,239 (96.8%) were Merseyside residents⁵, which is the highest proportion of the ten-year period. Residents of Liverpool Local Authority (LA) accounted for the highest proportion of adults who were drug tested in the past decade (an average of 44.9%; *Figure 2*).

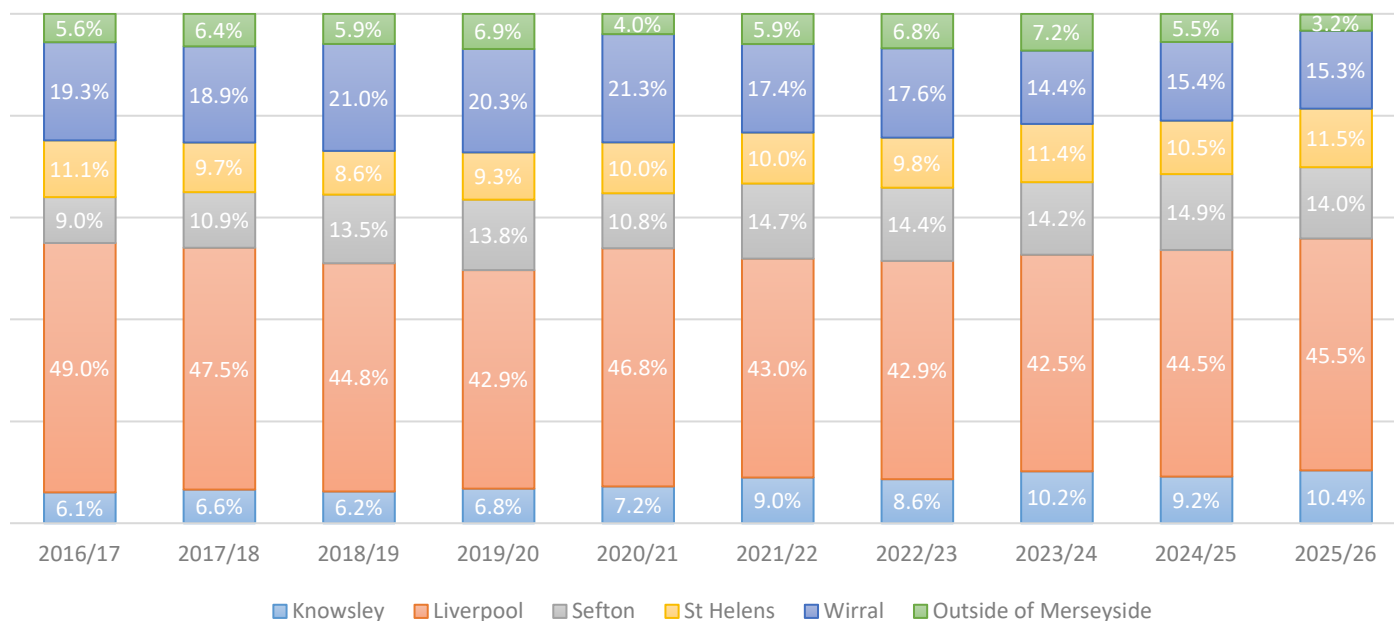
² Drug testing was suspended for around five months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thus impacting the number of tests carried out in 2020/21.

³ Notes regarding Merseyside Police custody suites are available in [Appendix A](#).

⁴ There were five records that did not specify the custody suite where the drug test was conducted in 2025/26.

⁵ This includes six records that had 'Merseyside' recorded, not specifying the Local Authority of residence.

Figure 2: Attempted drug tests by LA of residence and year, 2016/17 - 2025/26 ⁶



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 3 (page 4) shows the drug testing activity for adults who were drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the total 4,382 attempted drug tests, 4,327 were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 2,974 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is similar to the 2,986 positive tests in the previous year (0.4% decrease). Just over two-thirds (68.7%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police between April 2025 and March 2026 resulted in a positive test, which is the same as the previous year. Notably, this is substantially higher than the police forces in England and Wales reporting to the Home Office (2025) in the twelve months ending March 2025 (55.3%). Though different twelve-month periods, this is a variation of 13.4%, which may reflect the targeted approach used by Merseyside Police.



63%

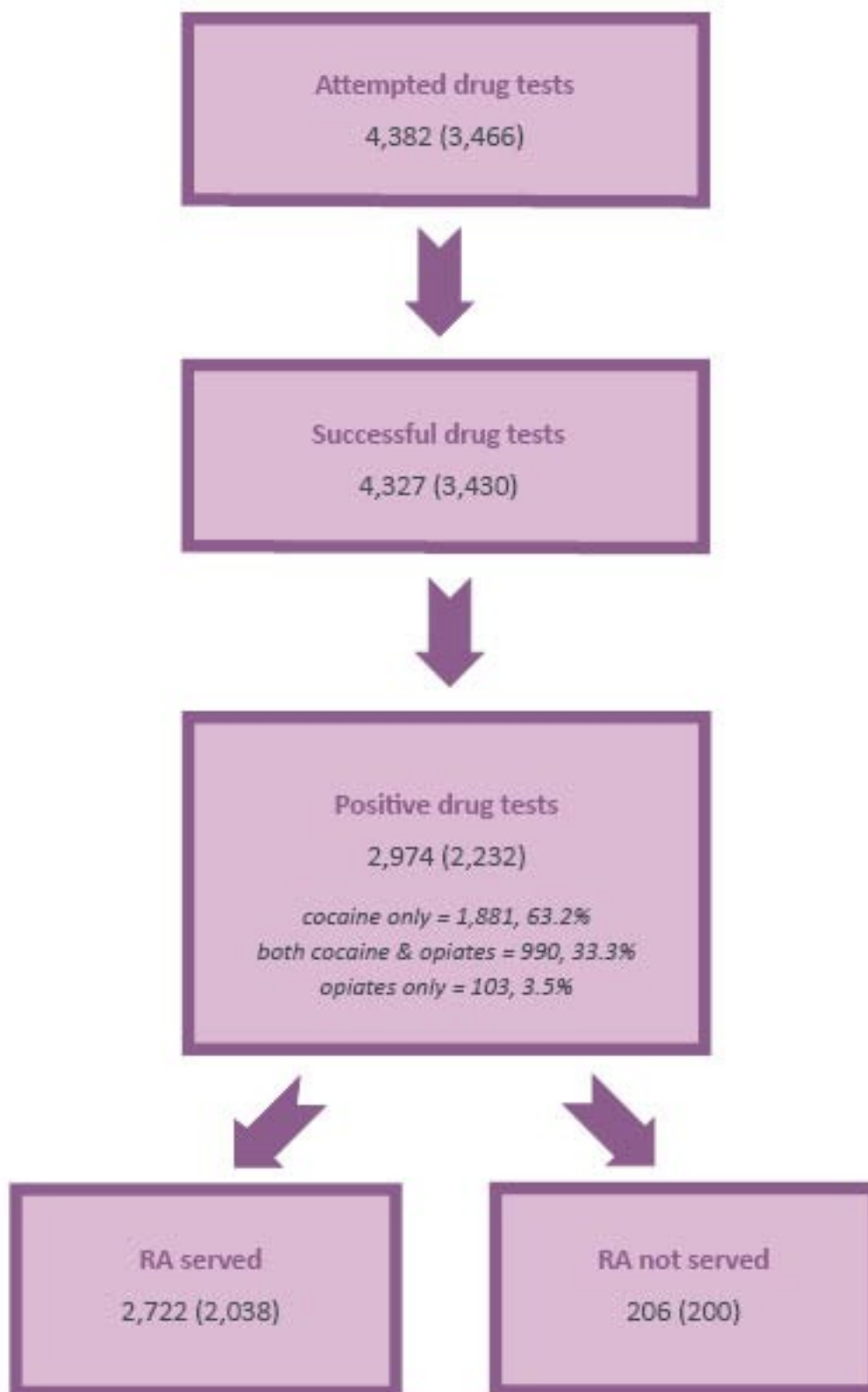
of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

Over three in five positive tests were cocaine only (n=1,881, 63.2%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 990, 33.3%; opiates only = 103, 3.5%). Where the positive result was maintained⁷, there were 2,722 Required Assessments (RAs) served by Merseyside Police to 2,038 individuals in the year ending March 2026. This accounts for 91.5% of the total positive tests in 2025/26, compared to 88.6% reported by the police forces in England and Wales in 2024/25 (Home Office, 2025).

⁶ There were four records that did not have the LA of residence recorded.

⁷ The number of RAs served excludes any drug tests where the positive result was overturned or not resolved following a dispute.

Figure 3: Drug testing activity in Merseyside's custody suites, 2025/26 ^{8,9,10}



⁸ Numbers of individuals are presented in brackets.

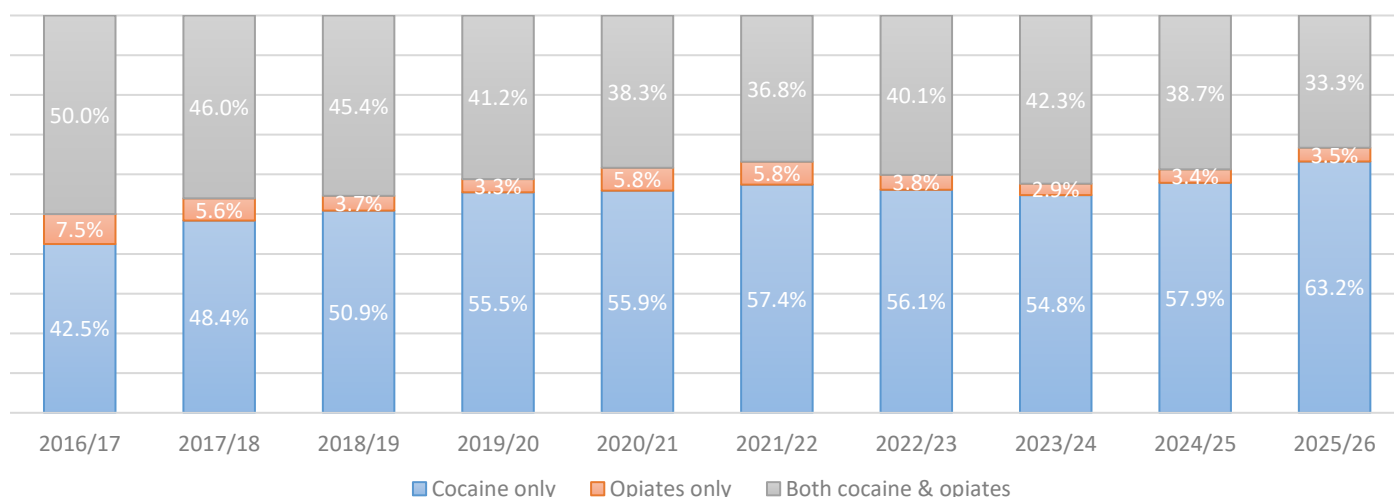
⁹ There were 55 tests refused, though no further unsuccessful tests were reported.

¹⁰ 'RA served' and 'RA not served' indicate the number of occasions when those who tested positive were either served or not served with the requirement to attend an initial RA (RA1). There are individuals with more than one positive drug test that could be included in both 'RA served' and 'RA not served'. Note that two records did not indicate whether an RA was served and there were 44 records where an RA was served but the positive result was overturned or not resolved following the dispute, which have been removed from the final 'RA served' figure.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

There has been a clear shift in the drug profile over the past ten years, with cocaine only positive tests becoming increasingly prevalent, while positive tests for both cocaine and opiates have steadily declined (*Figure 4*). There were 1,881 positive tests for cocaine only in 2025/26, which is a 9.0% increase on the 1,726 positive tests in the previous year. This is the highest number of cocaine only positive tests since Merseyside Police introduced the targeted approach to drug testing, with the proportion increasing from 42.5% in 2016/17 to 63.2% in 2025/26, accounting for over half of all positive tests since the year ending March 2019. Conversely, the proportion of both cocaine and opiates in 2025/26 is the lowest of the ten-year period, while opiate only positive tests remain consistently low, becoming less common over time (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4: Positive drug tests by drug test result, 2016/17 - 2025/26



Seizures of cocaine: year ending March 2025 (Home Office, 2026)

Powder cocaine

Overall, there were 24,492 powder cocaine seizures by police forces and Border Force in England and Wales in the year ending March 2025, which is a 14% increase from 21,548 seizures in the previous year. Powder cocaine accounted for three in five (60%) of all seizures of Class A drugs, compared to 57% in the previous year. Notably, police forces had a record number of seizures; an increase of 13%, from 20,900 to 23,706.

However, the total quantity of powder cocaine seized by police forces and Border Force decreased by 35% to 18.5 tonnes, compared to 28.3 tonnes in the previous year, returning to a similar quantity seized in the year ending March 2023 (18.6 tonnes). Although Border Force seized the majority (86%) of powder cocaine, accounting for a 40% decrease, the quantity seized by police forces increased by 49%.

Crack cocaine

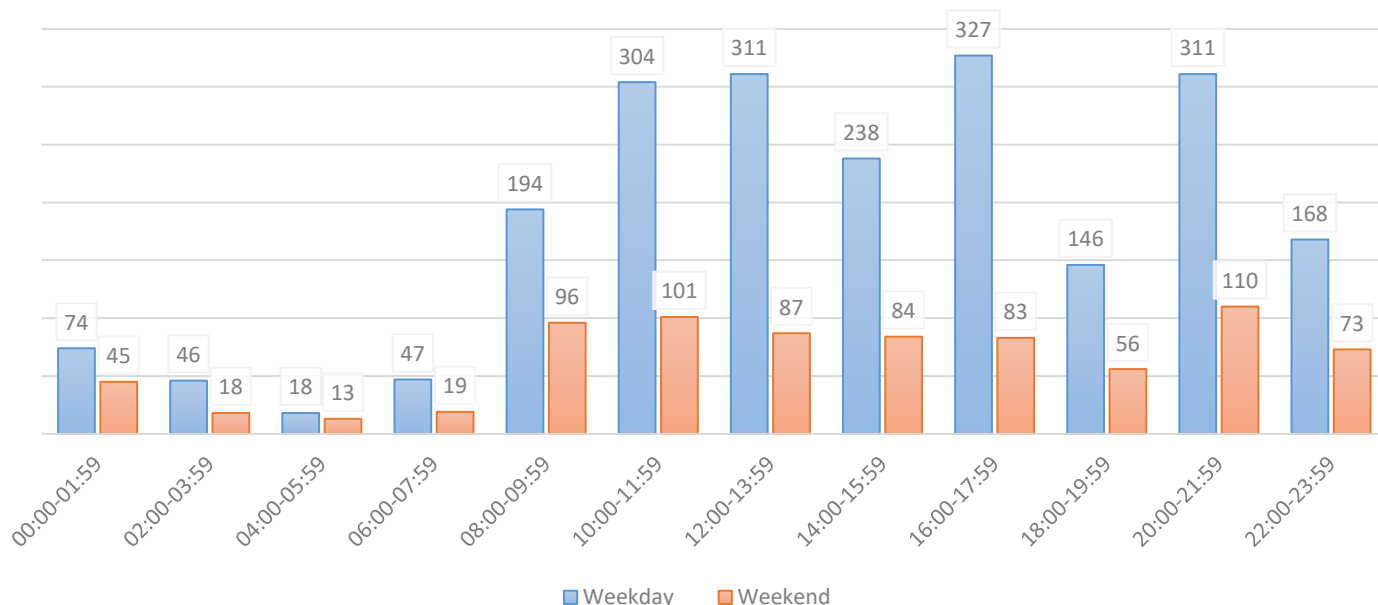
The number of crack cocaine seizures by Police forces and Border Force in the year ending March 2025 increased by 4% to 6,952, accounting for one in six (17%) of Class A drug seizures.

Notably, the quantity of crack cocaine seized doubled to 81kg compared to the previous year, though the quantity seized by Border Force increased by 294% (from 6kg to 25kg). Police forces tend to seize larger quantities of crack cocaine than Border Force, as the majority of the drug is produced from imported powder cocaine.

TIME OF DRUG TESTS

Of the positive drug tests across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2026, around three-quarters occurred on a weekday (n=2,186, 73.5%), compared to those on a weekend (n=788, 26.5%). *Figure 5* shows the number of positive drug tests by time group of tests, comparing those that occurred on a weekday with those on a weekend. On a weekday, positive drug tests peaked at 16:00-17:59 (15.0%), followed by 12:00-13:59 and 20:00-21:59 (both 14.2%), and 10:00-11:59 (13.9%). While on a weekend, they peaked at 20:00-21:59 (14.0%), followed by 08:00-09:59 and 10:00-11:59 (12.2% and 12.9% respectively).

Figure 5: Positive drug tests by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2025/26 ¹¹



Belle Vale and St Anne Street custody suites, Liverpool

Around three-quarters of the positive drug tests at Liverpool's custody suites in the year ending March 2026 occurred on a weekday (n=1,134, 73.4%), compared to those on a weekend (n=411, 26.6%). On a weekday, positive drug tests peaked at 16:00-17:59 and 20:00-21:59 (15.5% and 15.0% respectively), followed by 10:00-11:59 (14.2%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked at 20:00-21:59 (14.4%), followed by 08:00-09:59 and 12:00-13:59 (both 11.4%; *Appendix B1*).

Copy Lane custody suite, Sefton

Around three-quarters of the positive drug tests at Copy Lane custody suite in the year ending March 2026 occurred on a weekday (n=471, 73.1%), compared to those on a weekend (n=173, 26.9%). On a weekday, positive drug tests peaked at 16:00-17:59 (14.9%), followed by 14:00-15:59 (14.0%), 10:00-11:59 (13.6%), and 12:00-13:59 and 20:00-21:59 (both 13.4%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked at 10:00-11:59 and 20:00-21:59 (both 14.0%), followed by 16:00-17:59 (12.9%; *Appendix B2*).

Wirral custody suite

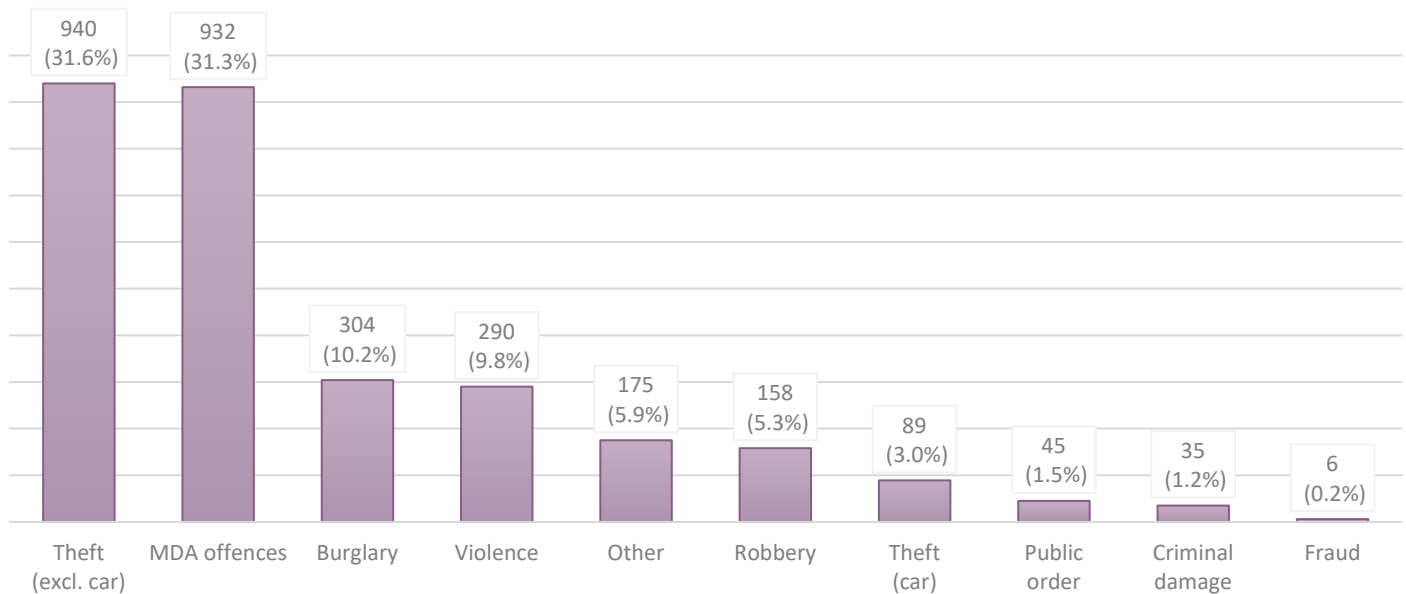
Around three-quarters of the positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite in the year ending March 2026 occurred on a weekday (n=578, 73.9%), compared to those on a weekend (n=204, 26.1%). On a weekday, positive drug tests peaked at 12:00-13:59 (16.3%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked at 10:00-11:59 (16.3%), followed by 08:00-09:59 (14.8%; *Appendix B3*).

¹¹ There were five records that did not have the time of test recorded. [Appendix B1-3](#) is available on page 43.

OFFENCES

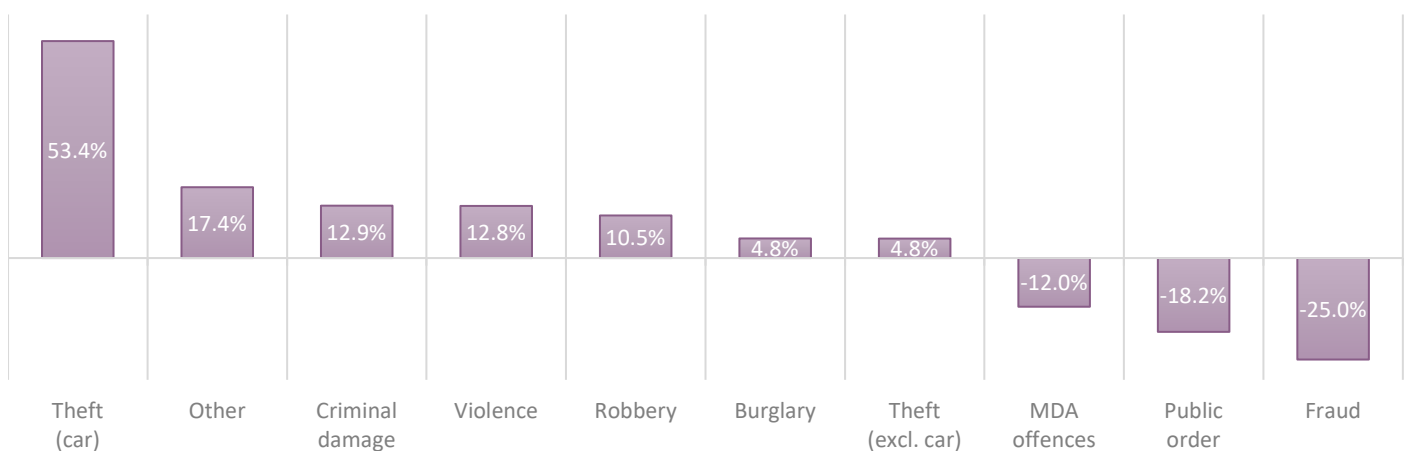
Police drug testing records capture the alleged offence that led to the arrest and subsequent drug test. In the year ending March 2026, over four in five of the positive drug tests were following a trigger offence, which are typically acquisitive crimes (n=2,467, 83.0%). Specifically, there was a similar proportion of theft¹² (n=940, 31.6%) and Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences¹³ (n=932, 31.3%), accounting for a total of 62.9% of all positive tests in the year (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Positive drug tests by offence, 2025/26 ¹⁴



When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for most offending categories in 2025/26, with the largest increase for theft of a motor vehicle (+53.4%), while there were decreases in the number of MDA offences, public order and fraud (Figure 7). Notably, the proportion of theft in the year ending March 2026 was the highest since the year ending March 2019, which may be attributed to the removal of the targeted drug testing approach for shoplifting.

Figure 7: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, 2025/26



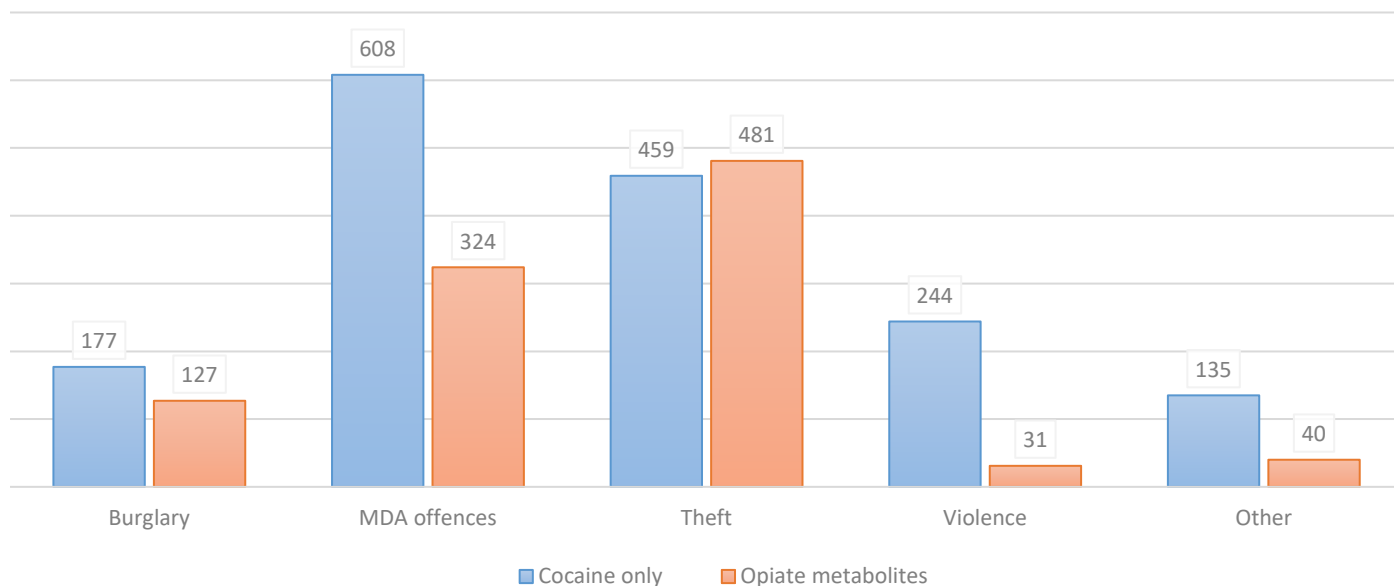
¹² Shoplifting = 760, 80.9% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

¹³ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 554, 59.4%; possession of controlled drugs = 378, 40.6%.

