LEADERS
UNLOCKED

POLICING THE PANDEMIC

EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES & RECOMMENDATIONS

**FINAL REPORT
JULY 2020**

INTRODUCTION

This report has been co-produced by Leaders Unlocked and a group of young leaders from diverse communities across England and Wales.

Policing the Pandemic is youth-led study that seeks to provide a snapshot of young people's views and experiences of policing during lockdown. Between May and June 2020, the project gathered views from over **3900 young people** across England and Wales.

The project aimed to find out:

- Young people's experiences of policing during the COVID-19 restrictions

- What's worked and what the challenges have been for young people

- Young people's recommendations for improving the policing approach

Policing the Pandemic has taken a **youth-led approach** at every stage. Young people have co-designed the online survey; analysed the data; decided the project's findings and recommendations; and presented the results to stakeholders.

Policing the Pandemic was delivered by social enterprise Leaders Unlocked and supported by a range of national and local partners. Leaders Unlocked exists to allow young people to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect them. For more information please see **www.leaders-unlocked.org**

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on evidence gathered from **3941 young people aged 13-25** across England and Wales. Each section features key findings and verbatim quotes from young people. The final part of the report outlines the recommendations the young leaders have identified for the policing sector.

This report is intended to act as an unmediated record of what young people have told us through this process. It is also intended to be the starting point for further thought and action on the part of decision-makers and professionals working in the policing sector and related agencies.

WHAT WE DID

RECRUITING YOUNG LEADERS:

We recruited 25 young leaders to join the project from existing youth-led groups operating in the policing and criminal justice fields. The young leaders came from the following groups:

Cheshire Youth Commission; Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) Youth Panel; Hampshire & Isle of Wight Youth Commission; Leaders Unlocked Youth Board; North Wales Youth Commission; North Yorkshire Youth Commission; Nottinghamshire Youth Commission; Staffordshire Youth Commission; Young Adult Advisors on Criminal Justice.

CO-DESIGNING THE RESEARCH:

We held a co-design session with the young leaders to define the research questions and design the method. The group decided to develop an **online survey with 16 questions,** including a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. Please see Appendix 2 for a copy of the survey questions. This method was easily deployable during lockdown, and the survey was quick and simple to complete on mobile devices.

The survey covered the following key areas:

- Young people's views on the approach taken by the police to ensuring people follow the COVID-19 restrictions
- Young people's experiences of engaging with the police during lockdown
- Perspectives of crime and safety during the lockdown
- Ideas for improving the policing approach going forward

CONDUCTING THE SURVEY:

The survey was launched on May 19th 2020 and was open for 17 days until June 5th. Over this time period, the survey generated 3941 valid responses from young people aged between 13 and 25 years of age.

The survey was promoted using a variety of local, regional and national channels. We had invaluable help and support from a wide range of partners both within and outside the policing sector, who helped to distribute the survey through their social media channels and their networks of local youth and community organisations.

DEVELOPING OUR FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

In mid June, we held an analysis session with the young leaders, to decide the project's key findings and recommendations. The young leaders worked together to identify the key themes from the research and to agree the most important recommendations to put forward.

PRESENTING THE RESULTS:

