



North Yorkshire Youth Commission:

Interim Report to the Police and Crime Commissioner

January 2016

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**

YC:UK
YOUTH COMMISSION

Police and Crime
Commissioner
North Yorkshire



Introduction

North Yorkshire Youth Commission was established in July 2015 with support from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Community Fund. The project aims to enable young people aged 14-25 to inform decisions about policing and crime prevention in North Yorkshire, working in partnership with the PCC and North Yorkshire Police.

The key objectives of the project are:

- Recruit a diverse group of 25-30 young people from across North Yorkshire to join the Youth Commission.
- Work with Youth Commission members to identify the key priority topics they want to tackle during the project.
- Provide Youth Commission members with the practical skills training they will need for their role.
- Plan and deliver a 'Big Conversation' to enable the Youth Commission to gather meaningful views from 1,500 young people across North Yorkshire.
- Support the Youth Commission to turn these views into key findings and recommendations, to be disseminated at a final conference with the PCC, police and partner agencies.

The Youth Commission is being managed by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise which aims to enable young people to have a stronger say on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions working with PCCs in 4 other regions, and is planning to further expand the model in 2016.

For more information about Leaders Unlocked please see www.leaders-unlocked.org

Progress to date

During July and August 2015, Leaders Unlocked recruited and trained 30 young adults to become members of the Youth Commission. The Youth Commission members were recruited with the support of a wide range of local organisations to ensure they come from a diverse range of backgrounds and life experiences.

Through deliberation and teamwork, the Youth Commission identified 6 key priority topics they wanted to tackle through the project. These were:

- 1) Cyber-bullying and Internet Safety
- 2) Hate Crime
- 3) Legal Highs and Drug Abuse
- 4) Relationships with the Police
- 5) Preventing Youth Crime
- 6) Youth Vulnerability and Exploitation

To tackle these 6 priorities, Youth Commission members have been carrying out a 'Big Conversation' and helping to lead consultation events and activities with other young people across North Yorkshire.

Since September, **the Youth Commission has delivered 27 consultation events in a wide range of localities** including Selby, Scarborough, Thirsk, Harrogate, Craven and York. So far, the Youth Commission has **gathered views from over 1,200 young people**. These views have been recorded on Youth Commission postcards and via the Youth Commission website at www.youthcommission.co.uk

In the final phase of the project, we plan to work in partnership with the Youth Offending Team in York and the Youth Justice Service for North Yorkshire, with a view to carrying out some targeted consultation with young

offenders. The project will then culminate in the Youth Commission's Big Conversation Conference on 25th January 2016 in York, at which the Commission will present its findings and final recommendations.

This interim report provides a summary of the key findings and draft recommendations arising from the Big Conversation so far. We expect that these findings and recommendations will be further honed and developed over the course of January, ready for launch at the conference on January 25th 2016.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the Youth Commission to consult with the young people in their organisations. Thanks go to: York St John University, Selby College, York College, York Young Carers, Askham Bryan College, University Of Hull Scarborough Campus, University of York, North Yorkshire Youth Council, National Citizen Service York and Harrogate, Flying Futures, York Young Adult Carers, Harrogate College, Care Leavers, Children in Care, The Clock Thirsk, Thirsk School, North Yorkshire Police Cadets, Action for Children Selby, Craven Young Carers, Fairfax Youth club, Jennyfields Youth Club, Girl Guides, and Sea Cadets.

A special thank you also goes to North Yorkshire Police, who have collaborated closely with the Youth Commission throughout the project. Senior officers have devoted time and energy to support the Youth Commission, given constructive feedback on their research, and offer opportunities for the Commission to inform police initiatives.



Priority 1: Cyber-bullying and Internet Safety

What we found

Cyber-bullying a widespread problem facing many young people, and there is a great deal of concern about the serious consequences for those who are affected. The Youth Commission has found that it has a strong relationship with wider issues such as mental health and self-harm.

Although there is a lot of educational material in place to address cyber-bullying, the fact it occurs across a variety of different media means that it is difficult for young people to know how to respond. Young people are clear that

'blocking' perpetrators is only a short-term solution, as they can get round this by simply switching to a different platform to continue the abuse.

The Youth Commission found that a key problem is anonymity. Not only does anonymity desensitise the perpetrator, but it also makes the abusive behaviour a lot more intimidating for the victim. However, the Youth Commission has found that is rarely a stranger who is the perpetrator, bullies are often friends or mutual friends. If people do know who the perpetrator is, or simply try to make their peers aware of what is happening, then it is often brushed off as 'banter'.

Young people would appreciate more information on what to do when they face these issues, as many don't have the confidence to report cyber-bullying, or the faith in the police to be able to resolve the issue.

"Cat fishing is a problem, setting up a false profile on social media and being in an online relationship. Friends I know have been hurt."

"5 months - Snapchat not knowing how to block people. Unpleasant photos being sent to me privately."

"I wouldn't tell my school if I was being cyber bullied and I wouldn't want to contact the police because I don't think they would really be able to do anything."

Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Need to become more technologically literate.
- Threats should be taken seriously and anything reported should not be ignored as this dissuades people from reporting.
- Raise awareness of what 'Cat Fishing' is and the risks involved.

PCC and Partners:

- Introduce restorative justice to respond to cases of cyber bullying in order to tackle depersonalisation.
- Make reporting easier – introduce a direct link to the CEOP Website. If young people are given this sort of information rather than having to commit to looking for it, then they are more likely to use it.

Youth Commission:

- Educate other young people on how to make the most of privacy settings.
- Give young people the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns about cyber-bullying without formally reporting an incident.

¹ Cat Fishing – the phenomenon of internet predators that fabricate online identities and entire social circles to trick people into emotional/romantic relationships (over a long period of time). The term Cat Fish originates from an MTV documentary series by the same name which explores this issue.

² CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre



Priority 2: Hate Crime

What we found

Many young people are concerned about hate crime in their communities and want to see the issue tackled. They feel that this problem is getting worse with recent global events, which have contributed to increased hate and mistrust towards minority groups in the population.

Over the last few months, numerous young people have shared their stories and experiences of hate crime and hate incidents with the Youth Commission. These experiences include lots of verbal abuse and some physical assault. The majority of these experiences have been based on differences of race, ethnicity or sexuality.

A key problem is that young people do not realise the language they use can be offensive or divisive. Most are unaware what a hate crime is, how it affects people, and what they can do if they are a victim or a witness of this type of crime.

Young people told us they feel the police do not understand the issues surrounding hate crime, particularly when it comes to the issues facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people. They perceive that the police consequently don't take hate crime and hate incidents seriously enough. This perception, along with fear of escalating conflicts and a lack of confidence in the police response, is a real barrier to reporting hate crime.

"My brothers are constantly being targeted for being black and even I get attacked sometimes just for being with them."

"I've had experience with hate crime mainly due to my sexuality. Being called every offensive name under the sun mostly by men while out during socials."

"Muslim community are being ignored by police when they report hate crimes."

"Need to talk more about hate crime with the police."

Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Raise the Profile of Hate Crime prosecutions to highlight the consequences and how the police are taking action.
- Run awareness campaigns in schools and youth groups.
- Support initiatives to integrate minority groups with the wider community.

PCC and Partners:

- Improve awareness of reporting and that show issues will be taken seriously leading to a resolution.
- Make sure there's representation of diverse communities within the police.
- Raise profile of the issues nationally.

Youth Commission:

- Continue to represent and engage those young people who don't have confidence in the police.
- Raise the profile of hate crime as a crime with young people.
- Assist with any integration initiatives.

Priority 3: Legal Highs and Drug Abuse

What we found

The Youth Commission has found that young people simply are not aware of the risks of legal highs and drugs, especially the long-term consequences. Currently it is far too easy for young people to access drugs and legal highs. The most common way to do this is through house parties, music festivals (e.g. The Warehouse Project), event promotions and student lifestyle.

In terms of the solution, many young people believe there should be a greater police presence in high usage areas. They have also highlighted the need to ensure that young people can feel comfortable approaching the police about drug issues without fear of judgement.

"Can buy legal highs too easily, I did it and ended up in hospital"

"Police need to focus on the mental health side of drugs – the more human issue"

"Legal highs keep changing and the police aren't able to keep up"



Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Work more closely with bouncers to reduce drug taking in clubs.
- Be more understanding and less judgemental of young people.
- Raise awareness of the mental health impact of drugs and work to impart this knowledge onto young people.
- Take steps to reduce access to drugs and legal highs.

PCC and Partners:

- Run workshops and work with schools in order to increase awareness of drugs and legal highs, and help young people to understand how to handle the situations that arise in the real world, to prepare them to say no.
- Stop referring to them as 'legal' highs.
- Provide more support for users facing difficult health or personal circumstances.

Youth Commission:

- Continue to work with the police to reduce the stigma about asking for help.
- Engage with more young people from rural areas as boredom pushes many towards drugs and legal highs.
- Work with young offenders to prevent reoffending and deter others from offending.

Priority 4: Relationship with the Police

What we found

This has been a really popular topic and the Youth Commission has received many comments on different aspects of the relationship with the police, including: stereotypes, police in the media, communication, and police powers.

Many young people felt stereotyping was a frequent problem, especially when it came to Stop and Search. Many young people felt they were targeted because of where they were, the people they were with, or how they looked, rather than because of what they were doing. Stop and Search also worsened the relationship with the police, as most young people didn't know what their rights were.

In terms of police powers, many young people felt the police were unnecessarily confrontational and forceful, showing a lack of care and empathy. Some felt that the police did not consider incidents involving young people a priority.

Young people said the way the police are portrayed in the media helps to shape their opinion, often in a negative way.

In terms of communication with the police, the responses were mixed. Many commented on the fact that the police had a good sense of humour and could take a joke, which helped make students feel more relaxed. However, there is need for more opportunities for integration between the police, as some young people felt that there was no relationship at all.