¹⁴ Other offences: miscellaneous crimes = 154, 88.0%; stalking and harassment = 18, 10.3%; motoring offences (including unlawful driving) = 2, 1.1%; vehicle interference = 1, 0.6%.

Figure 8 shows the five offence categories with the highest numbers recorded in the year ending March 2026 by the positive drug test result¹⁵. There were slightly more positive tests for opiates metabolites (n=481, 51.2%) than cocaine only for those who were drug tested following theft, while there were higher numbers of cocaine only than opiate metabolites for burglary, MDA offences, violence and other offences. This was most prominent for violence-related offences, with around nine in ten (88.7%) adults testing positive for cocaine only, followed by other offences (77.1%), MDA offences (65.2%) and burglary (58.2%).

Figure 8: Positive drug tests by offence and drug test result, 2025/26 ¹⁵



Violence & cocaine

Around half (49.2%) of the 258 records for a violence-related offence where there was a positive result for cocaine only in the year ending March 2026 were violence with injury, while around a third (35.3%) were violence without injury, and the remaining offences consisted of possession of weapons offences, homicide, rape and other sexual offences. Around seven in ten (69.0%) were domestic related, which increased to 77% for violence with injury. Of the 250 individuals of the violence and cocaine cohort, just under nine in ten (87.6%) were men, and the average age was 37.4 years (men = 37.3, women = 37.9).

Theft & opiate metabolites

There were 481 records for theft where there was a positive result for opiate metabolites in the year ending March 2026; of which, over four in five (83.8%) were categorised as shoplifting. Of the 330 individuals, three-quarters (75.1%) were men, and the average age was 42.1 years (men = 42.7, women = 40.5).

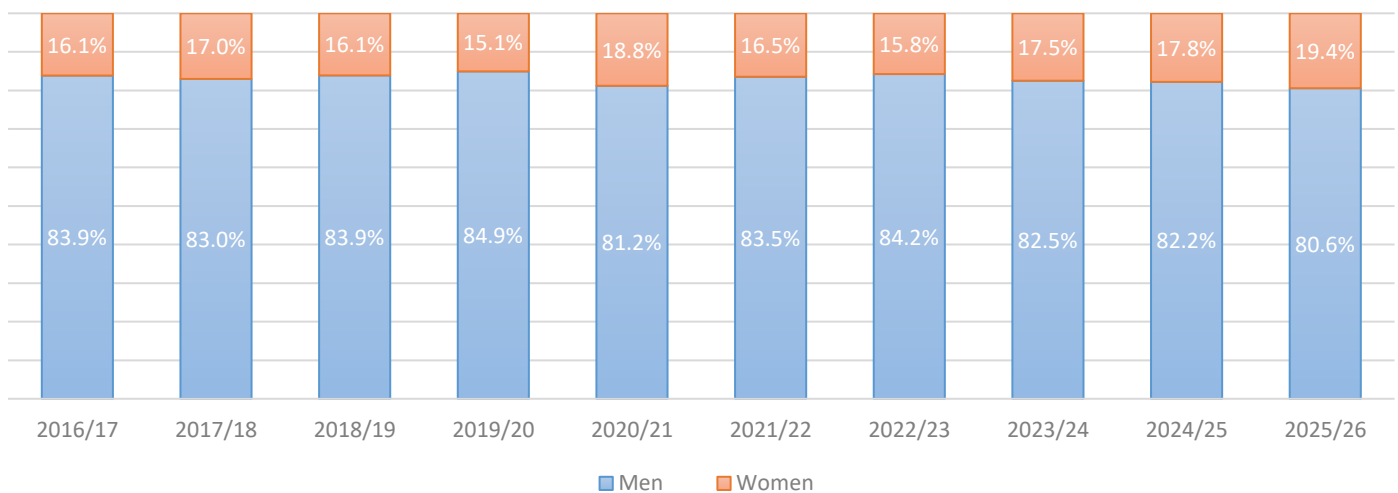
Where recorded, just under two-thirds of the positive drug test records reported multiple offences (n=1,899, 64.0%); of which, around half were non-trigger (n=947, 49.4%), just under two in five were trigger (n=718, 37.4%) and around one in seven were both trigger and non-trigger offences (n=253, 13.2%).

¹⁵ Opiate metabolites combine opiates only and both cocaine & opiates.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Men continue to account for the majority of adults drug tested in police custody, representing around four in five individuals in the year ending March 2026 (n=1,792, 80.6%), which is lower than the ten-year average (83.0%; *Figure 9*). However, there is an increasing female representation in recent years; the number of women increased by 4.6%, from 413 individuals in 2024/25 to 432 in 2025/26, which is the highest number of women testing positive for specified Class A drugs since the implementation of targeted testing.

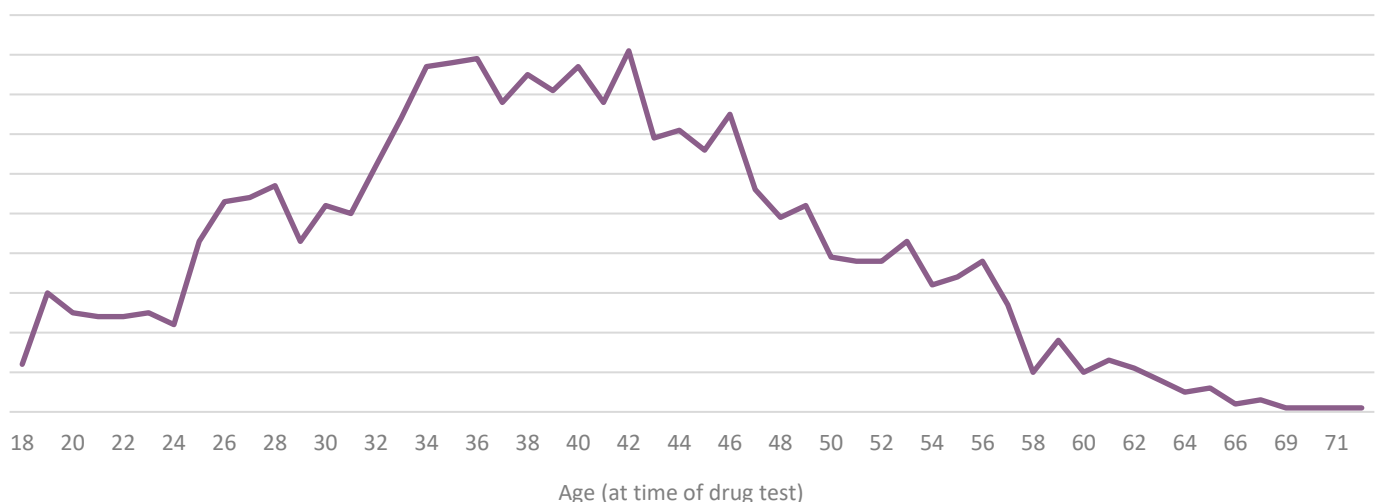
Figure 9: Positive drug tests by sex (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26 ¹⁶



Where ethnicity was stated, the majority of individuals who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (n=2,137, 96.0%), which is a slight increase on the previous year (95.1%). The average age was 39.3 years (men = 39.0, women = 40.2), which is the oldest average age of the past ten years.

The number of positive drug tests peaked for individuals in their late 30s and early 40s. There were fewer tests among younger adults aged under 26 years, while the frequency declined steadily after age 45, becoming very low among individuals aged over 60 years (*Figure 10*).

Figure 10: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test (individuals), 2025/26 ¹⁷



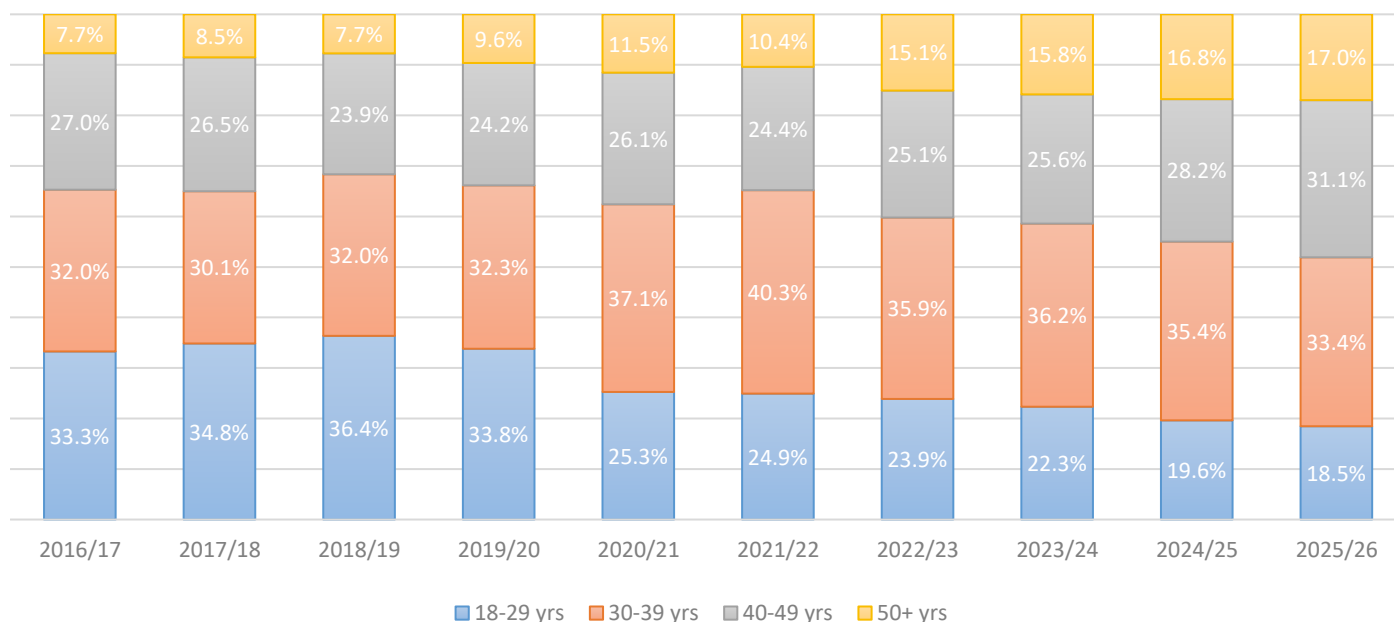
¹⁶ There were eight records that did not have the sex recorded in 2025/26.

¹⁷ There was one record that did not have the age or date of birth recorded in 2025/26.

A third of the individuals who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were aged 30-39 years (n=746, 33.4%), followed by around three in ten aged 40-49 years (n=694, 31.1%), around one in five aged 18-29 years (n=412, 18.5%) and one in six aged 50 years or over (n=379, 17.0%; *Figure 11*).

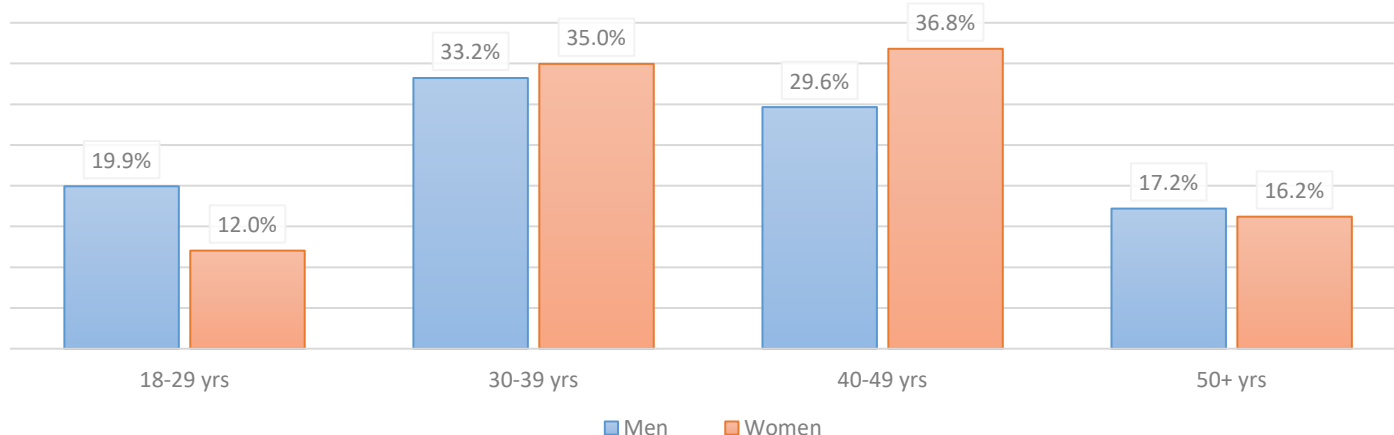
Figure 11 highlights a clear ageing trend over time. The proportion of younger adults aged 18-29 years almost halved, decreasing year-on-year since 2018/19 to the smallest proportion of the ten-year period, while the proportion of 30-39-year-olds decreased in the past two years. Conversely, the proportion of individuals aged 40-49 years and particularly 50 years or over increased year-on-year since 2021/22, peaking in the latest year. Notably, 48.1% were aged 40 years or over in 2025/26, compared to 34.7% in 2016/17.

Figure 11: Positive drug tests by age group (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



While individuals testing positive for specified Class A drugs are predominantly aged 30-49 years, the age profile differs slightly by sex. In the year ending March 2026, the proportion of men peaked in the 30-39-year-old category and the proportion of women peaked in the 40-49-year-old category (*Figure 12*). One in five (19.9%) men were aged 18-29 years, compared to 12.0% of women, while 36.8% of women were aged 40-49 years, compared to 29.6% of men. The proportions of men and women aged 30-39 years (33.2% versus 35.0%) and 50 years or over (17.2% versus 16.2%) were similar.

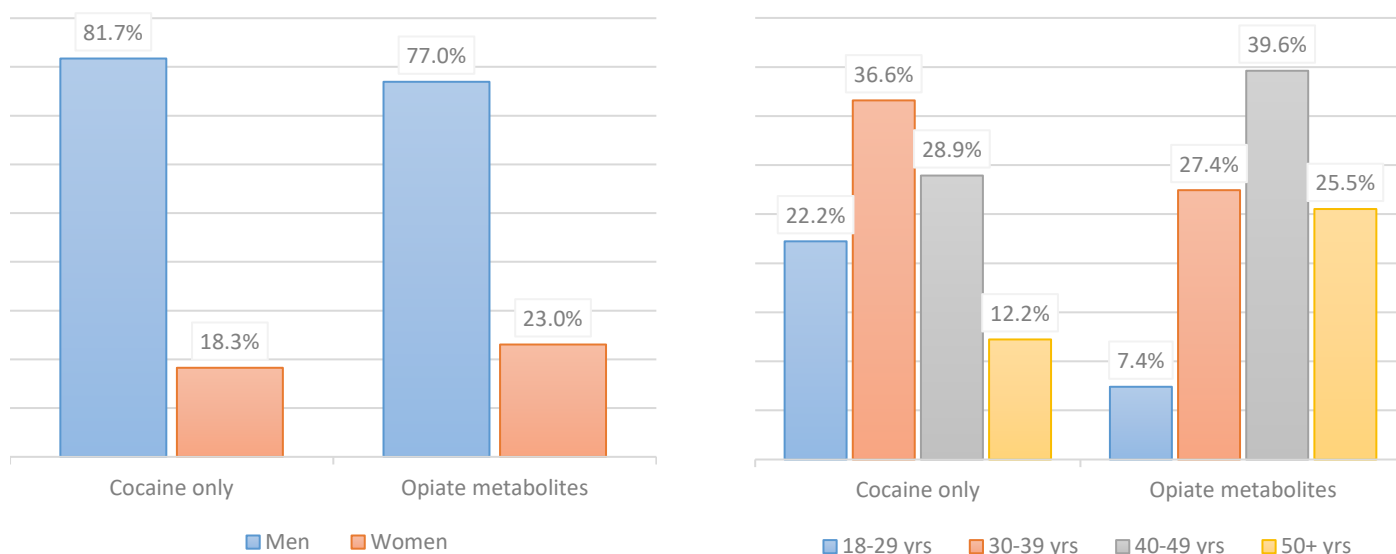
Figure 12: Positive drug tests by age group and sex (individuals), 2025/26



Positive drug test results in 2025/26 are categorised by age group and sex in *Figure 13*. Overall, men accounted for around four in five (80.6%) adults testing positive for specified Class A drugs, which increased slightly for those who tested positive for cocaine only (81.7%), though decreased to just over three in four (77.0%) for those who tested positive for opiate metabolites.

There are some notable differences in the age profile when comparing the drug test result. Cocaine only positive tests were generally more common among younger adults, peaking in those aged 30-39 years (36.6%), while positive tests for opiate metabolites were more prevalent among the older age groups, peaking in those aged 40-49 years (39.6%). Notably, adults aged 18-29 years were three times more likely to be represented in the cocaine only cohort than opiate metabolites (22.2% versus 7.4%), while of those aged 50 years or over, around a quarter of the positive tests were opiate metabolites, more than double the cocaine only cohort (25.5% versus 12.2%; *Figure 13*).

Figure 13: Positive drug tests by drug test result and age group/sex, 2025/26



Cocaine-related deaths

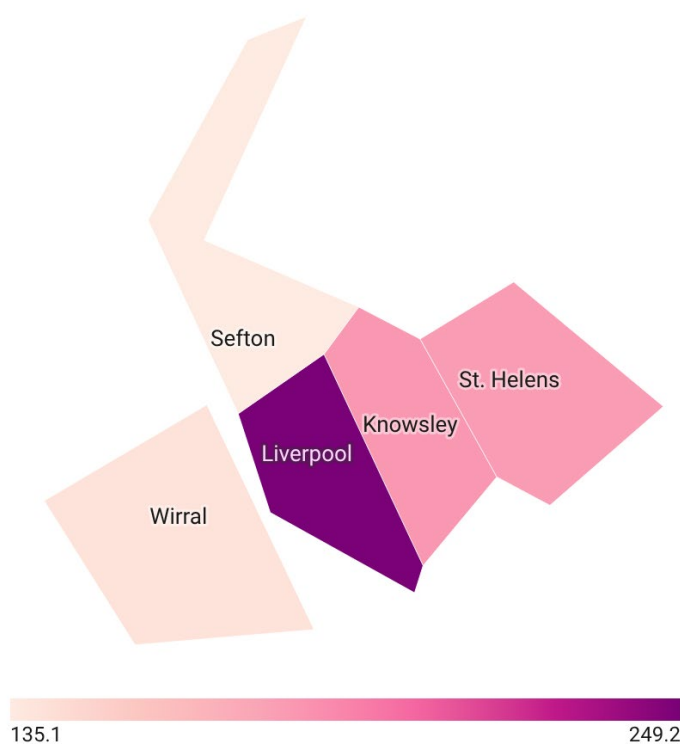
In 2024, 1,279 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales involved powder/crack cocaine. This is a 14% increase on the 1,118 deaths in the previous year and eleven times the number recorded in 2011 (112 deaths; Office for National Statistics, 2025). Of these deaths, just over three in four (76.8%) were men, compared to just under one in four (23.2%) who were women.

As reported by the Integrated Monitoring System (IMS) Drug and Alcohol Related Deaths (DARD) surveillance system, there were 138 cases where powder/crack cocaine was implicated in a drug related death in Merseyside in 2025, which is a 38% increase on the 100 deaths in the previous year (Whitfield and Reed, 2026).

MERSEYSIDE RESIDENTS

Using [mid-2025 population estimates](#), there were 182.9 per 100,000 adult population in Merseyside who tested positive for specified Class A drugs in the year ending March 2026, which is a decrease on the previous year (189.1 per 100,000 population, using mid-2023 population estimates). Of the five LA areas, Liverpool residents had the highest rate (249.2 per 100,000), followed by residents of Knowsley (183.7), St Helens (181.6), Wirral (140.1) and Sefton (135.1; *Figure 14*).

Figure 14: Rates of positive drug tests per 100,000 adult population by LA of residence (individuals), 2025/26 ¹⁸



LA of residence	Positive drug tests (individuals)	
	Number	Rate (per 100,000 adult population)
Knowsley	234	183.7
Liverpool	1,029	249.2
Sefton	315	135.1
St Helens	277	181.6
Wirral	370	140.1
<i>Total Merseyside residents</i>	<i>2,177</i>	<i>182.9</i>

The following sections provide figures for residents of each of the five Merseyside LAs; note that the data quality of the recording of the LA of residence in some years, particularly prior to the year ending March 2020, may affect some of these trends. Where comparisons have been made with Merseyside figures, these are totals for Merseyside residents only and not all tests carried out by Merseyside Police (presented in the preceding chapter), which is all residents, including those who reside outside of the Merseyside area.

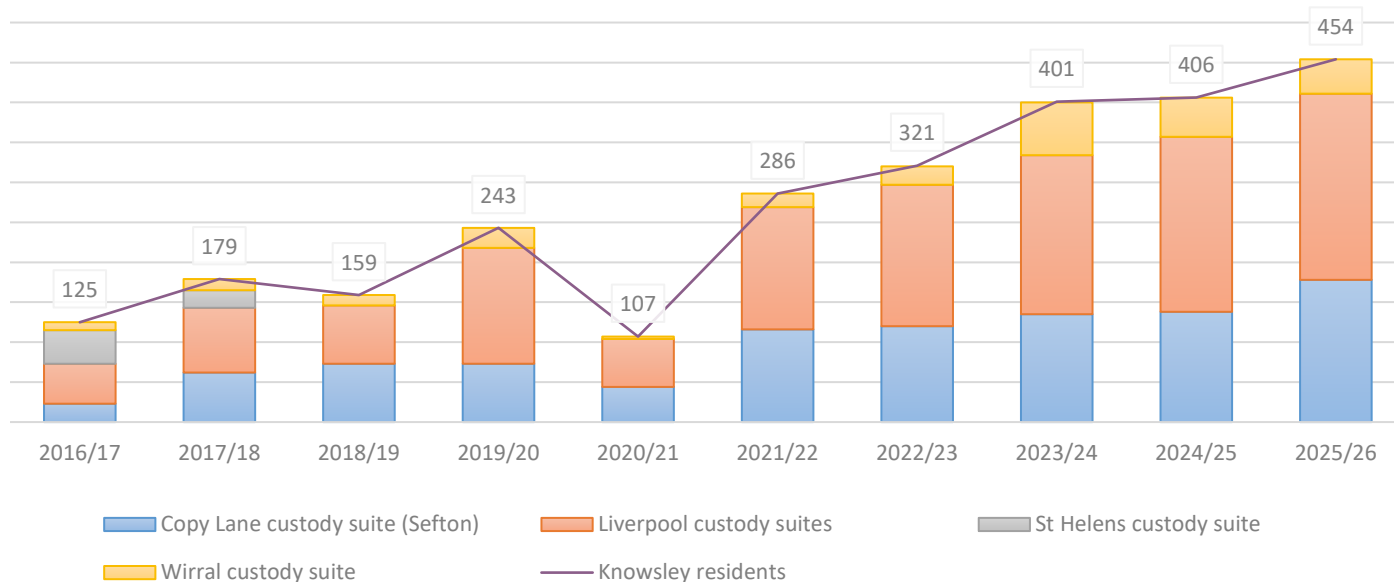
¹⁸ Note that the total number of Merseyside residents (n=2,225) is less than the summation of the five LAs (n=2,177) due to some individuals with multiple drug tests having different LAs recorded.

OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, there were 454 attempted tests recorded for specified Class A drugs on Knowsley residents across Merseyside Police's custody suites, representing around one in ten (10.7%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. This is an 11.8% increase on the 406 attempted tests in the previous year and the highest number of tests of the ten years shown in *Figure 15*. Notably, the number of drug tests carried out on Knowsley residents increased year-on-year since testing was suspended for around five months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On average, around half (51.1%) of the attempted drug tests on Knowsley residents were carried out at a Liverpool custody suite during the ten-year period, followed by just over a third (35.5%) at Copy Lane custody suite in Sefton and around one in ten (8.8%) at Wirral custody suite (*Figure 15*).

Figure 15: Attempted drug tests by custody suite and year, Knowsley residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 16 shows the drug testing activity for Knowsley residents drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the 454 attempted drug tests, 444 were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 277 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is just over three in five (62.4%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police in 2025/26 and a slight decrease on the previous year (66.4%).