At the end of June, we held an online presentation in conjunction with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC). At this event, the young leaders presented their key findings and recommendations to an audience of approximately 30 police representatives from across England and Wales. The audience included Jo Shiner NPCC lead for children and young people. The response was hugely positive and created engagement prior to the launch of this report.
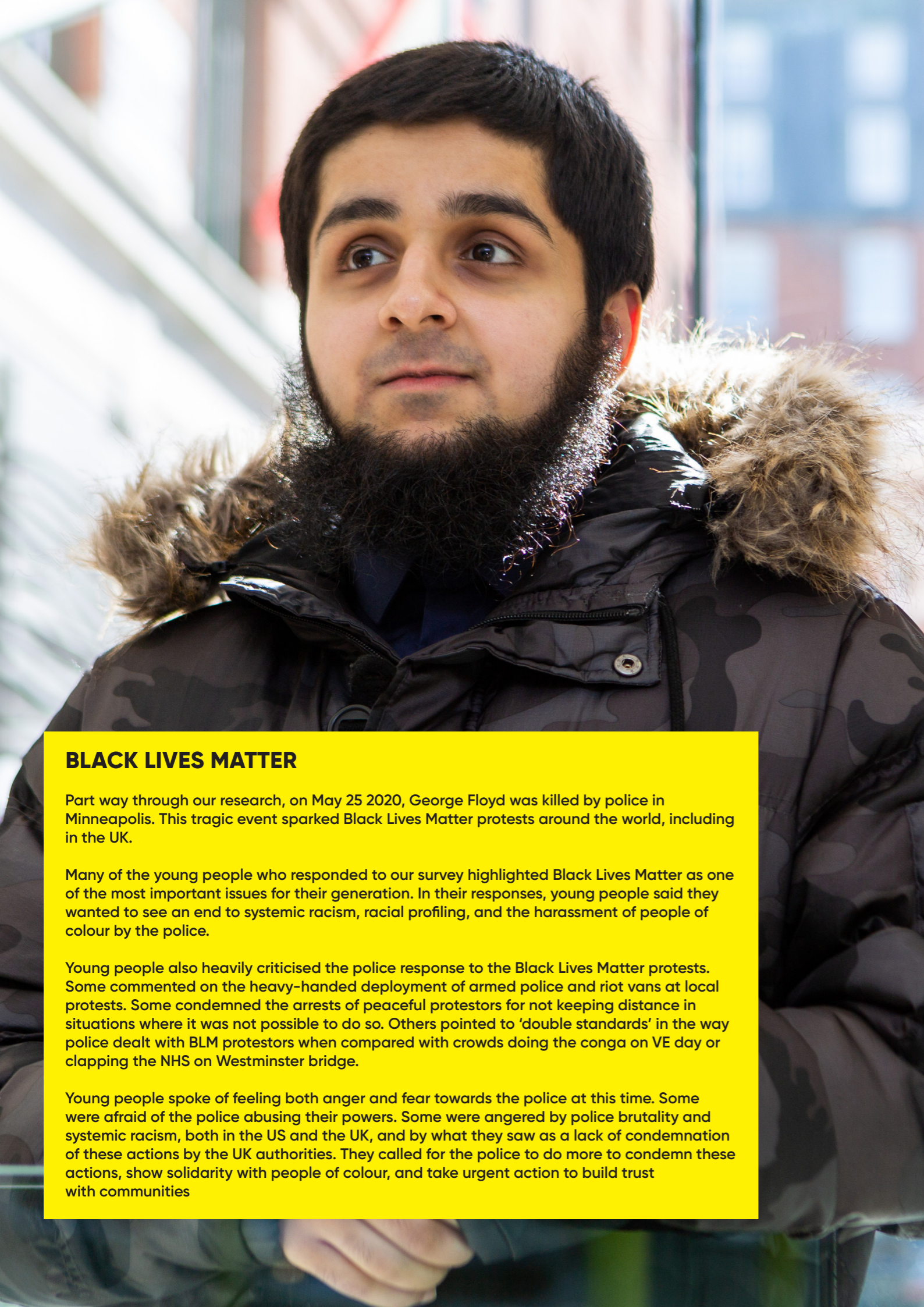
WHO WE REACHED

We received 3941 valid survey responses from young people across England and Wales.

Respondents were predominantly **13-25 years of age** and came from a diverse range of backgrounds and communities.

- 14% identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME)
- 12% identified as LGBTQ+
- 7% identified as having disabilities
- 4% said they had criminal justice experience

We achieved a good geographical coverage across England and Wales. The highest numbers of responses came from London, West Midlands, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. For a breakdown of response numbers by region please see Appendix 1.

It is worth noting that we attracted responses from young people who were very positive about the police, as well as those with more negative experiences and perceptions. Several police forces promoted the survey through their own social media, which tended to reach those with a more positive view of the police.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Part way through our research, on May 25 2020, George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis. This tragic event sparked Black Lives Matter protests around the world, including in the UK.

Many of the young people who responded to our survey highlighted Black Lives Matter as one of the most important issues for their generation. In their responses, young people said they wanted to see an end to systemic racism, racial profiling, and the harassment of people of colour by the police.

Young people also heavily criticised the police response to the Black Lives Matter protests. Some commented on the heavy-handed deployment of armed police and riot vans at local protests. Some condemned the arrests of peaceful protestors for not keeping distance in situations where it was not possible to do so. Others pointed to 'double standards' in the way police dealt with BLM protestors when compared with crowds doing the conga on VE day or clapping the NHS on Westminster bridge.