"A bit harsh, they judge you on what you look like, what you wear, where you live and who your friends are"

"Young people are taught to fear them, plus the impact of the media doesn't portray the police well"

"I'd go to other people before I went to the police. Local people know more."

Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Take a unified approach across the police regarding how to interact with young people.
- Don't always be in cars.
- Get to know communities.
- Increase informal interactions with young people (not just issuing warnings).

PCC and Partners:

- Partner with colleges to assign a PCSO to each school.
- Promote awareness of non-emergency numbers.
- Facilitate open days to show a day in the life of a police officer.

Youth Commission:

- Go into schools to increase awareness of young people's responsibilities.
- Identify key target groups, i.e. homeless/ young offenders to hold 'surgeries' with.
- Continue to facilitate links between the police and young people.



Priority 5: Preventing Youth Crime

What we found

The young people we spoken to tended to perceive youth crime as an urban issue. The crimes they talked most about are anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse. Many young people have also highlighted the widespread use of fake IDs as a problem.

In terms of the root causes of youth crime, many people believed a lack of awareness regarding the consequences of crime was a key contributing factor. Young people are not aware of the way a criminal record might affect their long-term future. They are also not aware enough of the impact of crime on victims and others.

The Youth Commission also found there is an inter-generational divide between young people and the older population, creating a general stereotype that young people are associated with crime. Many young people felt they were unfairly labelled as troublemakers by virtue of their age.

Many of the young people we have spoken to so far tended to think that the best solution to youth crime would be to increase the police presence and the use of CCTV. However, the Youth Commission is keen to hear directly from young offenders in the next phase of the project, with a view to gaining a better understanding of the root causes and the solutions.

Young people need to be educated on how committing crimes can affect their lives

"Older generations have the view that young generations are very violent and criminally orientated"

"Lots of kids hanging around, underage drinking and being noisy."

Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Increase the presence of police/PSCOs in schools.
- Crack down on fake IDs and do more to identify the source.
- Discourage stereotype that all young people are 'out to cause trouble'.

PCC and Partners:

- Encourage more street patrols (especially in the Tang Hall, York).
- Encourage police to highlight the long-term consequences of youth crime, instead of just giving warnings.

Youth Commission:

- Facilitate conversations in schools to discuss youth crime and how it affects people.

Priority 6: Youth Vulnerability and Exploitation

What we found

The Youth Commission spoke to many young people who felt vulnerable when they were out, especially at night. Lots of people told us they felt unsafe out at night in the dark. They feared muggings, attacks and assaults. Some said this was more of an issue outside of the city centre, in areas that are quieter and often poorly lit.

A large number of responses commented on a lack of street lighting on footpaths and cycle lanes, which leaves many people feeling vulnerable when walking or cycling at night. Many young women are concerned about sexual harassment, and some shared their personal experiences of being harassed while on nights out.

The Youth Commission found that young people are also concerned about the vulnerability that comes hand in hand with mental health issues, homelessness and the prevalent alcohol culture. They called for greater understanding of mental health and homelessness on the part of the police and other authorities. They warned that the student drinking culture is leading to highly reckless behaviour and felt that bouncers (and police) are not doing enough to protect people in vulnerable situations.

Worryingly, many of these young people did not feel confident that the police would protect them if they were in a vulnerable situation. Many other young people highlighted the difficulties in the relationship between young people and the police, saying that young people are often ignored or made to feel intimidated by the police, and minorities often felt marginalised.

"Dark streets leave people vulnerable to attack; its not very safe or comforting -when living in uni- at night alone."

"More should be done to support vulnerable young people, I have self harmed and felt like no one would help me because of my home situation."

"Being inappropriately approached, catcalled, feeling threatened. Especially when walking alone."

"The relationship with the police is negative, most people feel the police are judgmental and that the victims are blamed."



Our draft recommendations

Police:

- Be more approachable and empathetic when helping young people in potentially vulnerable situations.
- Have a greater presence in particular areas.
- Top priority should be to reduce drinking in streets and parks.

PCC and Partners:

- Provide easier access to language classes to increase the integration of minority groups and prevent them from becoming isolated.
- Better street lighting.
- Work more closely with charities, especially those that address homelessness.

Youth Commission:

- Go into schools to raise awareness of how to prevent vulnerability and exploitation.

Conclusion:

This interim report summarises the key findings and emerging recommendations from the North Yorkshire Youth Commission so far. The members of the Youth Commission have worked extremely hard to gather the views of over 1,200 young people in locations all across North Yorkshire, and we are extremely proud of what they have achieved already.

In the next stage of the project, the Youth Commission will complete their 'Big Conversation' to reach their final target of 1,500 young people. This will give the Commission a rich evidence base, which will then be used to develop a final set of recommendations and key findings for the PCC, police and partner agencies.

The project will culminate in a final conference event on 25th January 2016, at which the Youth Commission will present their findings and recommendations to an influential audience of senior police officials, local partner agencies, education and community organisations, and the Police and Crime Commissioner. This event will be an opportunity for all key stakeholders to inform the future development of the North Yorkshire Youth Commission as a platform for young people to influence policing and crime prevention in the region.

A full final report will be publicly available in February 2016.