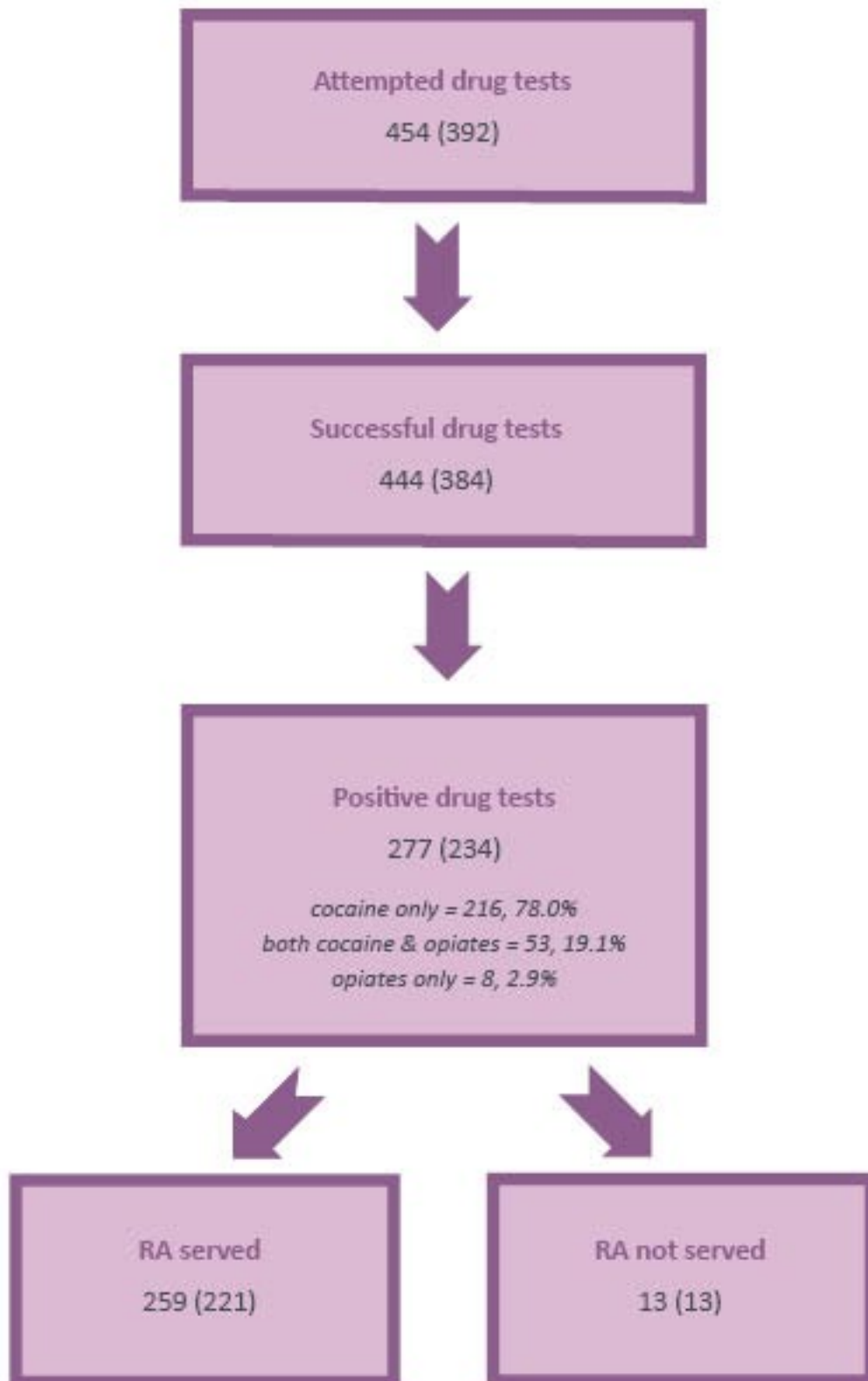
Just under four in five positive tests were cocaine only (n=216, 78.0%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 53, 19.1%; opiates only = 8, 2.9%). Where the positive result was maintained, there were 259 RAs served by Merseyside Police to 221 individuals in the year ending March 2026.



78%

of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

Figure 16: Drug testing activity, Knowsley residents, 2025/26 ¹⁹

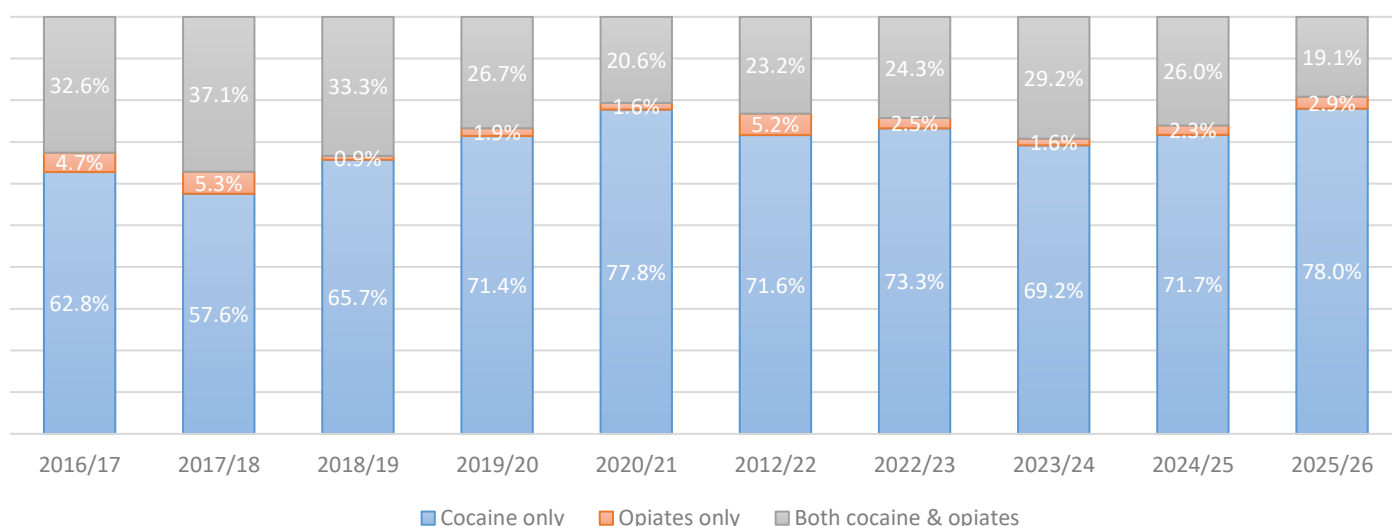


¹⁹ There were ten tests refused.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

Cocaine only positive tests have consistently accounted for a larger proportion of tests than opiate metabolites (opiates only, and both cocaine & opiates) for Knowsley residents in the ten years shown in *Figure 17*. The number of cocaine only positive tests increased by 13.7%, from 190 in 2024/25 to 216 in 2025/26, accounting for the highest proportion of the ten-year period. Notably, Knowsley had the highest proportion of cocaine only positive tests recorded of the five Merseyside LA areas in all ten years.

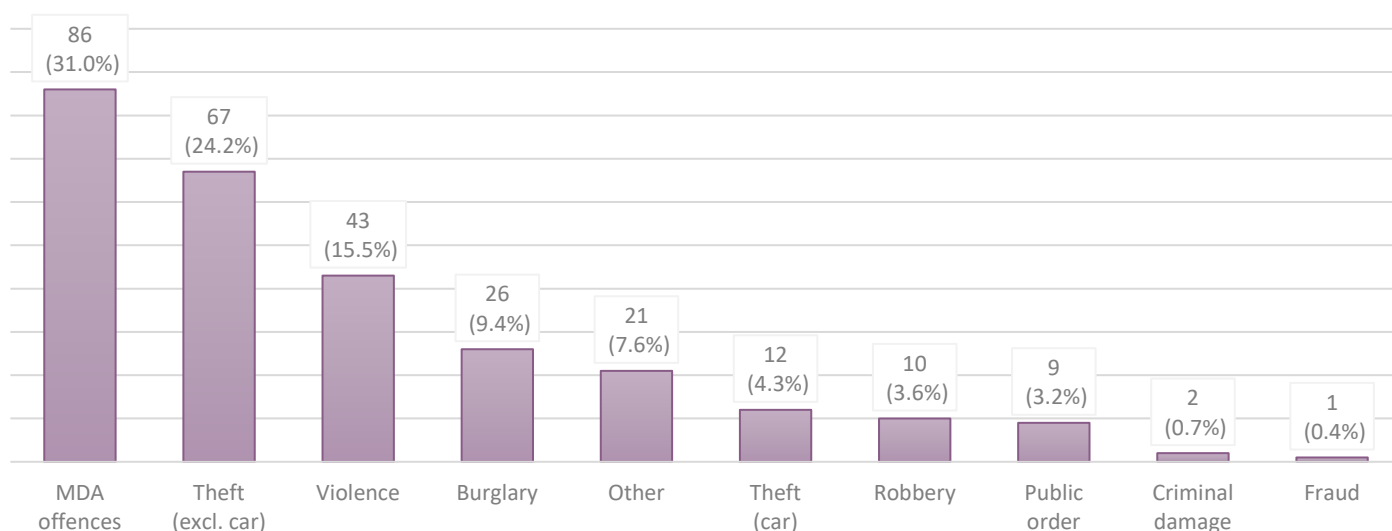
Figure 17: Positive drug tests by drug test result, Knowsley residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



OFFENCES

In the year ending March 2026, nearly three in four positive drug tests were following a trigger offence (n=202, 72.9%). Specifically, around three in ten were MDA offences²⁰ (n=86, 31.0%) and around a quarter were theft²¹ (n=67, 24.2%), while violence, a non-trigger offence, accounted for around one in six (n=43, 15.5%; *Figure 18*). When compared to the other Merseyside LA areas, Knowsley had the highest proportions of violence and other offences, though lower proportions of burglary, robbery and theft.

Figure 18: Positive drug tests by offence, Knowsley residents, 2025/26

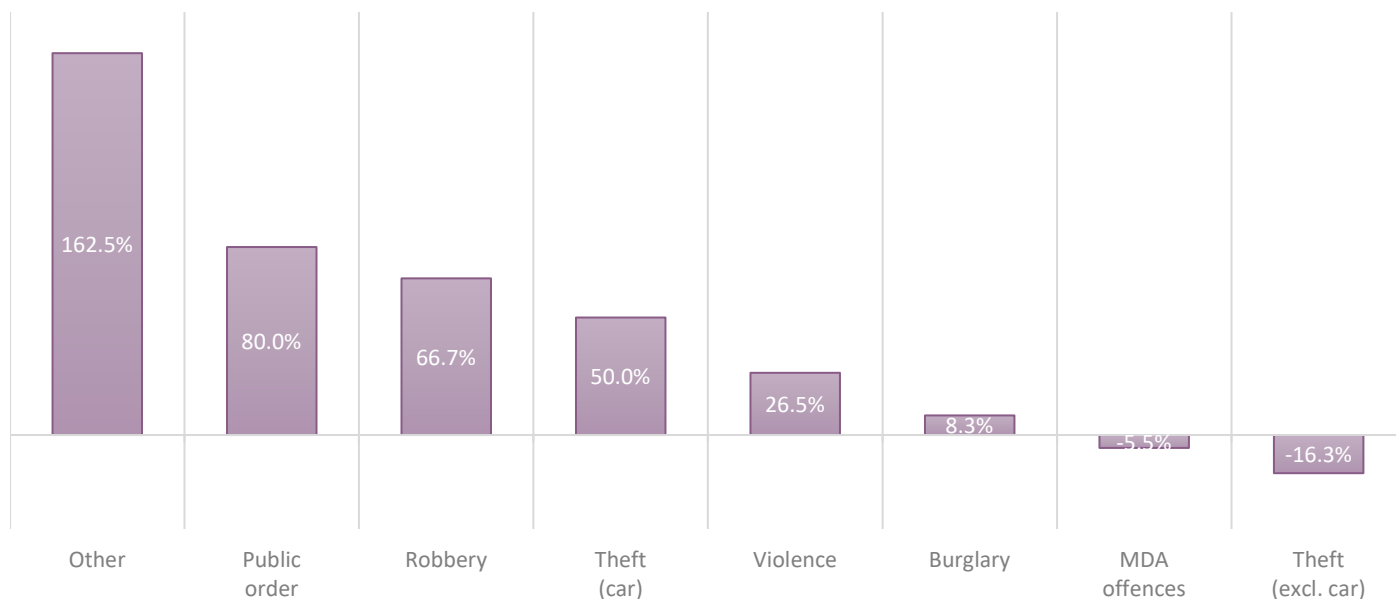


²⁰ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 45, 52.9%; possession of controlled drugs = 40, 47.1%.

²¹ Shoplifting = 53, 79.1% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for most offending categories in 2025/26 (*Figure 19*). The largest increase was noted for other offences (+162.5%), while there were decreases in the number of MDA offences and theft.

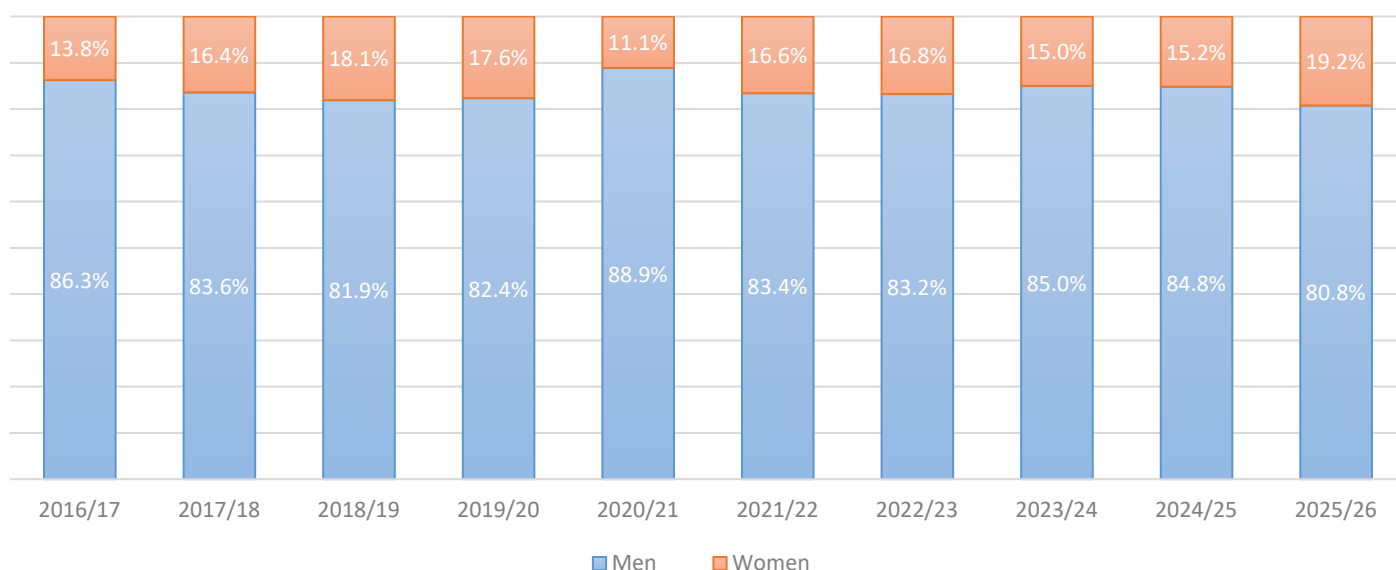
Figure 19: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, Knowsley residents, 2025/26



DEMOGRAPHICS

Men accounted for around four in five individuals who tested positive across Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (n=189, 80.8%; *Figure 20*). Although this is somewhat lower than the ten-year average (84.0%), it is similar to the figure for all Merseyside residents combine (80.4%). Notably, the number of women increased by 32.4%, from 34 individuals in 2024/25 to 45 in 2025/26, which is the highest proportion of the ten-year period.

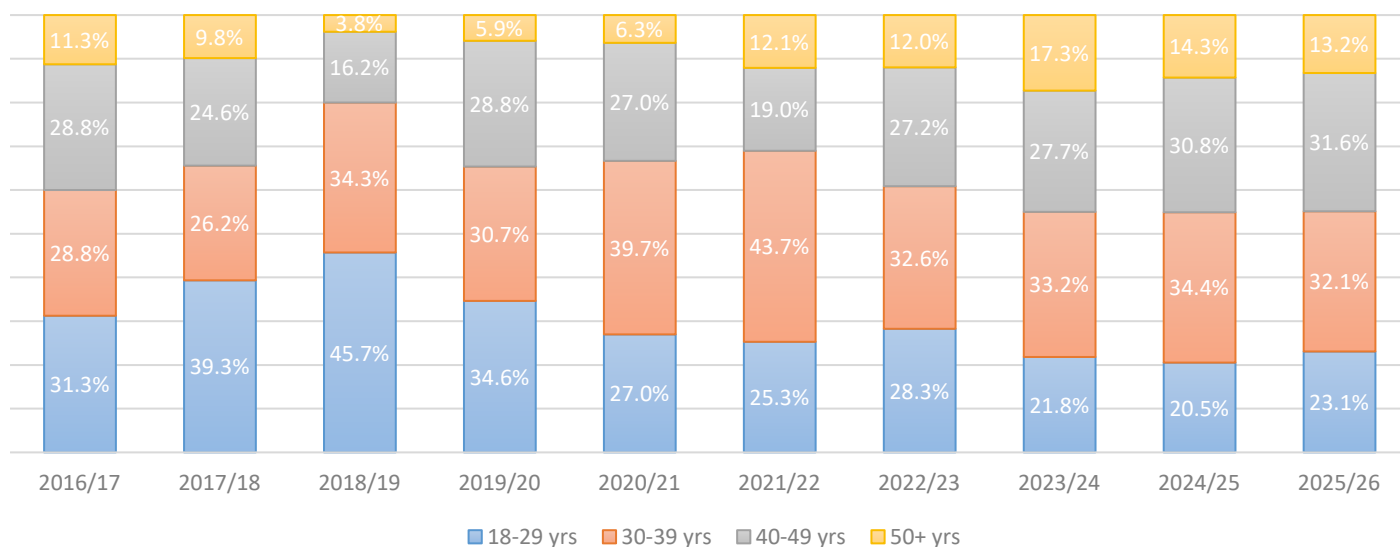
Figure 20: Positive drug tests by sex, Knowsley residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



Where ethnicity was stated, almost all Knowsley residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (n=231, 99.1%). The average age was 38.1 years (men = 37.9, women = 38.8), which is similar to the previous twelve-month period (38.3 years).

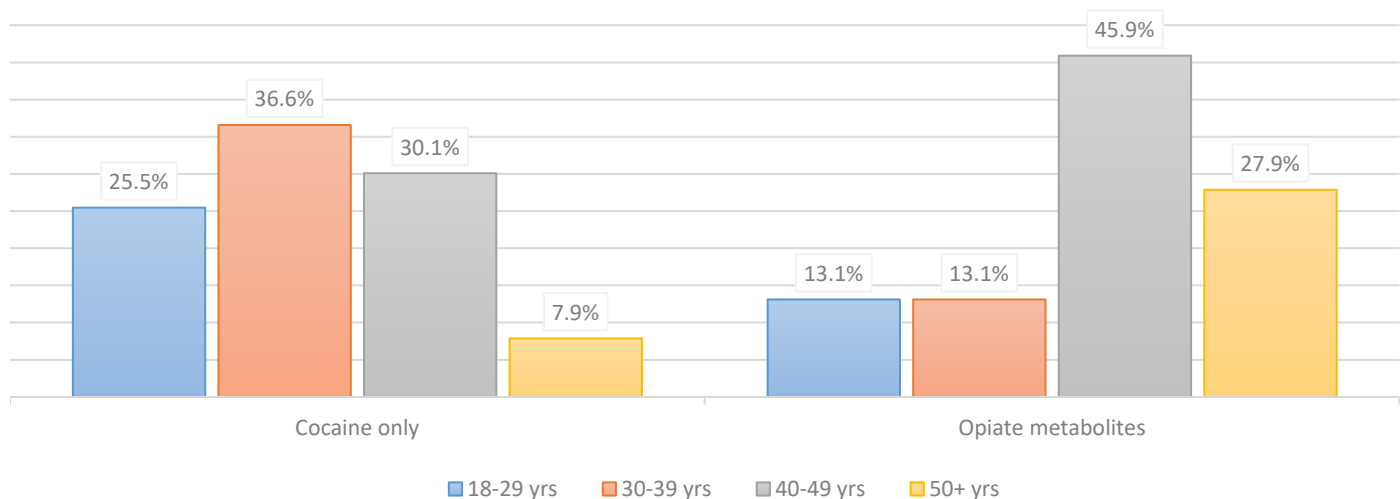
Individuals were generally aged 30-39 years (n=75, 32.1%) and 40-49 years (n=74, 31.6%), accounting for a total of 63.7% of the Knowsley residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026, while just under a quarter were aged 18-29 years (n=54, 23.1%) and around one in eight were aged 50 years or over (n=31, 13.2%, *Figure 21*). Overall, the age profile is older in more recent years, though there is a slight increase in the proportion of adults aged 18-29 in the year ending March 2026, which was the highest proportion of all Merseyside residents combined.

Figure 21: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test, Knowsley residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



There are some notable differences in the age profile when comparing the drug test result. Cocaine only positive tests were generally more common among adults aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years (36.6% and 30.1% respectively), while nearly half (45.9%) of the positive tests for opiate metabolites were aged 40-49 years, followed by just over a quarter (27.9%) aged 50 years or over (*Figure 22*).

Figure 22: Positive drug tests by drug test result and age group, Knowsley residents, 2025/26

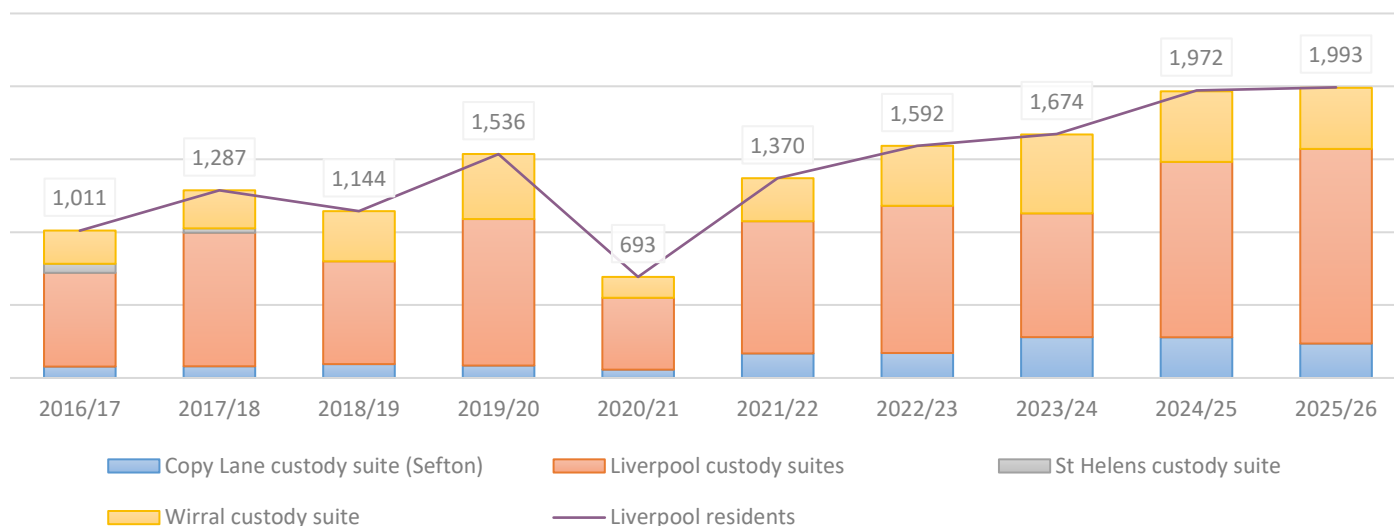


OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, there were 1,993 attempted tests recorded for specified Class A drugs on Liverpool residents across Merseyside Police's custody suites, representing nearly half (47.0%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. This is similar to the 1,972 attempted tests in the previous year (1.1% increase) and the highest number of tests of the ten years shown in *Figure 23*. Notably, the number of drug tests carried out on Liverpool residents increased year-on-year since testing was suspended for around five months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On average, just under two in three (64.2%) attempted drug tests on Liverpool residents were carried out at a Liverpool custody suite during the ten-year period, followed by one-quarter (25.2%) at Wirral custody suite and one in ten (10.2%) at Copy Lane custody suite in Sefton (*Figure 23*).

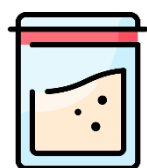
*Figure 23: Attempted drug tests by custody suite and year, Liverpool residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26*²²



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 24 shows the drug testing activity for Liverpool residents drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the 1,993 attempted drug tests, 1,965 were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 1,386 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is around seven in ten (70.5%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police in 2025/26 and a slight increase on the previous year (68.8%).

Around three in five positive tests were cocaine only (n=816, 58.9%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 524, 37.8%; opiates only = 46, 3.3%). Where the positive result was maintained, there were 1,300 RAs served by Merseyside Police to 966 individuals in the year ending March 2026.

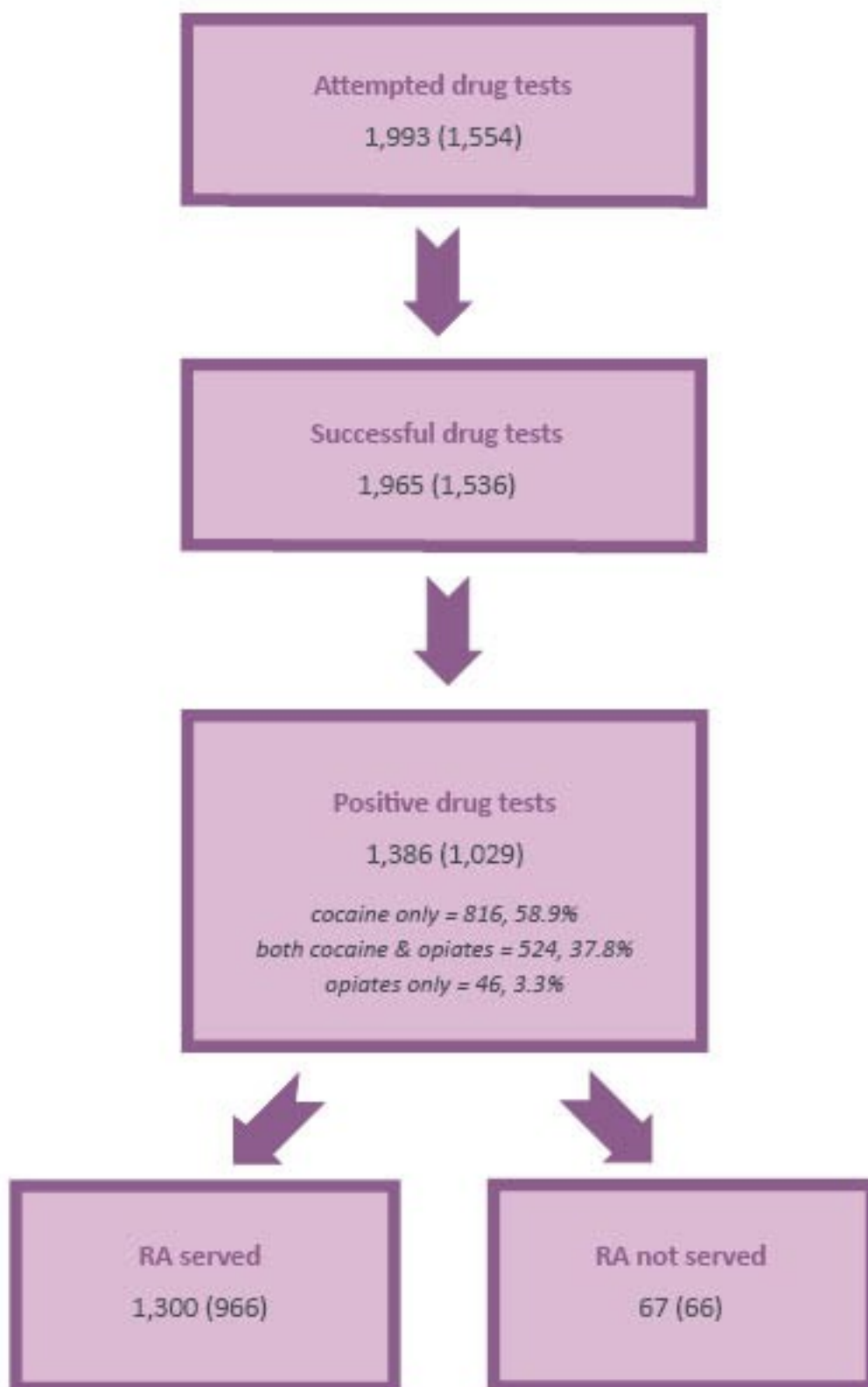


59%

of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

²² There were three records in 2025/26 that did not specify the custody suite where the test was conducted.