Young people spoke of feeling both anger and fear towards the police at this time. Some were afraid of the police abusing their powers. Some were angered by police brutality and systemic racism, both in the US and the UK, and by what they saw as a lack of condemnation of these actions by the UK authorities. They called for the police to do more to condemn these actions, show solidarity with people of colour, and take urgent action to build trust with communities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE POLICE APPROACH

OUR FINDINGS

26% felt well informed about what the police were doing to ensure people follow COVID restrictions in their area

42% said they did not know much or anything about what the police were doing to ensure people follow COVID restrictions[†]

Young people feel there has been a failure by Government to give clear information.

Many respondents commented on the lack of clear and consistent information from the Government. Some believed the Government had been hypocritical in its approach by allowing different rules for different people. Young people also recognised that this **made policing more difficult**. Most young people said they did not feel well informed about what the police were doing at this time.

"I understand that recent events within the government have made policing near impossible due to the lack of clarity about what reasons people are allowed to travel" (16, Hampshire)

"I'm not sure what they are meant to be doing or their powers, as the government and police have not explained them or been very clear" (18, Surrey)

"I don't think that the police got their message to young people quickly enough and broadcast the impact meet ups have on the wider fight against the virus" (18, West Midlands)

We found real inconsistency in the police approach across local areas.

Our responses showed **significant differences** in the way young people had experienced policing between local areas. Many young people were positive about seeing a stronger police presence in their local areas, for instance in town centres and tourist areas. However, others commented that they had not seen any more police around during lockdown, or that they felt police were not in the right places.

"The police have greatly enhanced their presence around the town and local retail park which has been very reassuring. They've approached and engaged with the local public in ways not seen for a long time" (25, Staffordshire)

"I live on an estate where there usually is a lot of trouble. Now that the police have shown how seriously they're taken lockdown, people are listening to them" (15, London)

"I haven't seen a single police officer. I went to the local park for a walk and there were big groups of people everywhere, drinking and having parties. I'm in a high risk group so for me that is a very bad thing" (19, West Midlands)

[†]9% felt completely informed about what the police were doing to ensure people follow COVID restrictions in their area
17% felt very informed about what the police were doing
31% felt somewhat informed about what the police were doing
21% said they did not know much about what the police were doing
21% said they did not know anything about what the police were doing

There were also notable differences in the distribution of fines between areas. Some young people felt their local police forces had been too heavy-handed in issuing fines.

"Heavy handed, disproportionately large amount of fines issued by Devon police, I know of a guy that was fined, but the guidance states that this should be a last resort. I have no faith" (16, Devon)

"Heavy handed use of fines against people not aware they were breaking rules or are forced to by difficult circumstances" (21, Dyfed-Powys)

Others were pleased that their local forces had used alternative methods to keep the numbers of fines as low as possible.

"I believe the police in Staffordshire have policed the pandemic well, they have demonstrated this by giving a total 52 Fixed Penalty Notices (as of 11th May) the 3rd lowest in England and Wales" (24, Staffordshire)

21% felt the police approach in their area was effective 52% felt the police approach was not effective[†]

Young people in many areas noticed more patrols, but a lack of active engagement

In areas where young people noticed a stronger police presence, they did not always feel this presence was effective. In many cases young people perceived the police were **patrolling without engaging** or intervening. They felt the police were missing opportunities to disperse gatherings, to raise awareness and engage the community.

"Large groups of people keep meeting in communal areas not socially distancing, such as fields, and minimal effort is being made to reduce this." (17, West Mercia)

"There are gatherings of many people in public and the police simply watch and do not get involved" (16, Hampshire)

"Have seen police officers and PCSOs walking and driving around, but haven't seen them talking to anyone or dispersing groups" (19, Hampshire)

Social media engagement has been effective for certain groups, but not all

We heard from many young people who accessed information from police forces on social media and found it to be helpful. Some of them had accessed local information through Facebook and Twitter posts from their police forces. Others had accessed the **yourpolice.uk Instagram channel**, which they found engaging and informative.

"Because of my interest in the police force I have liked many of Leicester's beats pages on FB which means I can see what each beat is doing promoting transparency" (21, Leicestershire)

"I have seen Facebook lives from Suffolk constabulary which are brilliant. A good way to include the community and answer questions from the public" (25, Suffolk)

"Good from the @police.insta.uk. It's a fun place to get answers and stuff like that" (15, Sussex)

"I've not spoken to any police during the lockdown but I've been following the Instagram page - keep up the good work there" (15, Leicestershire)

Some responses also highlighted the limitations of social media engagement. They pointed out that most young people would not be connected to the police on social media, and therefore would be unlikely to access this information.