Figure 24: Drug testing activity, Liverpool residents, 2025/26 ²³

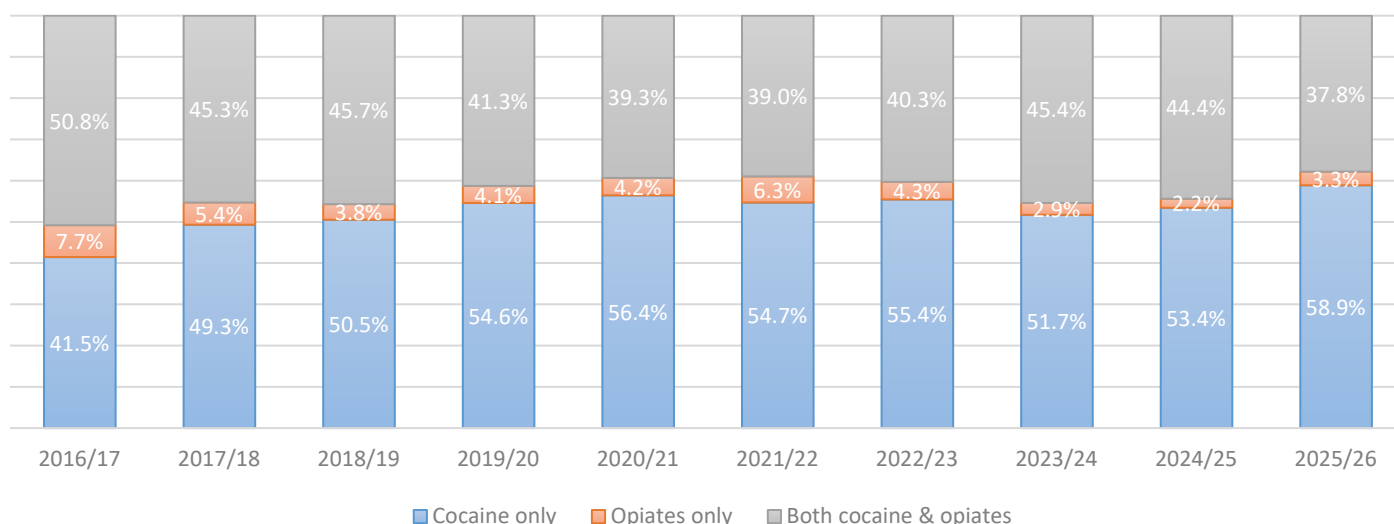


²³ There were 28 tests refused.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

The number of cocaine only positive tests increased by 15.9%, from 704 in 2024/25 to 816 in 2025/26, which is the highest proportion of the ten-year period. Notably, the proportion increased from 41.5% in 2016/17 to 58.9% in 2025/26, accounting for over half of all positive tests since the year ending March 2019 (*Figure 25*); however, it is the smallest proportion across Merseyside. Meanwhile, the proportion of both cocaine and opiates in 2025/26 is the lowest of the ten-year period, though the highest of the Merseyside LA areas. Furthermore, the proportion of opiate only positive tests remain consistently low, becoming less common in recent years.

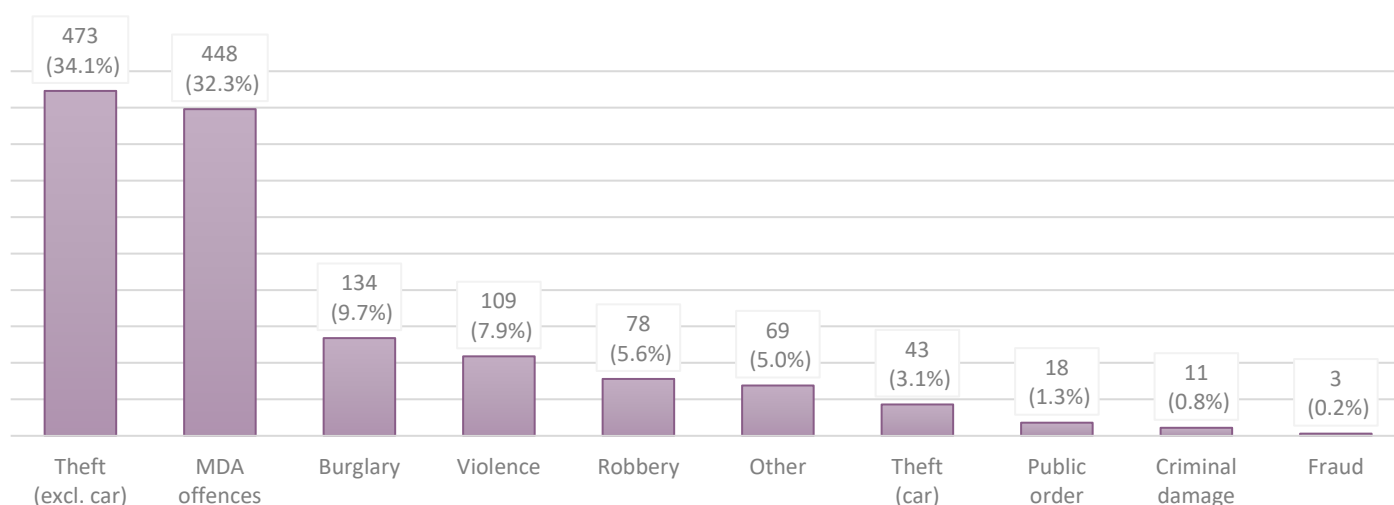
Figure 25: Positive drug tests by drug test result, Liverpool residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



OFFENCES

In the year ending March 2026, nearly nine in ten positive drug tests were following a trigger offence (n=1,203, 86.8%). Specifically, there was a similar proportion of theft²⁴ (n=473, 34.1%) and MDA offences²⁵ (n=448, 32.3%), accounting for a total of 66.5% of all positive tests in the year (*Figure 26*).

Figure 26: Positive drug tests by offence, Liverpool residents, 2025/26

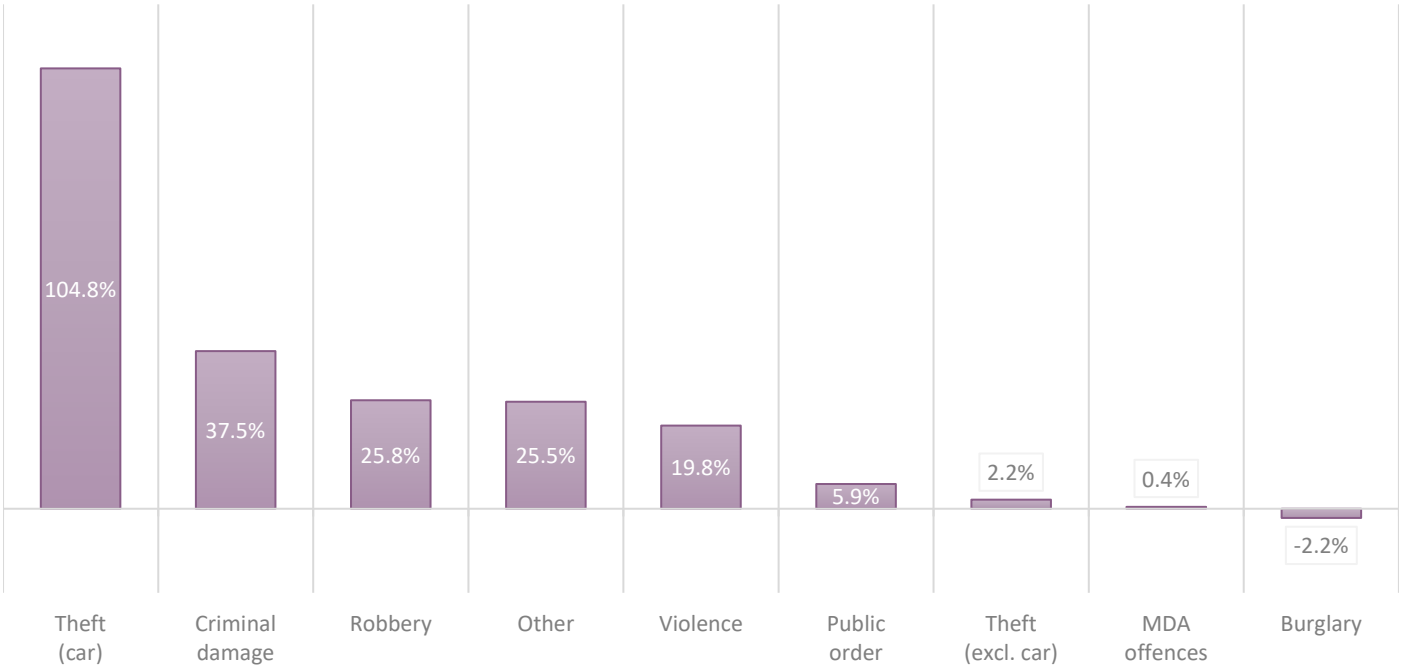


²⁴ Shoplifting = 383, 81.0% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

²⁵ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 268, 60.0%; possession of controlled drugs = 179, 40.0%.

When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for most offending categories in 2025/26 (Figure 27). The largest increase was noted for theft of a motor vehicle (+104.8%), while there was a decrease in the amount of burglary.

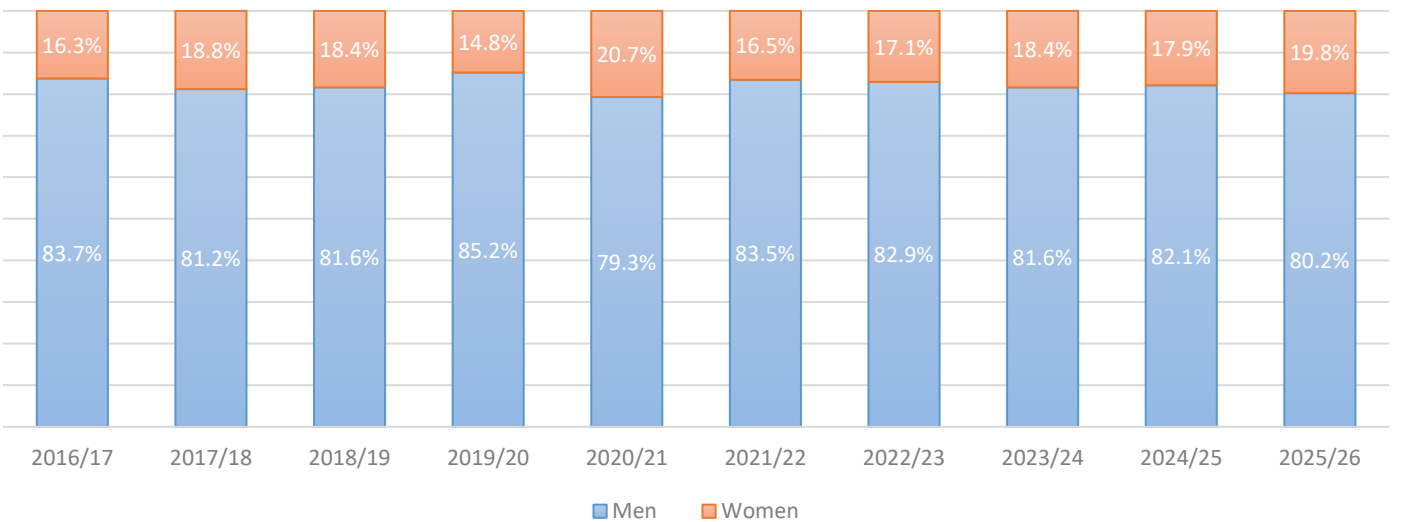
Figure 27: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, Liverpool residents, 2025/26



DEMOGRAPHICS

Men accounted for four in five individuals who tested positive across Merseyside Police’s custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (n=823, 80.2%; Figure 28). Although this is just below the ten-year average (82.1%), it is similar to the figure for all Merseyside residents combined (80.4%). Notably, the number of women increased by 12.8%, from 180 individuals in 2024/25 to 203 in 2025/26, which is the highest number of the ten-year period.

Figure 28: Positive drug tests by sex, Liverpool residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26 ²⁶

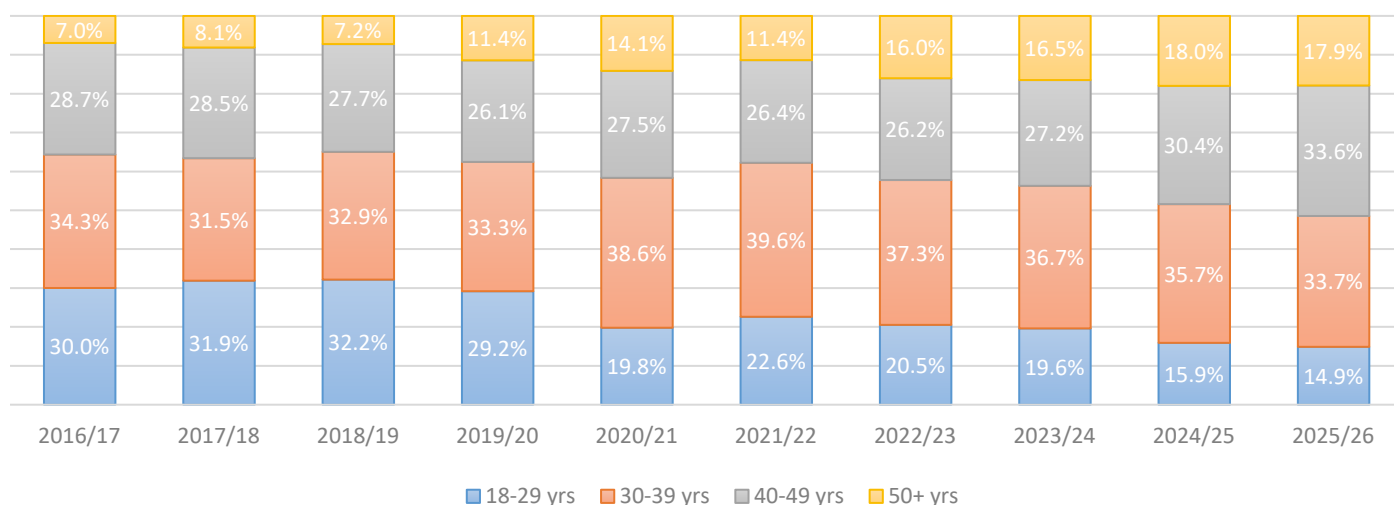


²⁶ There were three records that did not have the sex recorded in 2025/26.

Where ethnicity was stated, just over nine in ten Liverpool residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (n=957, 93.2%). The average age was 40.1 years (men = 40.0, women = 40.6), which is a slight increase on the previous year (39.8 years) and the oldest average age of the five Merseyside LA areas.

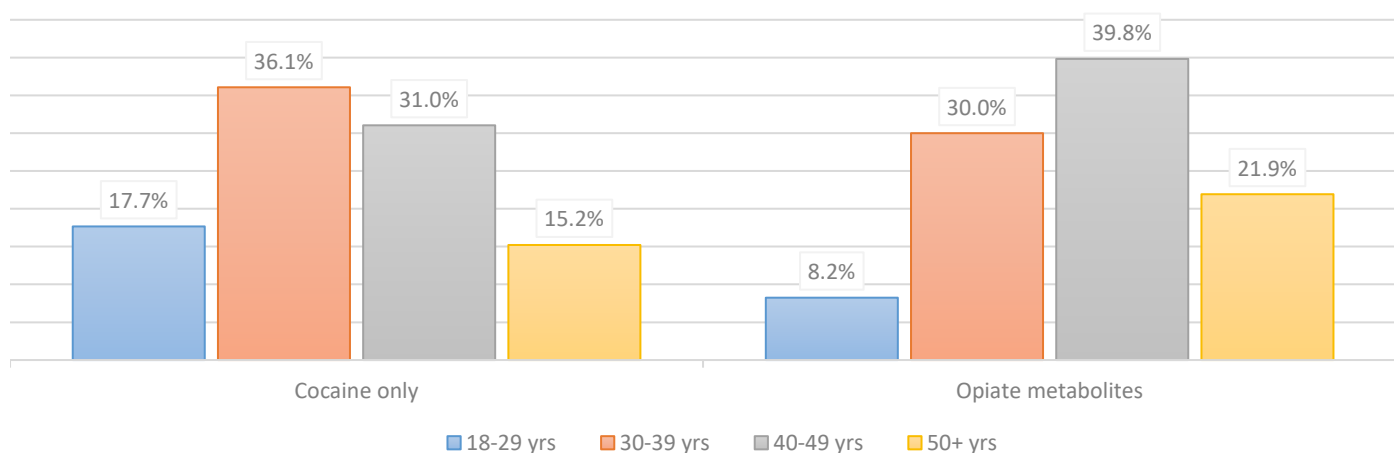
Individuals were generally aged 30-39 years (n=346, 33.7%) and 40-49 years (n=345, 33.6%), accounting for a total of two in three (67.2%) Liverpool residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026, while just under one in five were aged 50 years or over (n=184, 17.9%) and around one in seven were aged 18-29 years (n=153, 14.9%; *Figure 29*). Overall, the age profile is older in more recent years; in 2025/26, the number of 18-29-year-olds and 30-39-year-olds decreased (-4.4% and -3.6% respectively), while the number of 40-49-year-olds and those aged 50 years or over increased (+12.7% and +1.7% respectively). Notably, the proportion of individuals aged 18-29 years in the year ending March 2026 is both the lowest of the ten-year period and of all Merseyside residents combined.

Figure 29: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test, Liverpool residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26 ²⁷



There are some differences in the age profile when comparing the drug test result. Cocaine only positive tests were generally more common among adults aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years (36.1% and 31.0% respectively), while two in five (39.8%) of the positive tests for opiate metabolites were aged 40-49 years, followed by three in ten (30.0%) aged 30-39 years and just over two in ten (21.9%) aged 50 years or over (*Figure 30*).

Figure 30: Positive drug tests by drug test result and age group, Liverpool residents, 2025/26



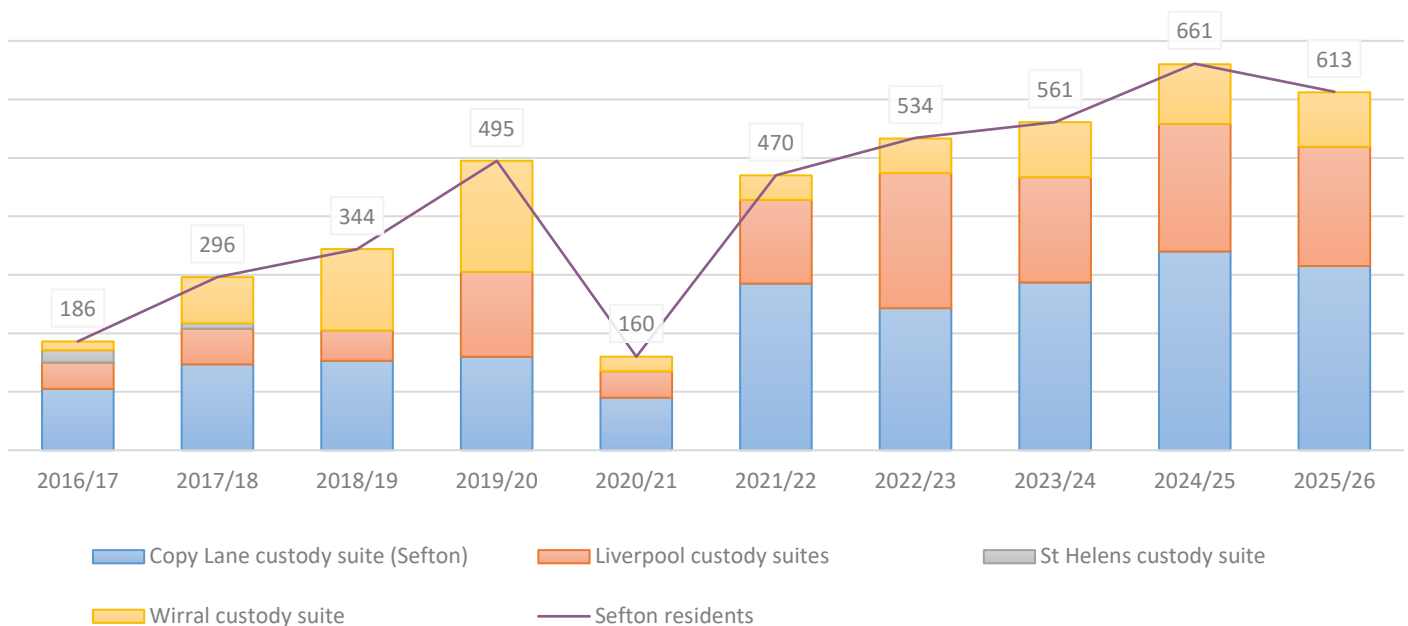
²⁷ There was one record that did not have the age or date of birth recorded in 2025/26.

OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, there were 613 attempted tests recorded for specified Class A drugs on Sefton residents across Merseyside Police's custody suites, representing around one in seven (14.5%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. Although this is a 7.3% decrease on the 661 attempted tests in the previous year, it is the second highest number of the ten years shown in *Figure 31* and higher than pre-pandemic levels.

On average, half (50.0%) of the attempted drug tests on Sefton residents were carried out at Copy Lane custody suite in Sefton during the ten-year period, followed by Liverpool custody suites (29.0%) and Wirral custody suite (19.7%; *Figure 31*).

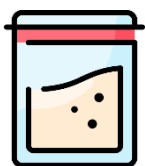
Figure 31: Attempted drug tests by custody suite and year, Sefton residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26 ²⁸



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 32 shows the drug testing activity for Sefton residents drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the 613 attempted drug tests, 604 were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 421 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is seven in ten (69.7%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police in 2025/26 and is similar to the previous year (71.2%).

Around three in five positive drug tests were cocaine only (n=256, 60.8%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 145, 34.4%; opiates only = 20, 4.8%). Where the positive result was maintained, there were 380 RAs served by Merseyside Police to 282 individuals in the year ending March 2026.

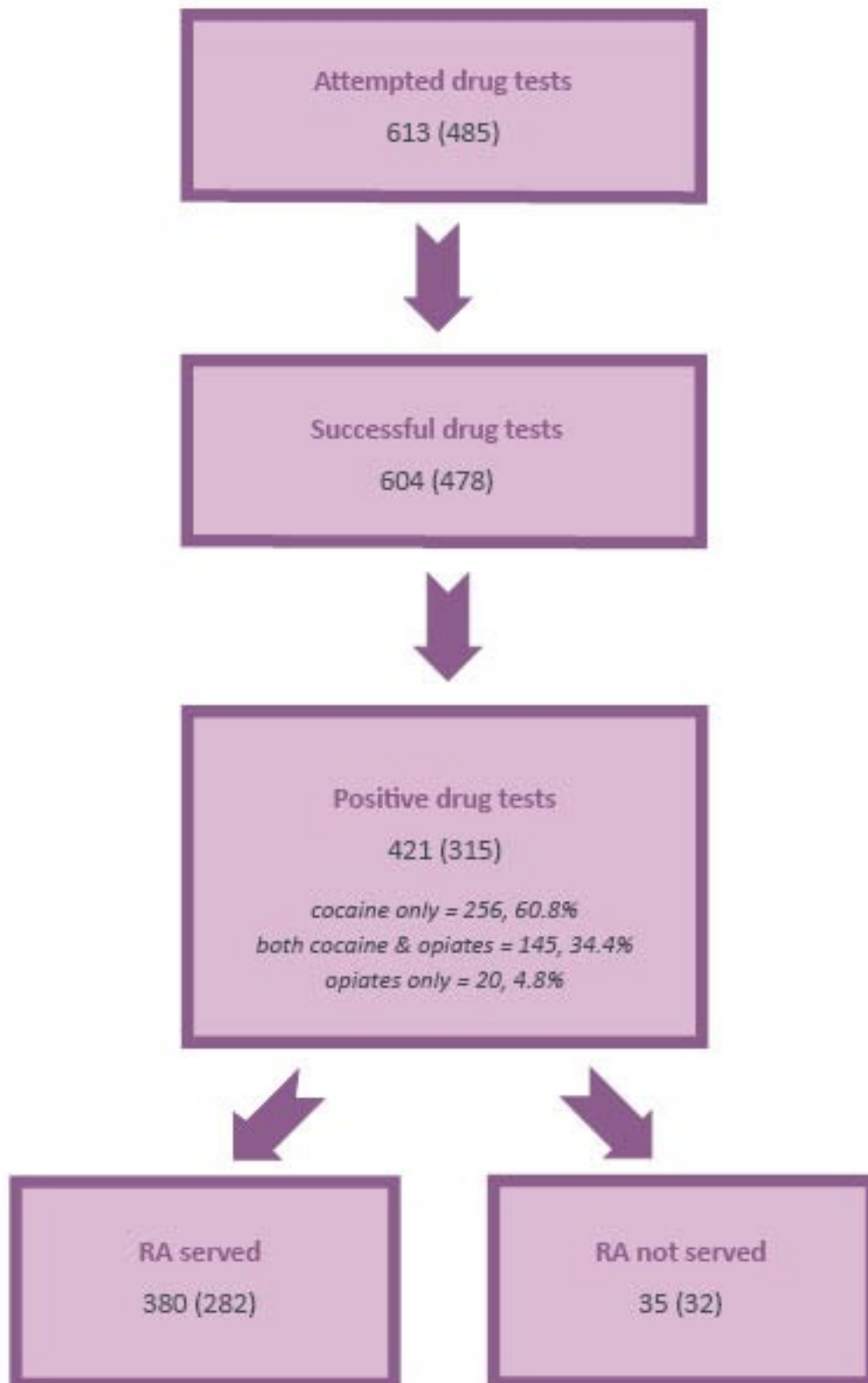


61%

of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

²⁸ There was one record in 2025/26 that did not specify the custody suite where the test was conducted.

Figure 32: Drug testing activity, Sefton residents, 2025/26 ²⁹

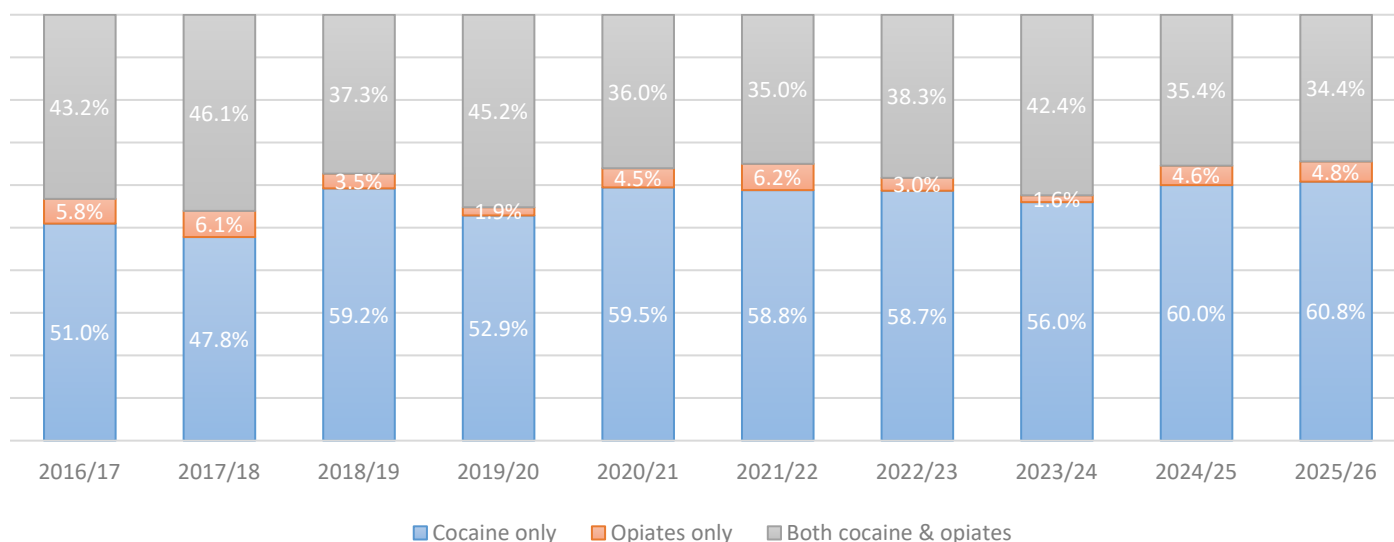


²⁹ There were nine tests refused.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

In all years except 2017/18, over half of the positive tests were cocaine only, with proportions peaking in the latest two years (*Figure 33*); the 2025/26 figure is somewhat similar to the total proportion of Merseyside residents (62.8%). Meanwhile, the proportion of both cocaine and opiates in 2025/26 is the lowest of the ten-year period and the proportion of opiate only positive tests remain consistently low, though it is higher than the other Merseyside LA areas in 2025/26.

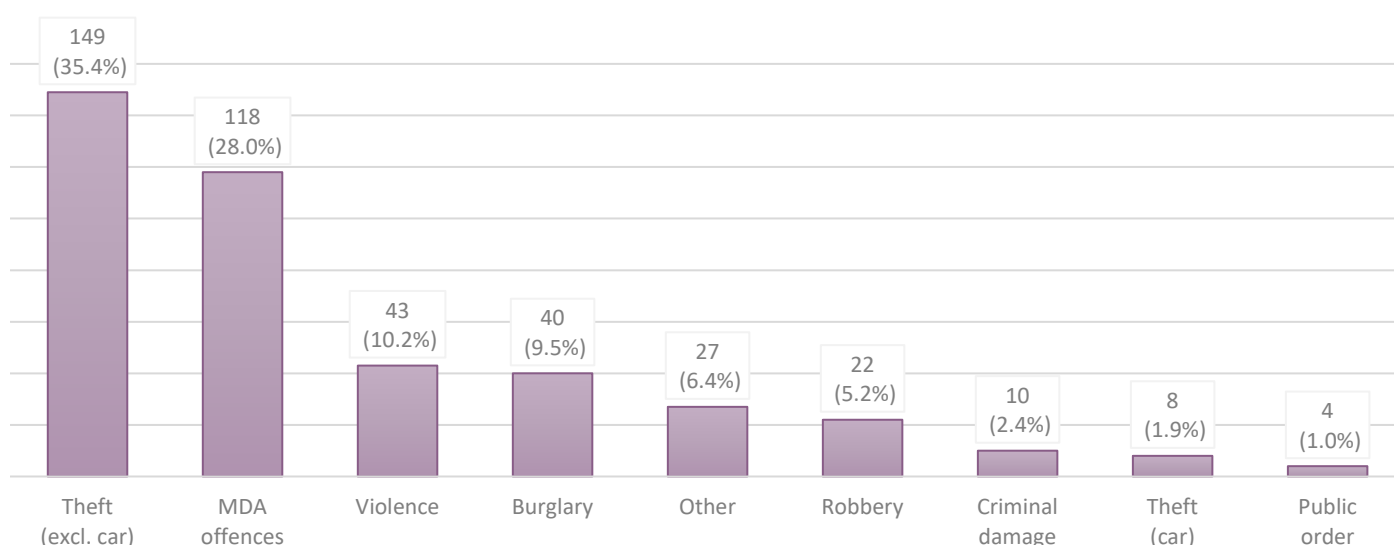
Figure 33: Positive drug tests by drug test result, Sefton residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



OFFENCES

In the year ending March 2026, just over four in five positive drug tests were following a trigger offence (n=344, 81.7%). Specifically, just over a third were theft³⁰ (n=149, 35.4%) and just over a quarter were MDA³¹ related (n=118, 28.0%; *Figure 34*). When compared to the other Merseyside LA areas, Sefton had the highest proportion of theft and the lowest proportion of MDA offences.

Figure 34: Positive drug tests by offence, Sefton residents, 2025/26

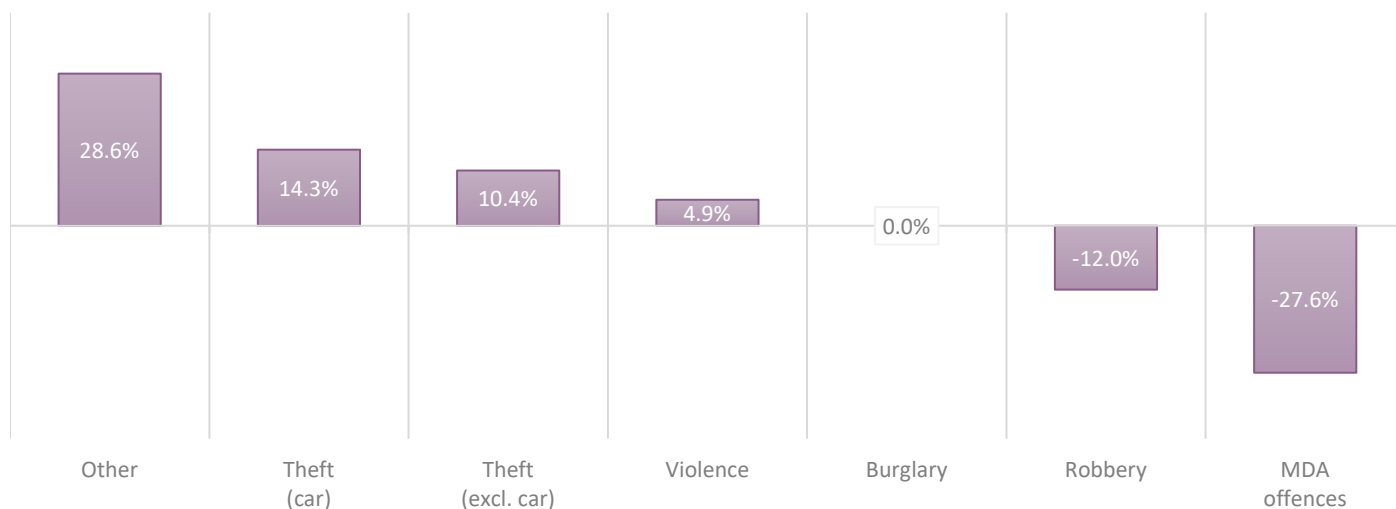


³⁰ Shoplifting = 124, 83.2% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

³¹ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 75, 63.6%; possession of controlled drugs = 43, 36.4%.

When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for other offences, theft of a motor vehicle, theft and violence in 2025/26, while there was a decrease in the number of robbery and MDA offences, and the number of burglary-related offences remained the same (*Figure 35*). Notably, the proportion of MDA offences in the year ending March 2026 was the smallest of the ten-year period.

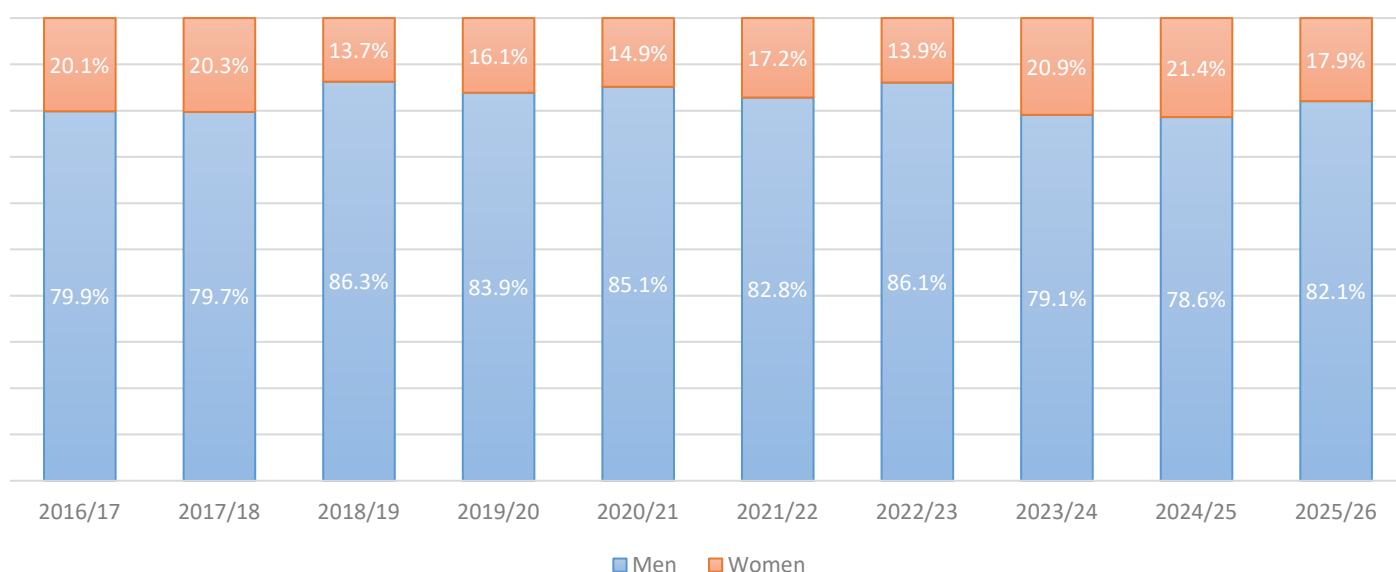
Figure 35: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, Sefton residents, 2025/26



DEMOGRAPHICS

Men accounted for just over four in five individuals who tested positive across Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (n=256, 82.1%), which is similar to the ten-year average (82.4%), though the highest of the Merseyside LA areas (total Merseyside residents: 80.4%). Conversely, in 2023/24 and 2024/25, Sefton saw an increase in the proportion of women, which was higher than the other Merseyside figures; while in 2025/26, the figure is similar to the ten-year average (17.6%) and the lowest of the five Merseyside LA areas.

Figure 36: Positive drug tests by sex, Sefton residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26 ³²

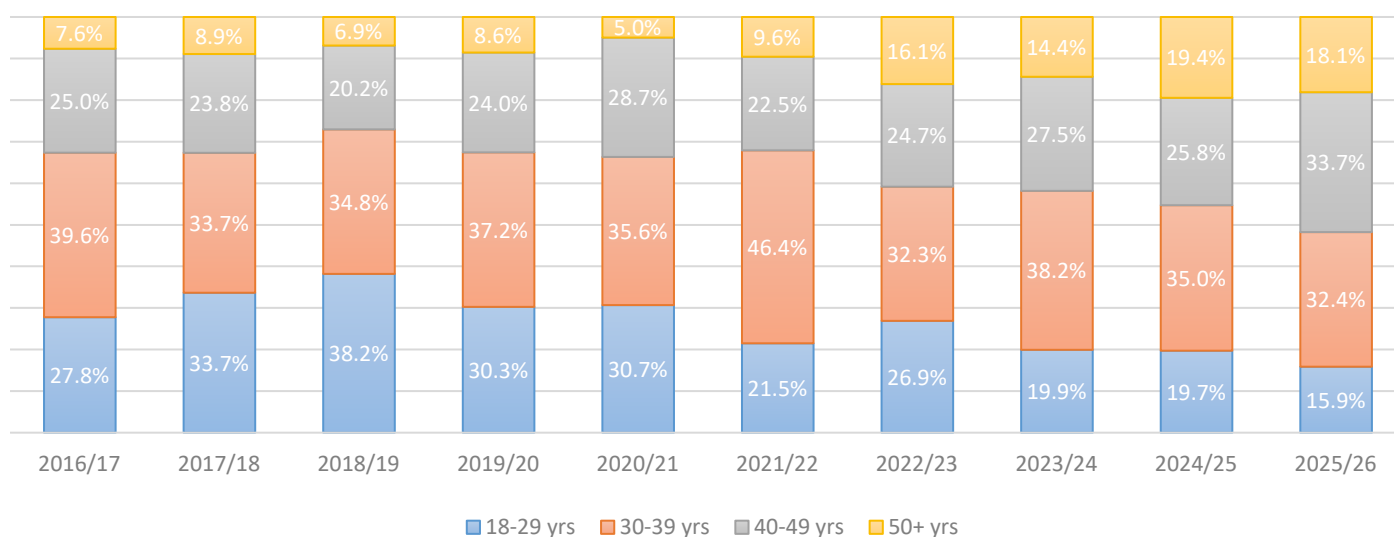


³² There were three records that did not have the sex recorded in 2025/26.

Where ethnicity was stated, almost all Sefton residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (n=308, 98.1%). The average age was 40.0 years (40.0 years for both men and women), which is a slight increase on the previous year (39.1 years) and the second oldest average age of the five Merseyside LA areas.

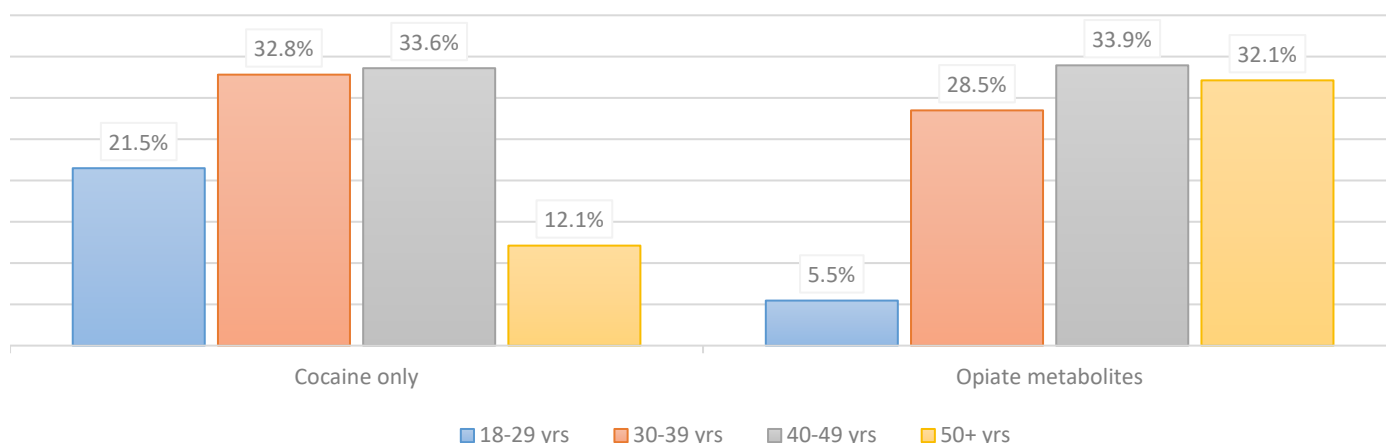
Individuals were generally aged 30-39 years (n=102, 32.4%) and 40-49 years (n=106, 33.7%), accounting for a total of two in three (66.0%) Sefton residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026, followed by those aged 50 years or over (n=57, 18.1%) and 18-29 years (n=50, 15.9%; *Figure 37*). Overall, the age profile is older in more recent years; in 2025/26, the proportions of individuals aged 18-29 years and 30-39 years are lower than the ten-year averages (26.5% and 36.5% respectively), while the proportions of 40-49-year-olds and those aged 50 years or over are higher than the ten-year averages (25.6% and 11.5% respectively). Notably, the proportion of 18-29-year-olds in the year ending March 2026 is the lowest of the ten-year period and the second lowest proportion of all Merseyside residents combined.

Figure 37: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test, Sefton residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



Although there were similarities in the proportion of adults aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years, there were substantial differences for the youngest and oldest cohorts. Of those who tested positive for cocaine only, just over one in five (21.5%) were aged 18-29 years, compared to 5.5% of the those who tested positive for opiate metabolites, while around a third (32.1%) of the those who tested positive for opiate metabolites were aged 50 years or over, compared to 12.1% of the cocaine only cohort (*Figure 38*).

Figure 38: Positive drug tests by age group and drug test result, Sefton residents, 2025/26

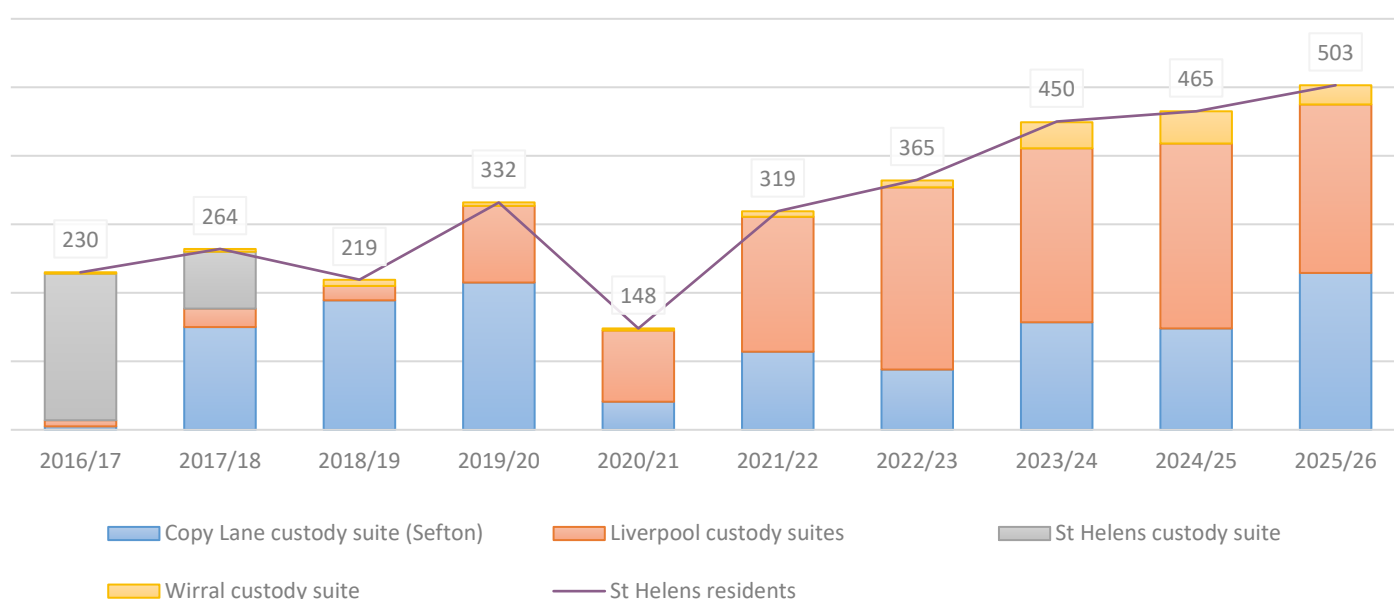


OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, there were 503 attempted tests recorded for specified Class A drugs on St Helens residents across Merseyside Police's custody suites, representing just over one in ten (11.9%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. This is an 8.2% increase on the 465 attempted tests in the previous year and the highest number of tests of the ten years shown in *Figure 39*. Notably, the number of drug tests carried out on St Helens residents increased year-on-year since testing was suspended for around five months in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the closure of St Helens custody suite in 2017, there have been some fluctuations in the custody suites where the drug test was carried out. Since the year ending March 2018, drugs tests have mainly been carried out at a Liverpool custody suite or Copy Lane custody suite in Sefton, accounting for a ten-year average of 41.9% and 40.5% respectively (*Figure 39*).

Figure 39: Attempted drug tests by custody suite and year, St Helens residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 40 shows the drug testing activity for St Helens residents drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the 503 attempted drug tests, all but four were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 346 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is around seven in ten (69.3%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police in 2025/26 and is similar to the previous year (71.8%).

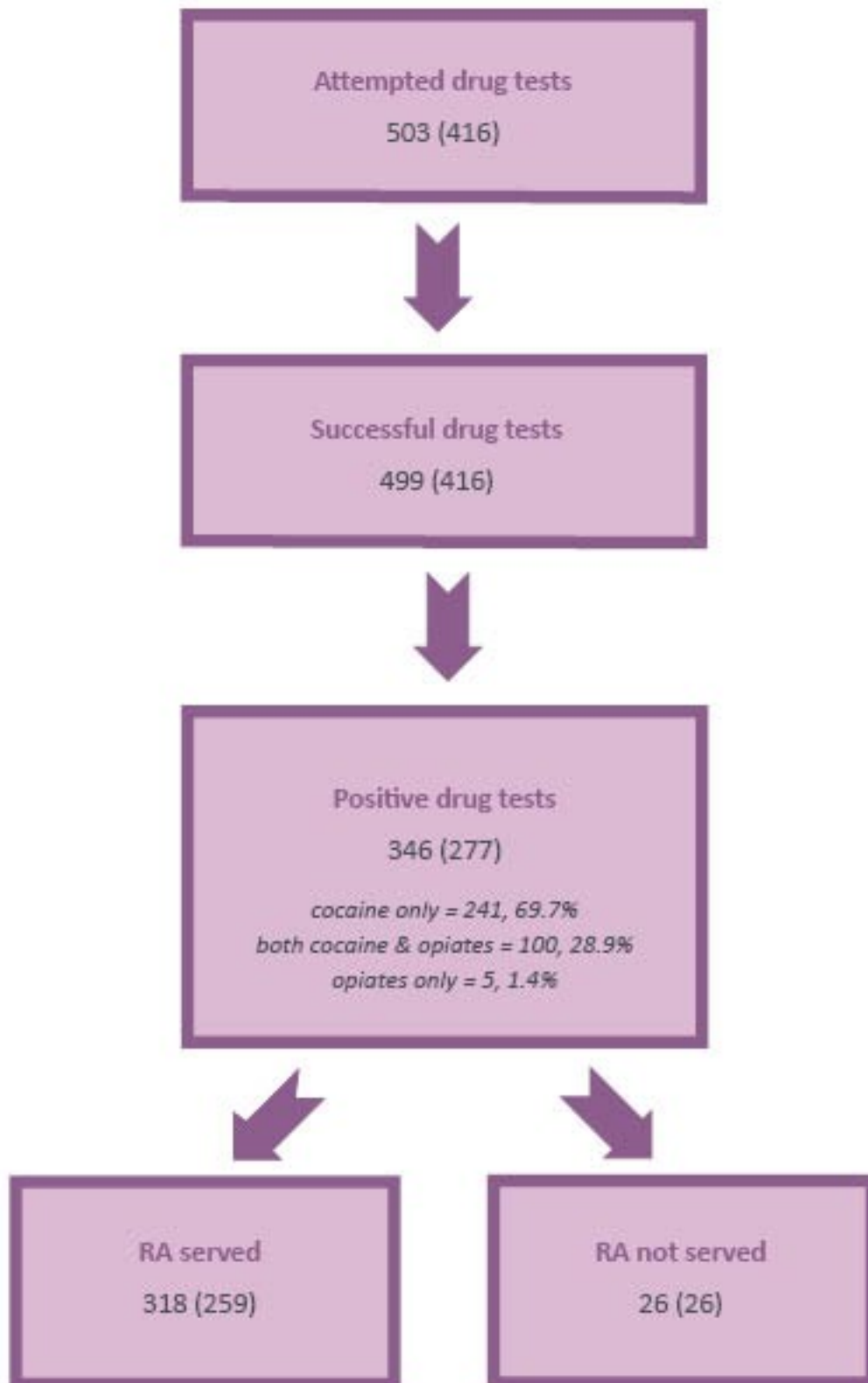
Seven in ten of the positive drug tests were cocaine only (n=241, 69.7%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 100, 28.9%; opiates only = 5, 1.4%). Where the positive result was maintained, there were 318 RAs served by Merseyside Police to 259 individuals in the year ending March 2026.



70%

of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

Figure 40: Drug testing activity, St Helens residents, 2025/26 ³³

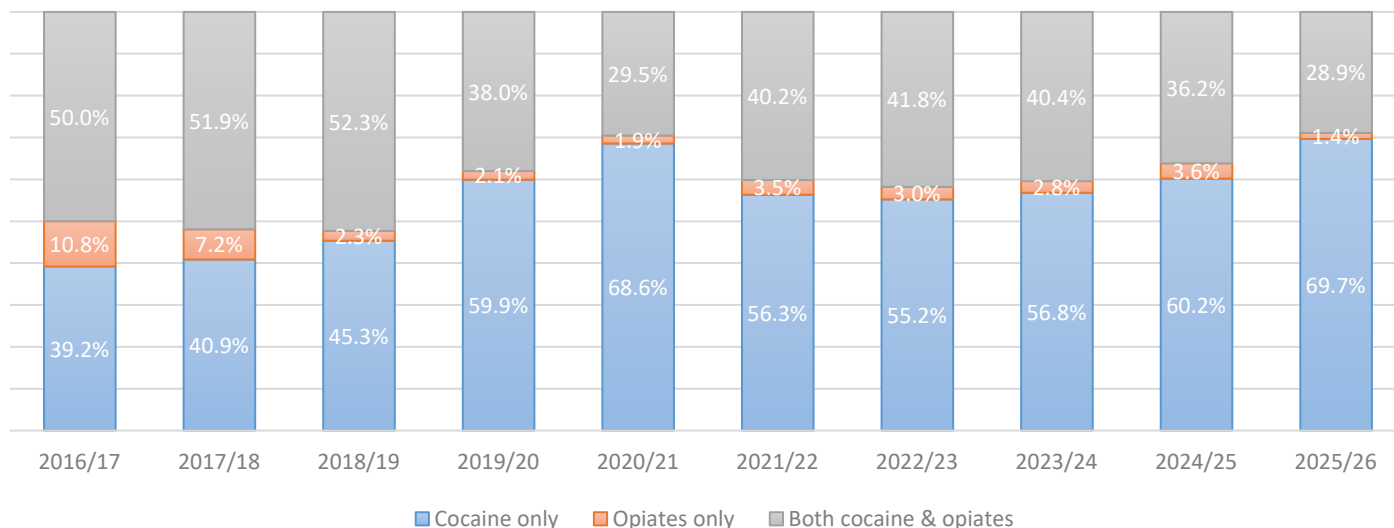


³³ There were four tests refused.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

The number of cocaine only positive tests increased by 21.7%, from 198 in 2024/25 to 241 in 2025/26, which is the highest proportion of the ten-year period. Notably, the proportion increased from 39.2% in 2016/17 to 69.7% in 2025/26, accounting for over half of all positive tests since the year ending March 2020 (*Figure 41*), and it is the second highest proportion across Merseyside. Meanwhile, the proportions of both cocaine and opiates, and opiates only, are the lowest of the ten-year period in 2025/26, with St Helens having the lowest proportion testing positive for opiates only across Merseyside.

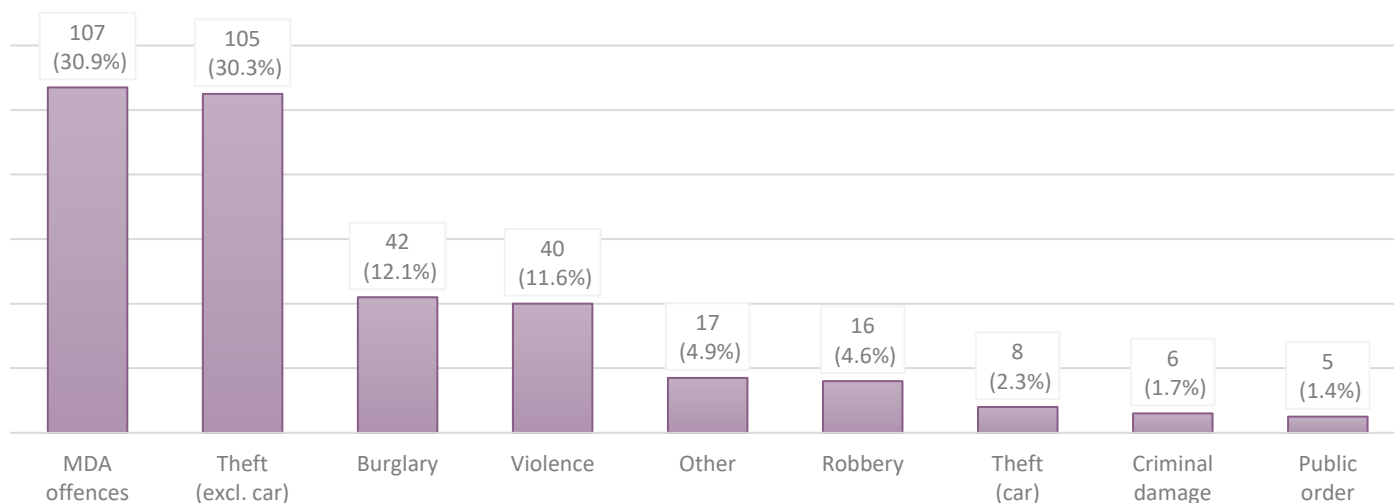
Figure 41: Positive drug tests by drug test result, St Helens residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



OFFENCES

In the year ending March 2026, four in five positive drug tests were following a trigger offence (n=279, 80.6%). Specifically, there was a similar proportion of MDA offences³⁴ (n=107, 30.9%) and theft³⁵ (n=105, 30.3%), accounting for a total of 61.3% of all positive tests in the year (*Figure 42*). When compared to the other Merseyside LA areas, St Helens had the highest proportion of burglary.

Figure 42: Positive drug tests by offence, St Helens residents, 2025/26

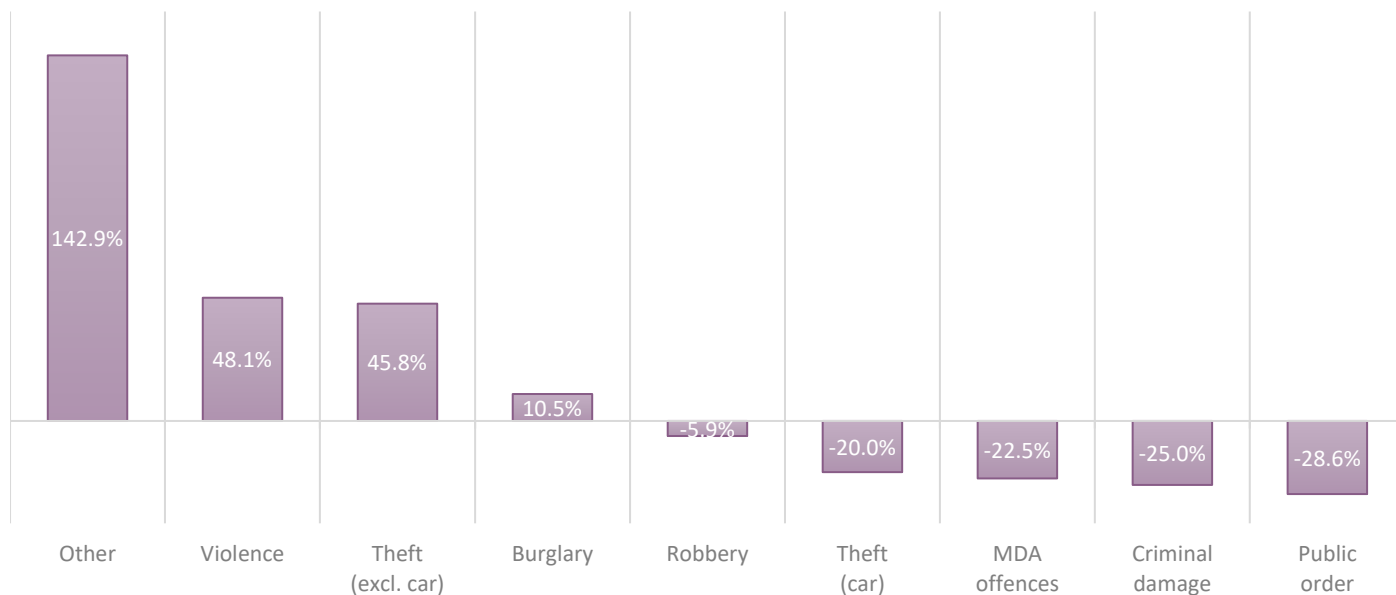


³⁴ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 66, 61.7%; possession of controlled drugs = 41, 38.3%.

³⁵ Shoplifting = 76, 72.4% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for other offences, violence, theft and burglary in 2025/26, with the largest increase for other offences (+142.9%). Conversely, there was a decrease in robbery, theft of a motor vehicle, MDA offences, criminal damage and public order (*Figure 43*). Notably, the proportion of violence in the year ending March 2026 was the highest of the ten-year period.

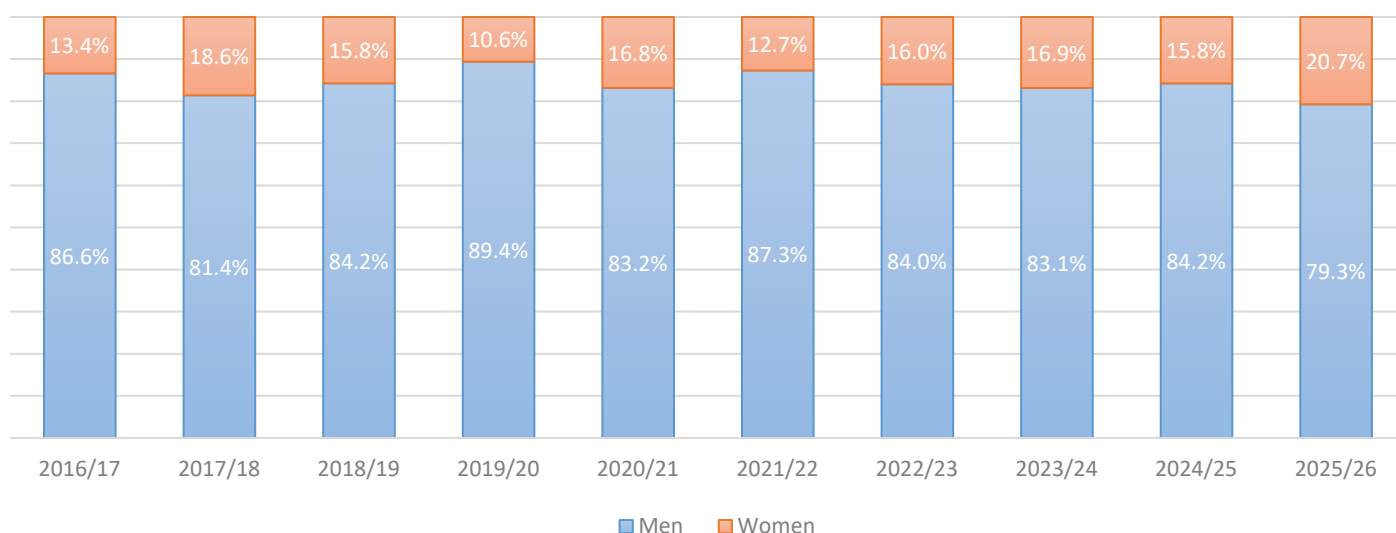
Figure 43: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, St Helens residents, 2025/26



DEMOGRAPHICS

Men accounted for around four in five individuals who tested positive across Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (n=218, 79.3%), which is the lowest proportion of the ten-year period. Notably, the number of women peaked in the year ending March 2026, increasing by 29.5%, from 44 individuals in the previous year to 57 individuals, which is the highest proportion across Merseyside (total Merseyside residents: 19.6%).

Figure 44: Positive drug tests by sex, St Helens residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26 ³⁶

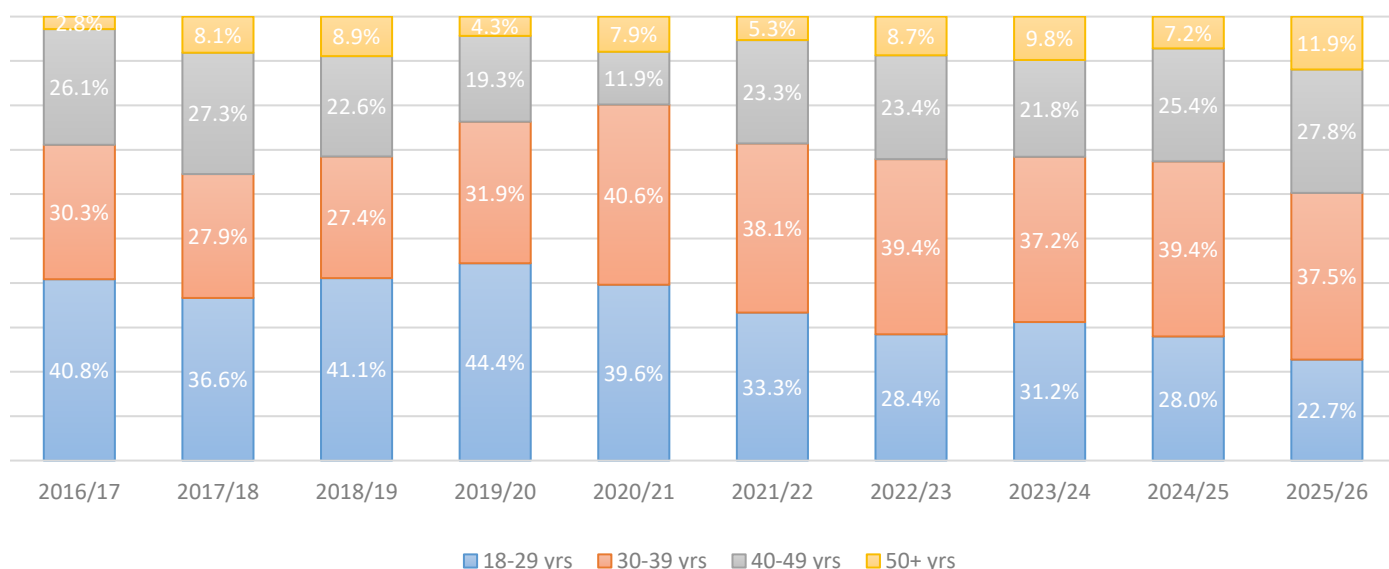


³⁶ There were two records that did not have the sex recorded in 2025/26.

Where ethnicity was stated, all but two of the 277 St Helens residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (99.3%). The average age was 37.4 years (men = 37.1, women = 38.4), which is a decrease on the previous year (40.0 years) and the youngest average age of the five Merseyside LA areas.

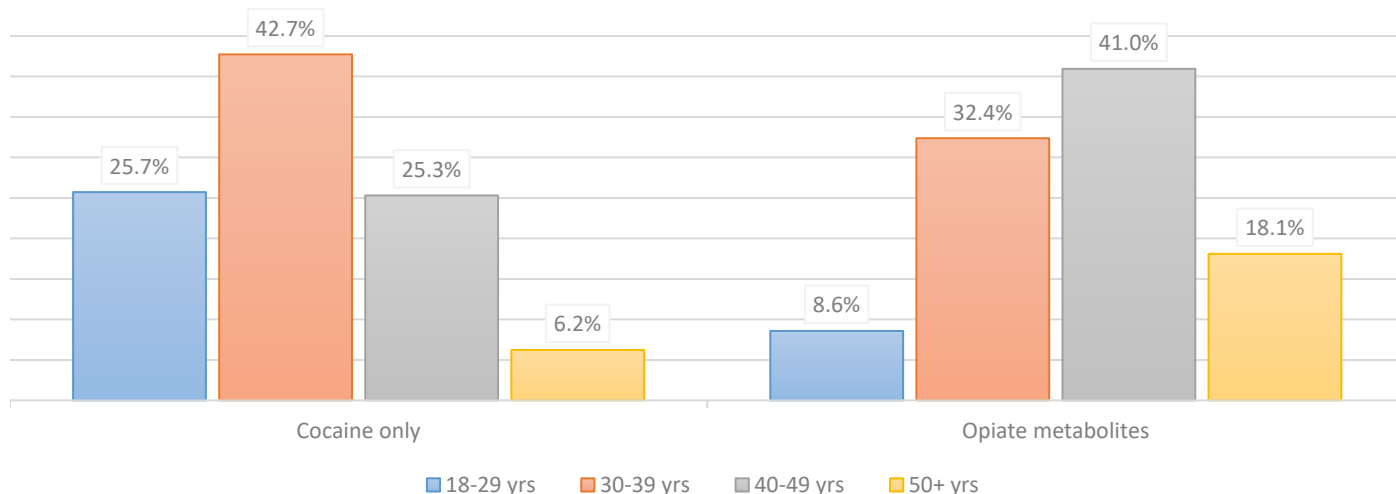
Over a third of St Helens residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were aged 30-39 years (n=104, 37.5%), followed by individuals aged 40-49 years (n=77, 27.8%), 18-29 years (n=63, 22.7%) and 50 years or over (n=33, 11.9%; *Figure 45*). Although there have been some fluctuations in the ten-year period, the age profile is generally older in more recent years. In 2025/26, the proportion of individuals aged 18-29 years is the lowest of the ten-year period, while the proportion of 40-49-year-olds and those aged 50 years or over are the highest; however, St Helens had the lowest proportion of adults aged 50 years or over when compared to the other Merseyside LA areas.

Figure 45: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test, St Helens residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



There are some differences in the age profile when comparing the drug test result. Of the adults who tested positive for cocaine only, over two in five (42.7%) were aged 30-39 years, while a similar proportion of those who tested positive for opiate metabolites were aged 40-49 years (41.0%). Notably, the proportion of those aged 50 years or over is nearly three times higher for opiate metabolites than for cocaine only (18.1% and 6.2% respectively; *Figure 46*).

Figure 46: Positive drug tests by age group and drug test result, St Helens residents, 2025/26

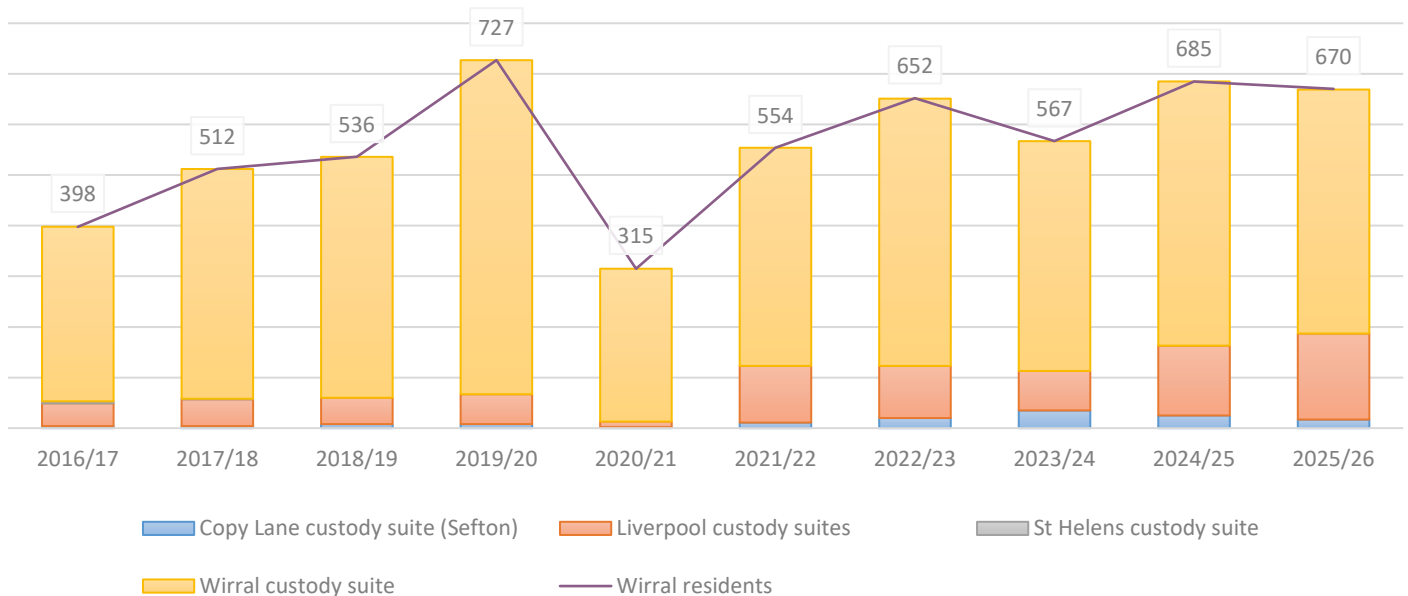


OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2026, there were 670 attempted tests recorded for specified Class A drugs on Wirral residents across Merseyside Police's custody suites, representing around one in six (15.8%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. Although this is a 2.2% decrease on the 685 attempted tests in the previous year, it is the third highest number of tests of the ten years shown in Figure 47.

On average, over four in five (83.8%) attempted drug tests on Wirral residents were carried out at Wirral custody suite during the ten-year period (Figure 47).

Figure 47: Attempted drug tests by custody suite and year, Wirral residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26 ³⁷



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 48 shows the drug testing activity for Wirral residents drug tested in Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026. Of the 670 attempted drug tests, all but two were successful, excluding those where a sample was refused to be provided. Subsequently, there were 478 positive results for a specified Class A drug, which is around seven in ten (71.6%) of the successful drug tests carried out by Merseyside Police in 2025/26 and is similar to the previous year (71.2%).

Just over three in five positive drug tests were cocaine only (n=296, 61.9%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 161, 33.7%; opiates only = 21, 4.4%). Where the positive result was maintained, there were 449 RAs served by Merseyside Police to 345 individuals in the year ending March 2026.

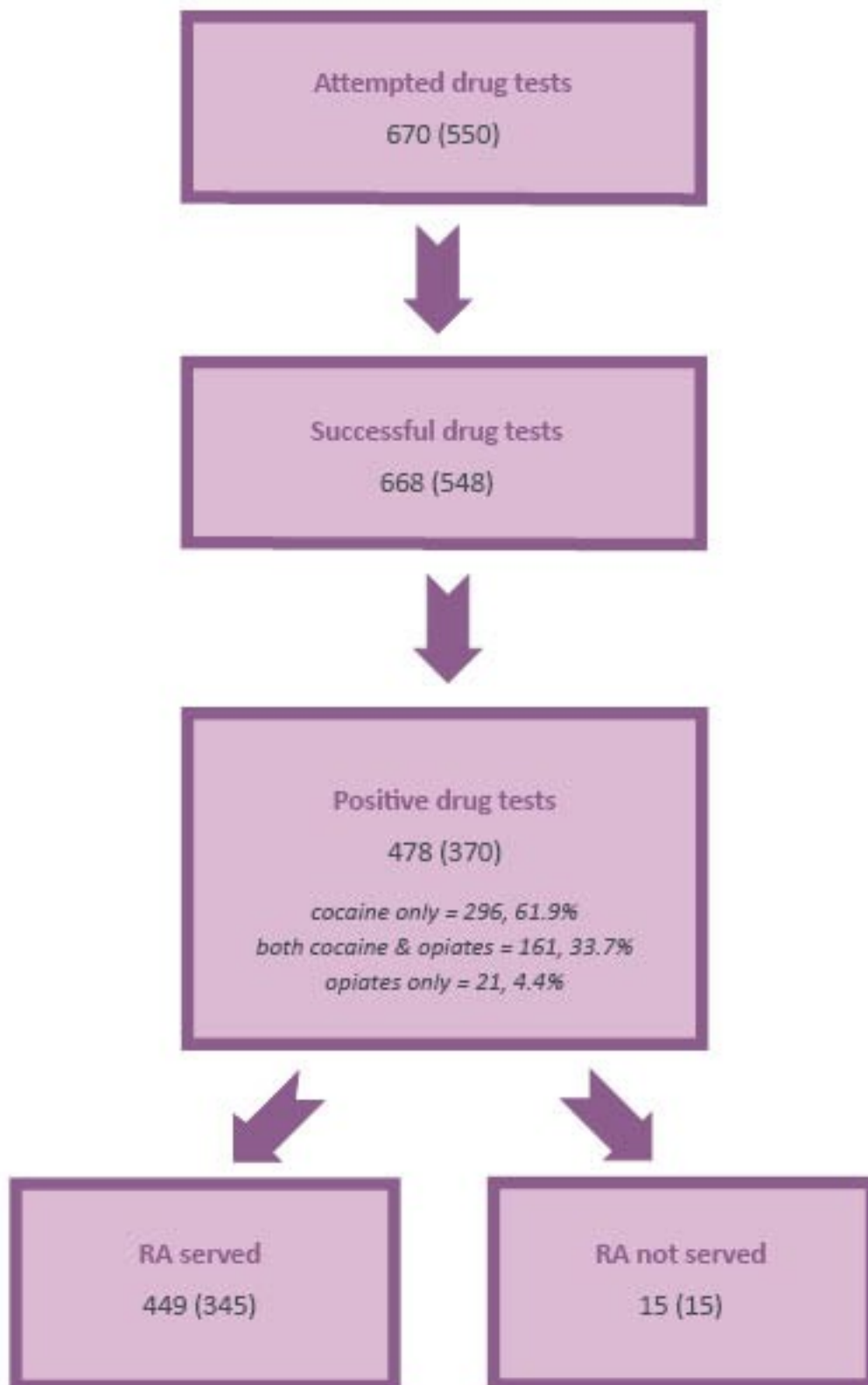


62%

of positive tests were cocaine only
(powder/crack)

³⁷ There was one record in 2025/26 that did not specify the custody suite where the test was conducted.

Figure 48: Drug testing activity, Wirral residents, 2025/26 ³⁸

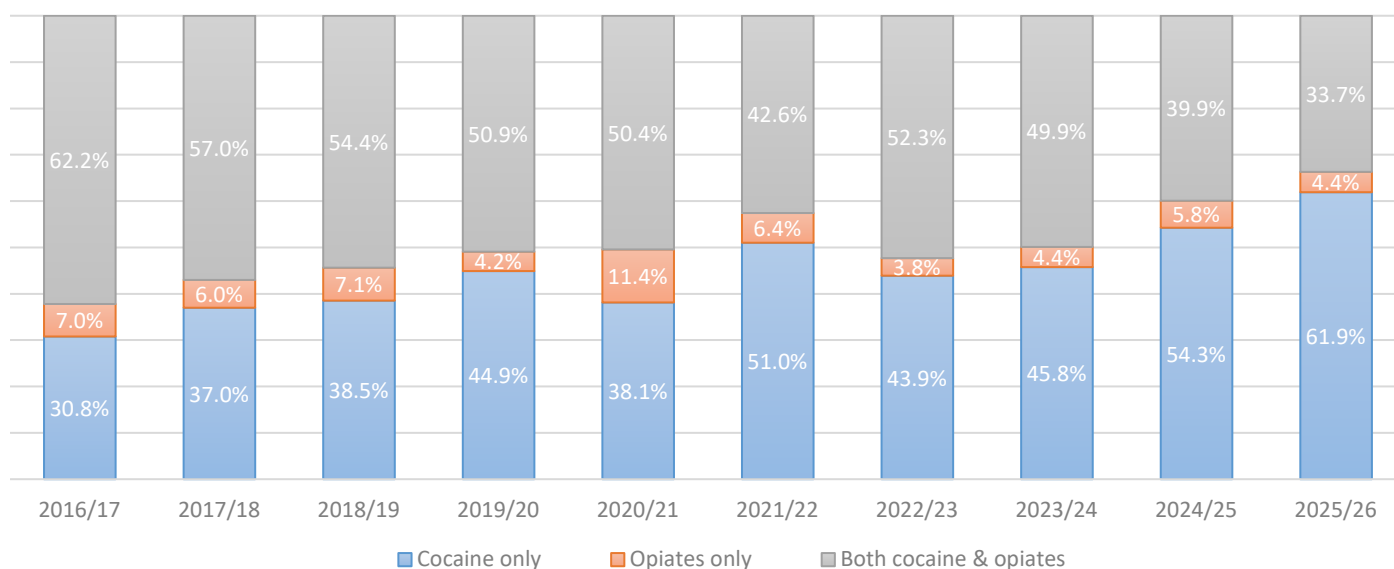


³⁸ There were two tests refused.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

In all but three years of the past decade there was a majority of opiates metabolites (opiates only, and both cocaine & opiates); however, proportions of cocaine only tests peaked in the last two years following a year-on-year increase since 2022/23 (Figure 49). Specifically, the number of cocaine only positive tests increased by 13.4%, from 261 in 2024/25 to 296 in 2025/26. Conversely, the proportion of both cocaine and opiates decreased in recent years to the lowest proportion in the year ending March 2026, while the opiates only cohort is similar to the ten-year average (6.1%) and the second highest proportion of the Merseyside areas.

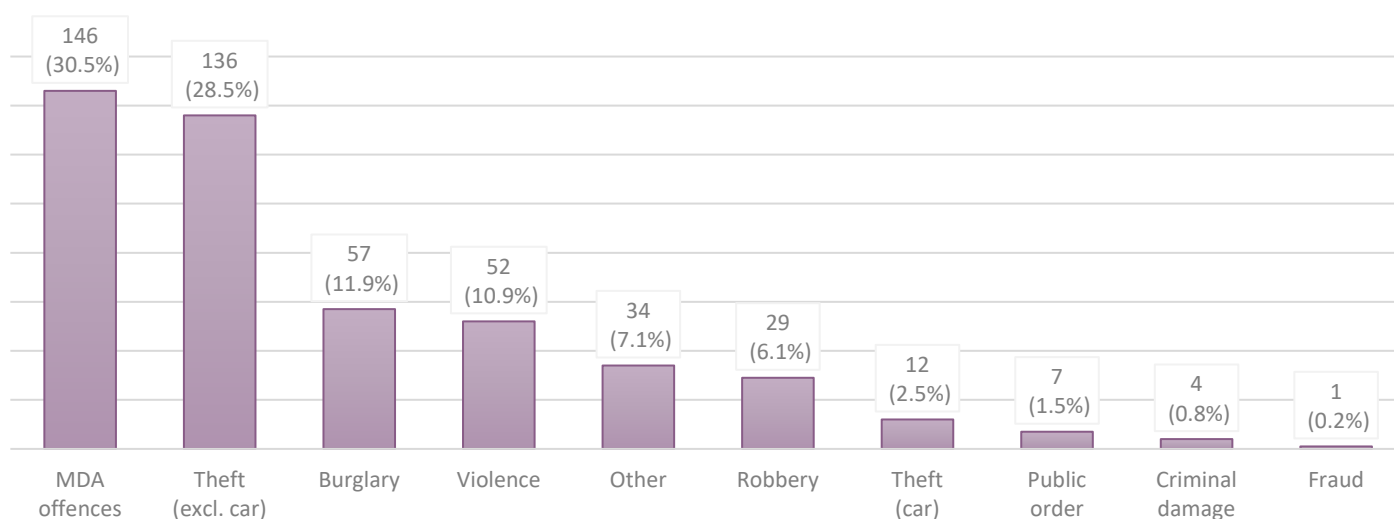
Figure 49: Positive drug tests by drug test result, Wirral residents, 2016/17 - 2025/26



OFFENCES

In the year ending March 2026, four in five positive drug tests were following a trigger offence (n=386, 80.8%). Specifically, a total of around three in five (59.0%) were MDA offences³⁹ (n=146, 30.5%) and theft⁴⁰ (n=136, 28.5%; Figure 50). When compared to the other Merseyside LA areas, Wirral had the highest proportion of robbery and the second highest proportion of burglary.

Figure 50: Positive drug tests by offence, Wirral residents, 2025/26

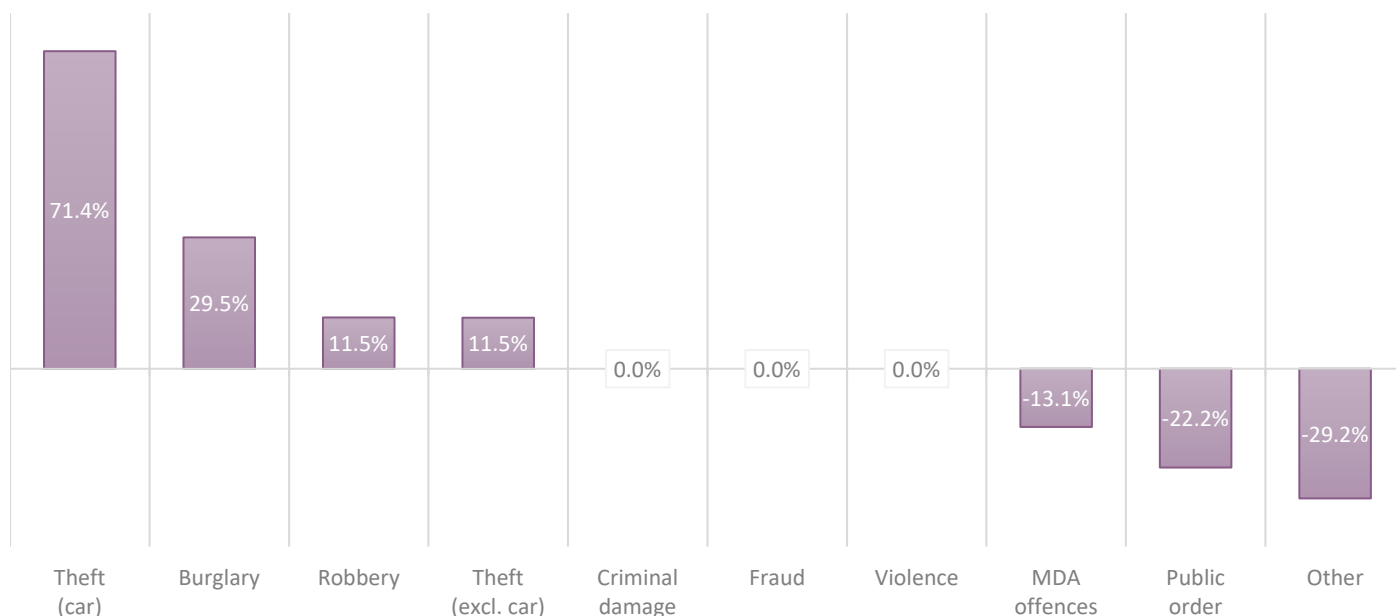


³⁹ MDA offences: trafficking in controlled drugs = 84, 57.9%; possession of controlled drugs = 61, 42.1%.

⁴⁰ Shoplifting = 116, 85.3% of theft (excluding theft of a motor vehicle).

When compared to the previous year, there were increases in the number of adults testing positive following an arrest for theft of a motor vehicle, burglary, robbery and theft, with the largest increase for theft of a motor vehicle (+71.4%; *Figure 51*). Conversely, the MDA offences, public order and other offences decreased, and criminal damage, fraud and violence remained the same. Notably, the proportion of burglary in the year ending March 2026 was the highest of the ten-year period.

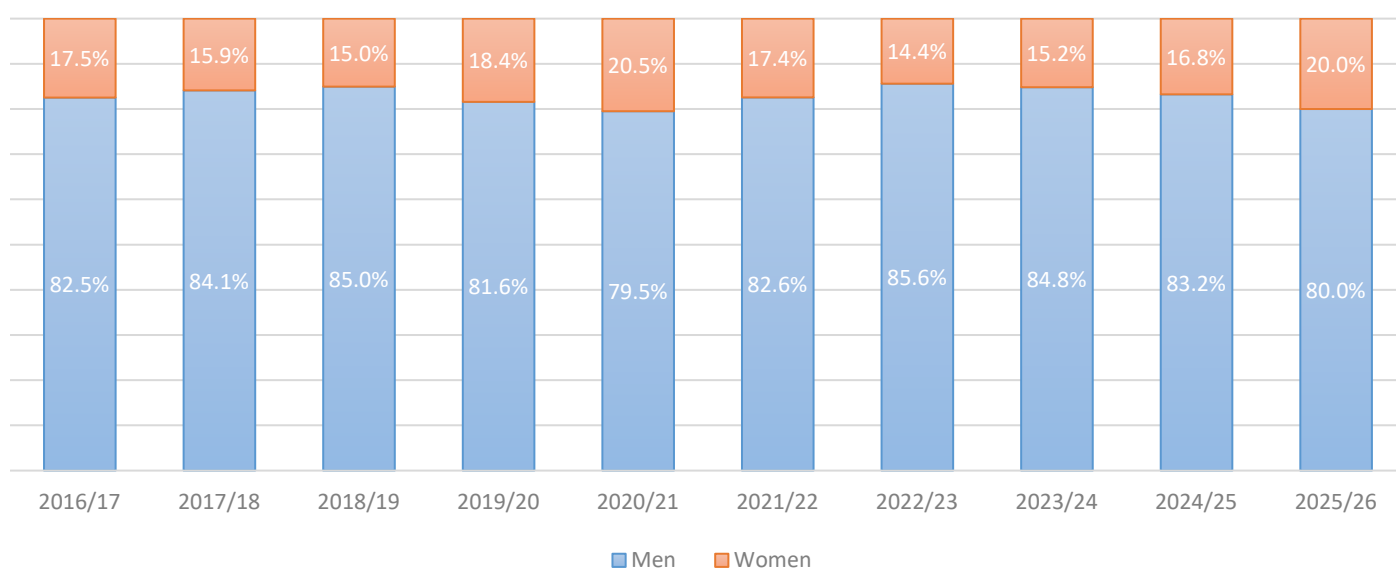
Figure 51: Positive drug tests by offence and percentage change on previous year, Wirral residents, 2025/26



DEMOGRAPHICS

Men accounted for four in five individuals who tested positive across Merseyside Police's custody suites in the year ending March 2026 (n=296, 80.0%; *Figure 52*). Although this is just below the ten-year average (82.9%), it is similar to the figure for all Merseyside residents combined (80.4%). Notably, the number of women increased by 13.8%, from 65 individuals in 2024/25 to 74 in 2025/26, which is the highest proportion since 2020/21.

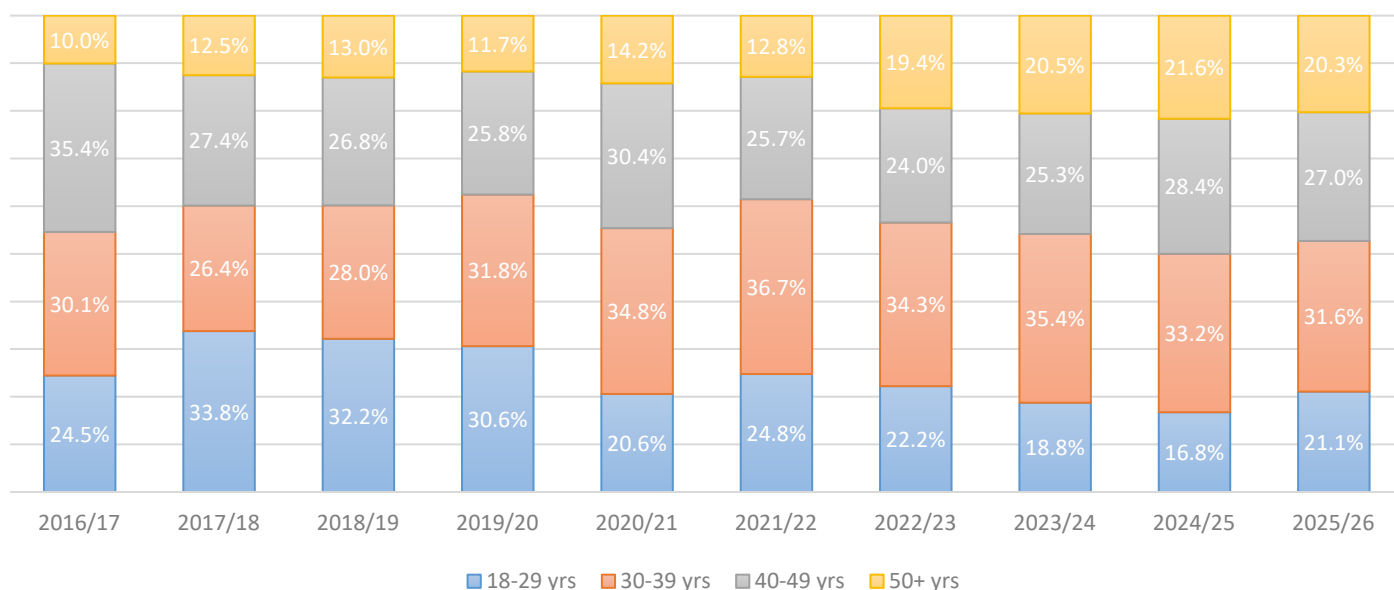
Figure 52: Positive drug tests by sex, Wirral residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



Where ethnicity was stated, almost all Wirral residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were White (98.1%). The average age was 39.4 years (men = 38.8, women = 41.9), which is a slight decrease on the previous year (40.3 years). Compared to the other Merseyside areas, Wirral has the oldest average age of women.

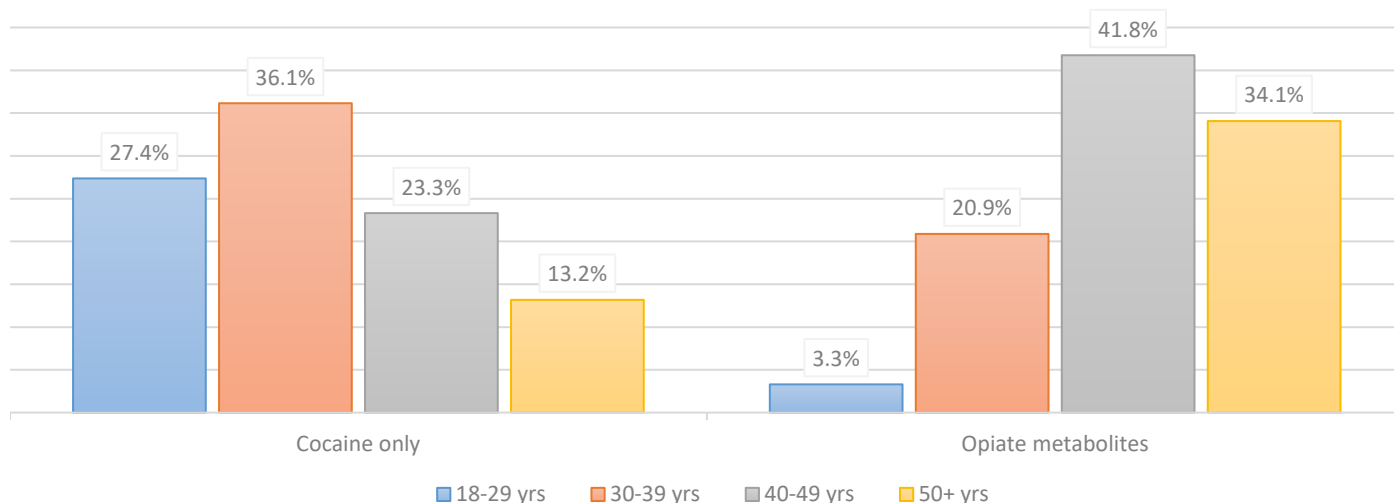
Around a third of the Wirral residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2026 were aged 30-39 years (n=117, 31.6%), followed by individuals aged 40-49 years (n=100, 27.0%), while there were similar numbers aged 18-29 years (n=78, 21.1%) and 50 years or over (n=75, 20.3%; *Figure 53*). Although there have been some fluctuations in the ten-year period, there has been a notable increase in adults aged 50 years or over in recent years, with Wirral having the largest proportion of individuals in this age group in 2025/26 when compared to the other Merseyside LA areas. Notably, there was a slight increase in the proportion of individuals aged 18-29 years in the year ending March 2026, though it is lower than the ten-year average (24.5%).

Figure 53: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test, Wirral residents (individuals), 2016/17 - 2025/26



There is a notable difference in the age profile when comparing the drug test result. Adults who tested positive for cocaine only were generally younger (63.5% were aged 18-39 years), while those who tested positive for opiate metabolites were generally older (75.8% were aged 40 years or over; *Figure 54*).

Figure 54: Positive drug tests by age group and drug test result, St Helens residents, 2025/26



RE-PRESENTATIONS

Table 1 provides an indication of the rate of re-presentations through Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA) in Merseyside, which can be used as a proxy measure of re-offending. Of the 2,177 individuals who reside in Merseyside who tested positive for opiates and/or cocaine in the year ending March 2026⁴¹, just over one in five subsequently re-presented and were drug tested again following their initial positive drug test during the twelve-month period (n=480, 22.1%; including negative results).

Table 1: Individuals re-presenting to DToA following a positive test for specified Class A drugs, Merseyside residents, 2025/26

Number of DToA incidences	N	%
One	1,697	77.95%
Two	296	13.60%
Three	108	4.96%
Four	41	1.88%
Five	23	1.06%
Six	4	0.18%
Seven	5	0.23%
Eight	1	0.05%
Nine	1	0.05%
Ten	1	0.05%
Individuals presenting more than once	480	22.05%

TRENDS OF RE-PRESENTATIONS

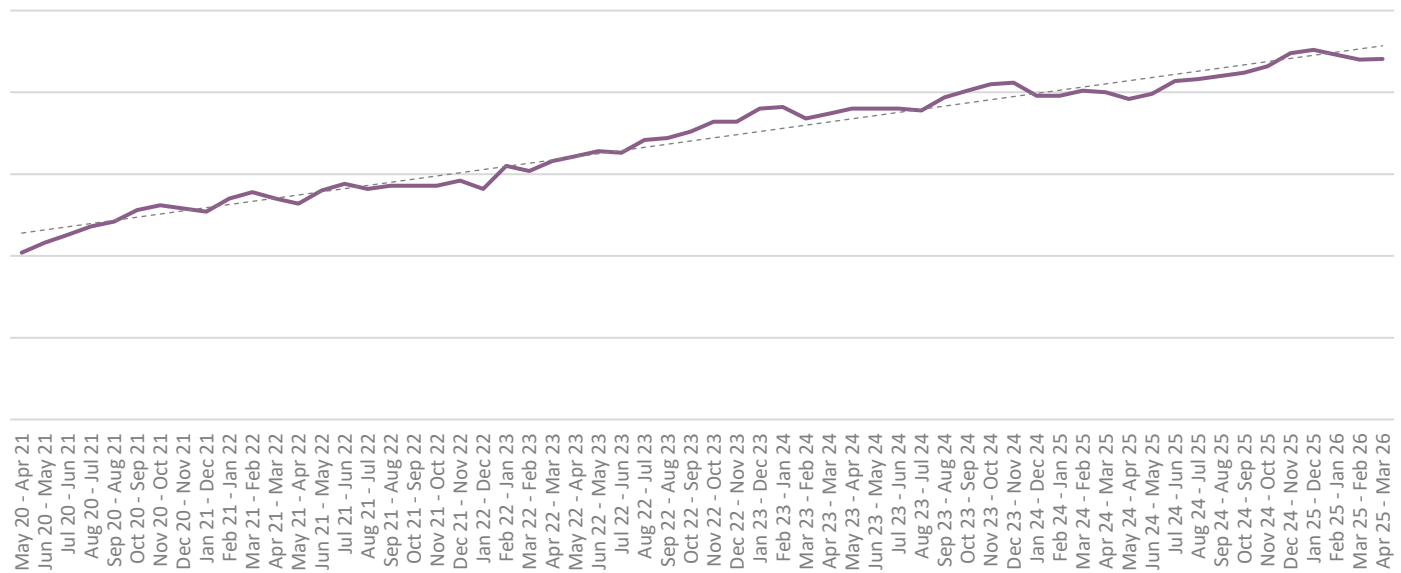
Figure 55 shows an upward trend in the proportion of individuals re-presenting to DToA following a positive test for specified Class A drugs during the sixty twelve-month cohorts⁴². As noted earlier in this report, this does not necessarily indicate a growing prevalence of drug use among people who offend; Merseyside Police have improved processes to ensure drug tests are taking place, with the overall number of attempted tests carried out in recent years (Figure 1).

The proportion of re-presentations was at its lowest in the first cohort in Figure 55, the twelve months ending April 2021 (10.2%), followed by a gradual but consistent increase with only minor fluctuations. The proportion peaked late 2025 and early 2026 (ranging from 22.0% in the twelve months ending February 2026 to 22.6% in the twelve months ending December 2025).

⁴¹ This number differs to what was reported in Figure 3, which included all residents, while this chapter reports on Merseyside residents only.

⁴² Note that Merseyside Police ran out of drug testing kits in May 2021 due to a nationwide shortage, which was an ongoing issue and may have affected the number of drug tests carried out in subsequent months.

Figure 55: Proportions of individuals re-presenting to DToA following a positive test for specified Class A drugs, Merseyside residents, May 2020 - Apr 2021 to Apr 2025 - Mar 2026



OVERVIEW OF INDIVIDUALS WHO RE-PRESENTED

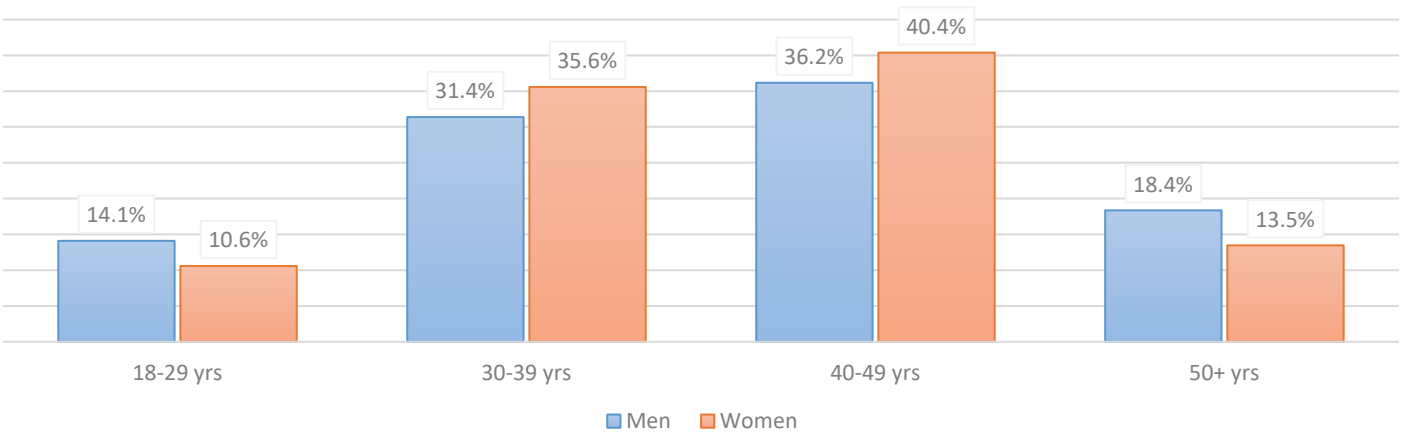
This section provides an overview of the 480 individuals who tested positive in the twelve months ending March 2026 and subsequently re-presented during the twelve-month period. Figures are shown as per the age and drug(s) detected at the initial positive drug test.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Around four in five of the individuals who re-presented in the year ending March 2026 were men (n=376, 78.3%) and the average age was 40.4 years (men = 40.5, women = 40.1). Just under two in five were aged 40-49 years (n=178, 37.1%), followed by individuals aged 30-39 years (n=155, 32.3%), 50 years or over (n=83, 17.3%) and 18-29 years (n=64, 13.3%).

Figure 56 compares age group with sex for individuals who presented more than once between April 2025 and March 2026. There were larger proportions of men than women in the youngest and oldest age groups (14.1% versus 10.6% aged 18-29 years and 18.4% versus 13.5% aged 50 years or over), though larger proportions of women than men aged 30-39 years (35.6% versus 31.4%) and 40-49 years (40.4% versus 36.2%).

Figure 56: Individuals re-presenting to DToA by age group and sex, Merseyside residents, 2025/26



Half of the individuals who re-presented in the twelve months ending March 2026 were residents of Liverpool LA at the time of their initial drug test (n=237, 49.4%), followed by Wirral residents (n=78, 16.3%), Sefton residents (n=64, 13.3%), St Helens residents (n=57, 11.9%) and Knowsley residents (n=40, 8.4%)⁴³.

INITIAL POSITIVE DRUG TEST OF INDIVIDUALS WHO RE-PRESENTED

Of the cohort who presented to DToA more than once between April 2025 and March 2026, around half tested positive for cocaine only at their initial positive test during the twelve-month period (n=245, 51.0%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 230, 47.9%; opiates only = 5, 1.0%; *Figure 57*). Liverpool was the only area where there was a majority of individuals testing positive for opiate metabolites at their initial positive test (54.4%), while Knowsley had the highest proportion of cocaine only (70.0%), followed by Sefton (57.8%), St Helens (56.1%) and Wirral (51.3%).

Figure 57: Individuals re-presenting to DToA by LA of residence and drug type at initial positive test, Merseyside residents, 2025/26

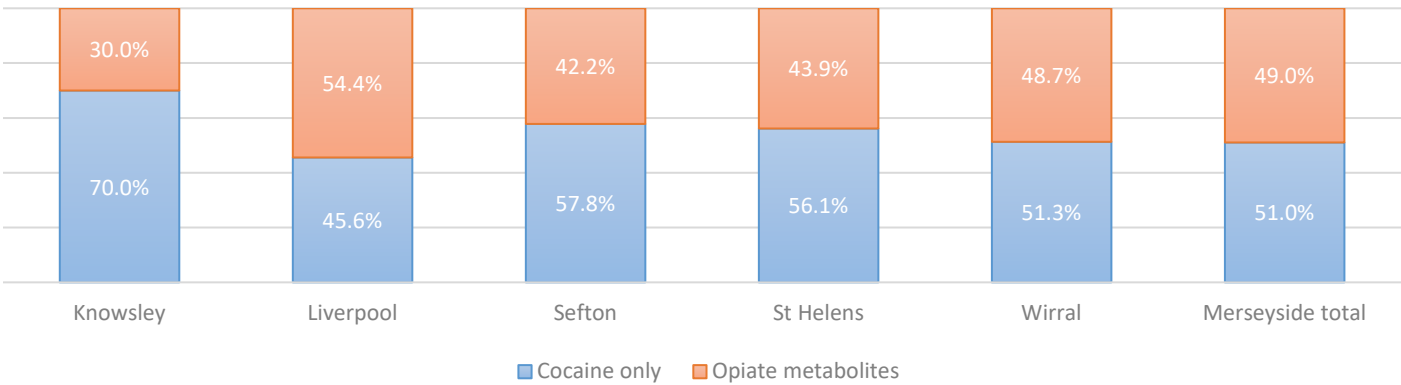
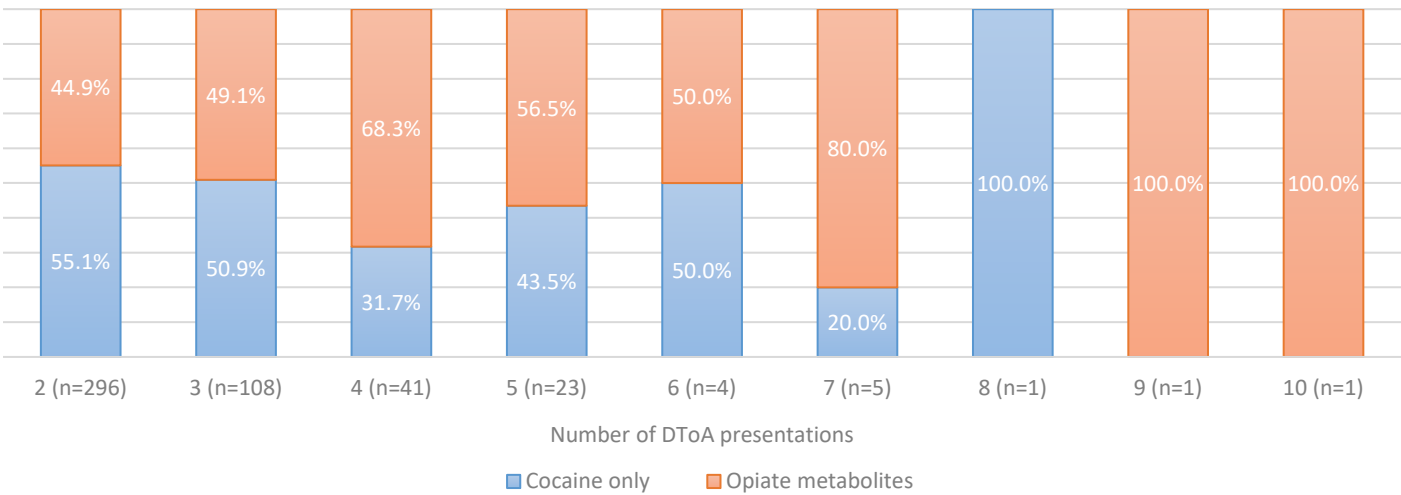


Figure 58 compares the number of DToA presentations with the drug type at the initial positive drug test between April 2025 and March 2026. Overall, there is a slight association with opiate metabolites as the frequency of presentations increase, though caution should be taken with eight or more presentations due to low numbers. Other than where there was only one individual, the proportion of cocaine only positive tests peaked for those who presented on two occasions (55.1%), while opiate metabolites peaked where there were seven presentations (80.0%), followed by four presentations (68.3%).

Figure 58: Individuals re-presenting to DToA by number of presentations and drug type at initial positive test, Merseyside residents, 2025/26



⁴³ There were a further four individuals that had 'Merseyside' recorded, not specifying the LA of residence.

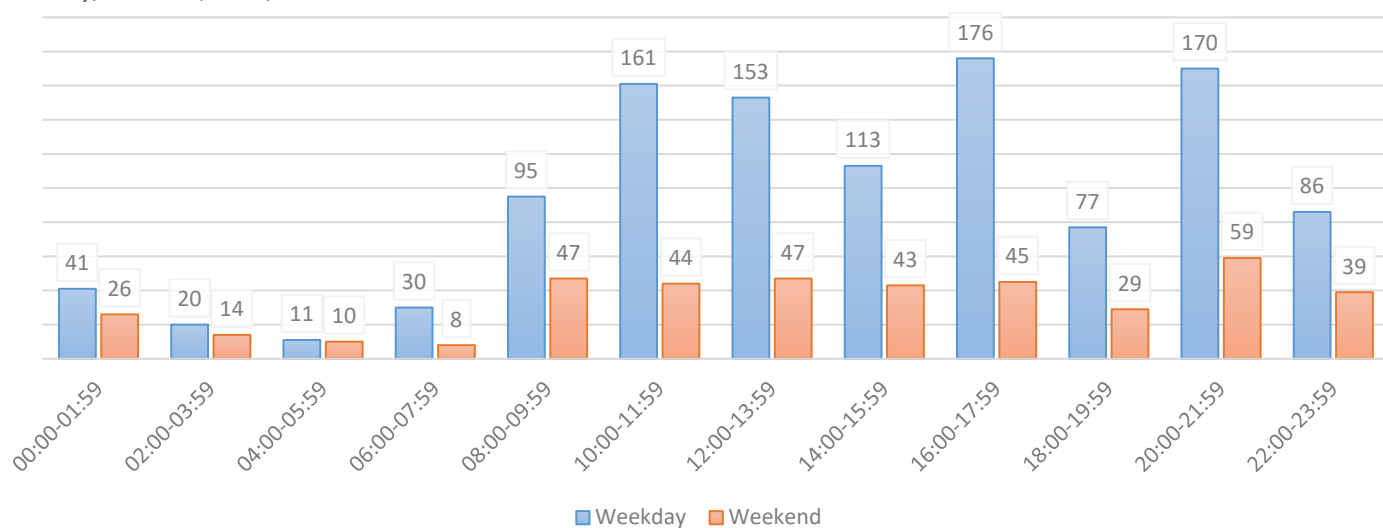
APPENDIX A

Notes to accompany this report:

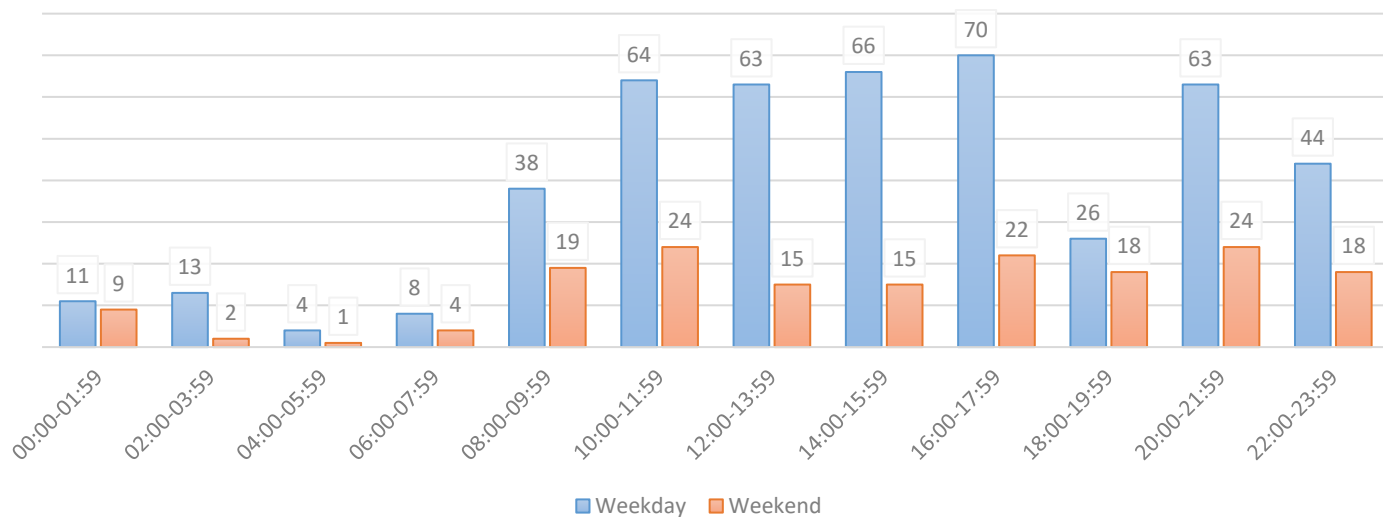
1. Merseyside Police custody suites:
 - a. Liverpool custody suites include Belle Vale, St Anne Street and Wavertree.
 - b. St Anne Street custody suite closed on 16 May 2023 for refurbishment and reopened on 20 September 2023.
 - c. Wirral custody suite closed early January 2022 for refurbishment and reopened on 30 April 2022.
 - d. Copy Lane custody suite closed temporarily for refurbishment for around ten weeks at the end of 2019.
 - e. St Helens custody suite permanently closed mid-August 2017.
 - f. There is no custody suite in Knowsley.
2. Merseyside Police suspended drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Where comparisons have been made with Merseyside figures, these are totals for Merseyside residents only and not totals of tests carried out by Merseyside Police, which include all residents.
4. Caution should be taken when comparing trends of Merseyside residents, as in earlier years a large number of records did not have LA of residence recorded; therefore, the number of Merseyside residents drug tested may be under-reported in these years.
5. Throughout this report, cocaine includes both powder cocaine and crack cocaine.
6. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
7. Numbers of individuals have been reported for demographics and re-presentations only, as per the initial drug test in the reporting period, while other figures include multiple tests for some clients where there could be different test results and/or offences recorded.
8. For instances where there are blank records or an individual declines to answer, does not know or does not state a response, these have been excluded from the calculations; therefore, totals may not add up to the total number of attempted/positive drug tests or individuals. Footnotes have been included throughout the report to indicate numbers of records missing information in order to monitor data quality.

APPENDIX B

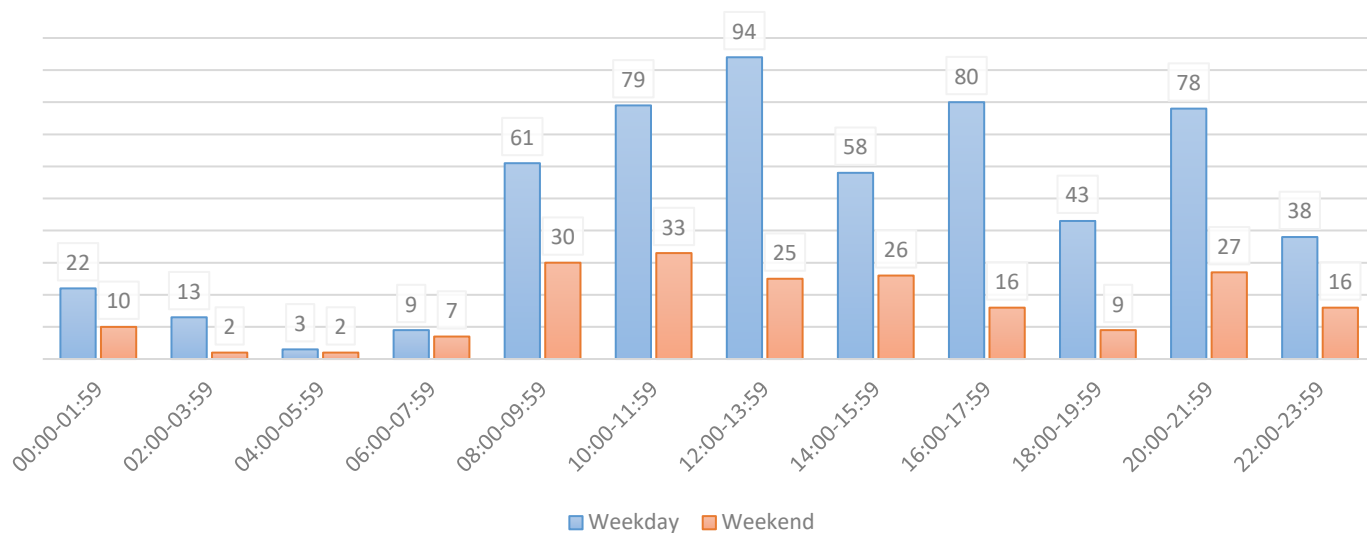
Appendix B1: Positive drug tests at Belle Vale, St Anne Street and Wavertree custody suites (Liverpool) by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2025/26



Appendix B2: Positive drug tests at Copy Lane custody suite (Sefton) by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2025/26

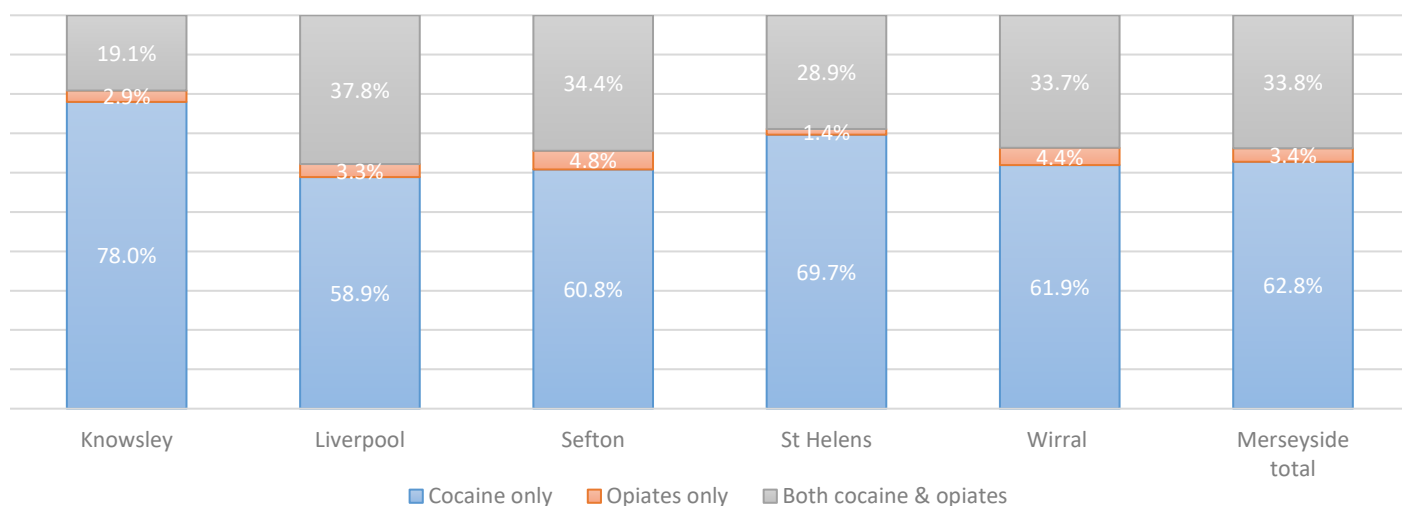


Appendix B3: Positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2025/26

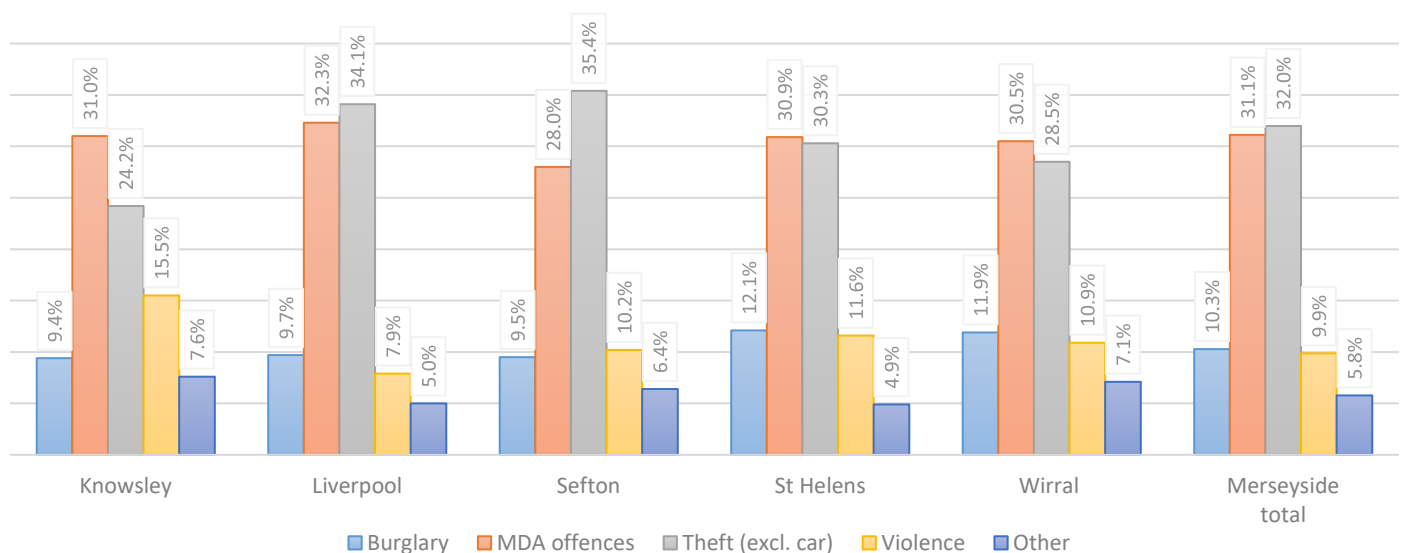


APPENDIX C

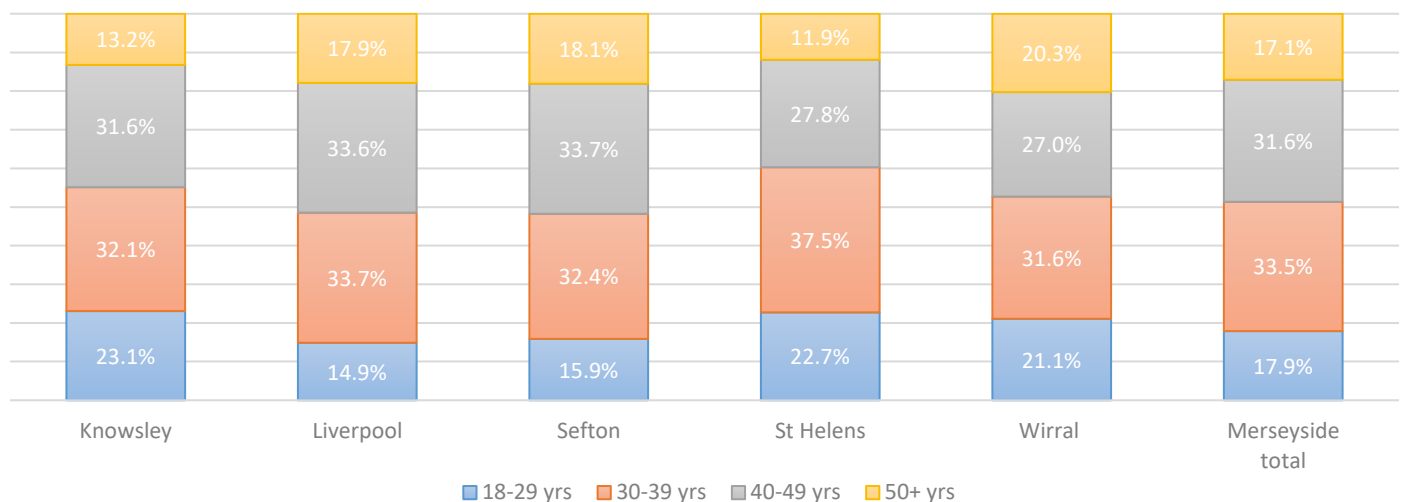
Appendix C1: Positive drug tests by LA of residence and drug, Merseyside residents, 2025/26



Appendix C2: Positive drug tests by LA of residence and key offences, Merseyside residents, 2025/26



Appendix C3: Positive drug tests by LA of residence and age group, Merseyside residents, 2025/26



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About the Public Health Institute

The Public Health Institute (PHI) within the Faculty of Health, Innovation, Technology and Science at Liverpool John Moores University, specialises in applied research and educational programmes addressing health issues at all levels from policy development to service delivery. PHI is committed to a multidisciplinary approach to public health and works in partnership with health services, local authorities, judicial bodies, environmental services and community groups.

Influencing health service design and delivery, as well as health related policy, PHI's research has been at the forefront of the development of multi-agency strategies to promote and protect public health. PHI turns information and data into meaningful and timely intelligence.

Integrated Monitoring System Team

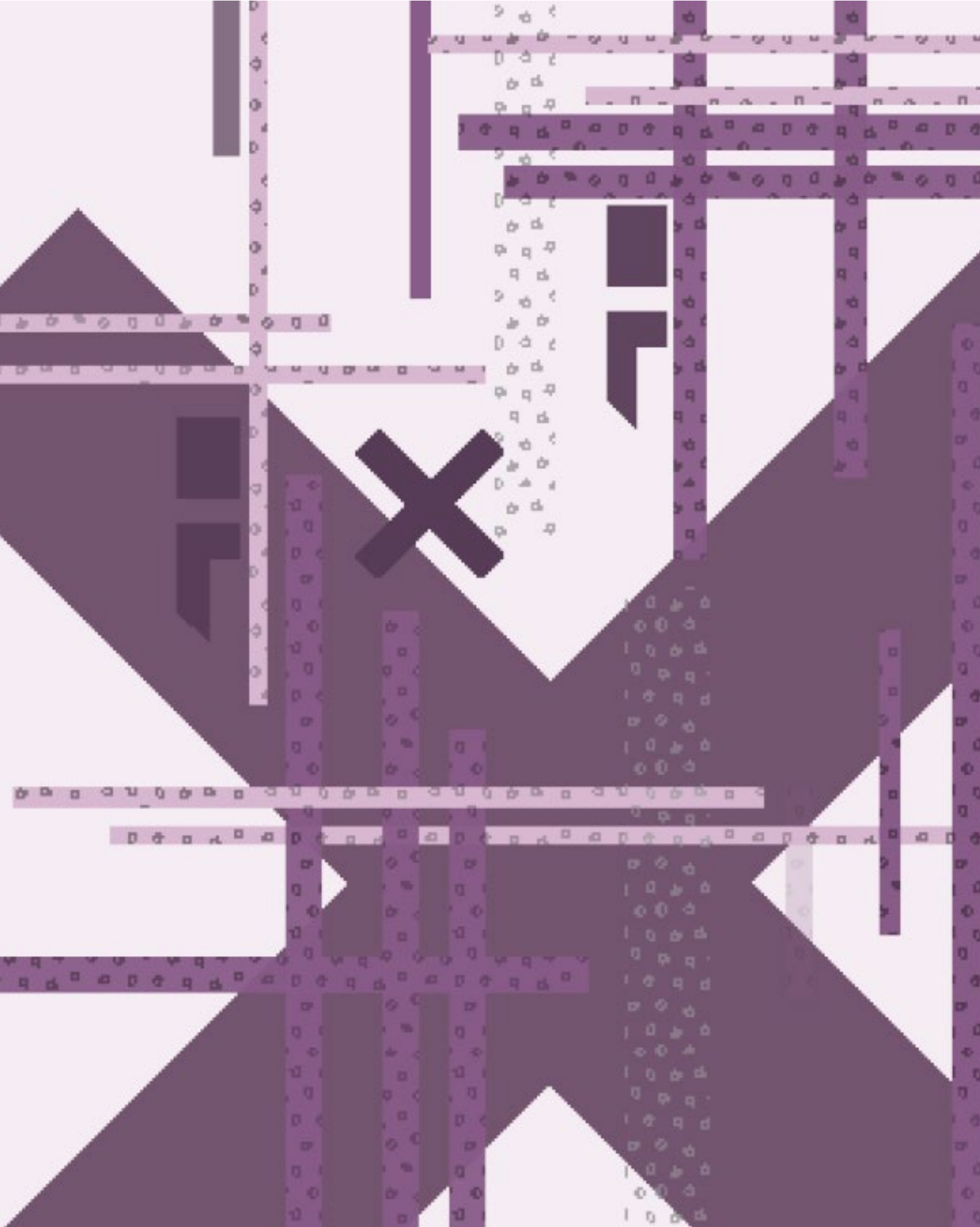
The Integrated Monitoring System (IMS) Team provides drug and alcohol data collection and monitoring to support public health reporting, evidence review, evaluation and research. The team has extensive experience across various large-scale substance use data sets, including the surveillance of the provision of needle and syringe programmes, brief interventions and other non-structured treatment, criminal justice interventions, drug and alcohol related deaths and in-treatment mortality, and non-fatal overdoses. Furthermore, IMS is responsible for the Cheshire and Merseyside Local Drug Information System, a multi-disciplinary system using existing local resources to receive, evaluate and disseminate alerts about new and/or novel, potent, adulterated or contaminated drugs.

DIP monitoring

PHI has been monitoring criminal justice interventions for people in the criminal justice system who use drugs and/or alcohol since the implementation of the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) in 2003. IMS is commissioned to deliver the intelligence and surveillance of data collected for clients in contact with DIP across Merseyside.

IMS has access to Merseyside Police records for Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA) for specified Class A drugs and the criminal justice data set, which collects information on clients in contact with the Criminal Justice Intervention Teams (CJITs) across Merseyside's drug and alcohol treatment providers. DToA records are matched with the criminal justice data set across the five Merseyside Local Authority areas, using a client attributor. This enables the monitoring of performance, identifying when individuals have attended their Required Assessment (RA) and engaged with DIP, and highlight any issues with the RA, and wider DIP, processes.

Intelligence is collated and presented through monthly and annual reports, and ad-hoc reporting in response to data requests. In partnership with commissioners, treatment providers and Merseyside Police, DIP monitoring in Merseyside is continually developing to meet local needs.



INTEGRATED
MONITORING SYSTEM



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