[†] 8% felt the policing approach in their area was completely effective
13% felt the policing approach in their area was very effective
27% felt the policing approach in their area was somewhat effective
27% felt the policing approach in their area was not very effective
25% felt the policing approach in their area was not at all effective

Racial disproportionality is a key concern for young people

Racial disproportionality during the pandemic was a key concern for many young people. Many respondents expressed concerns that police had **unfairly targeted young people from BAME backgrounds** during lockdown, especially in London. Several people commented that they had observed differences in the way police treated individuals from different ethnic groups. Young people from both white and BAME backgrounds made these observations.

"My older brother has been stopped by the police when he was driving twice in the past week. They were asking him if he's driving to work. He told them that he's been stopped before and feels like he's being targeted. I think race plays a part in this" (22, London)

"The other day I saw a group of white young people who were causing antisocial behaviour. Then I saw two black young people who weren't too far from this group. But these two weren't messing around or causing any trouble. When the police pulled over in their cars, they targeted the two black youth" (19, London)

"In my area, police have been hanging around and observing young people. Specifically young black men. My area is full of white people who come from wealthy backgrounds. The police are always targeting the black kids when they are in groups" (19, London)

"There should be a more consistent approach to handing out fines. Where I live I have noticed that a lot of reports of police attending barbecues and gatherings have occurred in an area with a high BAME population." (23, West Midlands)

Some felt unfairly targeted on the basis of their age or where they live

Young people also highlighted disparities in the policing approach based on age and locality. Some felt there was **age discrimination** in the way the police were enforcing the COVID restrictions, with younger people being targeted more than older people in the population.

"All police treat people my age with total disrespect, it's disgusting that in this day and age you still have age discrimination" (21, Suffolk)

"I don't feel safe with the police constantly harassing teenagers for minding their own business but old pensioners are allowed to do anything they want" (16, Wiltshire)

"Over policing happens on a daily basis on my estate. Police sit in their cars, right next to the park and watch young people. The police shouldn't wait for us to do something wrong" (16, London)

"We believe we were approached on the basis of our age, as we may look like a teenage couple when in fact we are in our early 20s and live together. We saw them walk past a series of older couples/families who they did not approach. I have anxiety and this interaction caused some distress" (22, Norfolk)

Other responses highlighted the over-policing of poorer communities in comparison to middle class communities. There was a view that the policing approach had been unjust in its targeting of younger and poorer groups in society.

"As someone who lives between two households, I've seen significantly more policing around my mum's neighbourhood, a council estate which happens to be mostly lower-to-mid income families. If you're gonna patrol everywhere, patrol everywhere, including rich people" (17, Greater Manchester)

"I don't have any positive interactions with police and I don't think any of my friends have. I still see them on my estate. Doing the same thing since lockdown started. They are always coming to council estates. Not richer neighbourhoods" (16, London)

There is a sense that policing in the pandemic has been in its 'traditional rut'

Our research suggests that policing during the pandemic has relied too heavily on old assumptions and strategies, and have not taken a **sufficiently innovative approach** to the crisis. Young people want to see policing break out of this 'rut', recognising the uniqueness of the situation and making the best of the opportunity to engage with communities in new ways.

"I think once this is all over, how the police treats the community now will play an important part in our future relationship. They need to think and get creative about ways to help the community"
(17, Warwickshire)

POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

During our research, young people across England and Wales shared positive examples of engagement with the police.

Positive examples of engagement in the community are:

- **Merseyside Police:** Police cadets working with PCSOs to give out informative leaflets to the public.
- **Metropolitan Police:** Police working with park guards and a youth team called 'Street base' to engage young people and focus away from enforcement.
- **Metropolitan Police:** Stands in Stratford and Leytonstone with Police Officers giving information and advice about COVID-19.
- **Staffordshire Police:** Setting up stands in town centres to give out advice and leaflets on staying safe and combatting the virus.
- **Various forces:** PCSOs and PCs having friendly and caring conversations with young people to find out how they are coping and to make sure they know how to stay safe.

Positive examples of engagement on social media are:

- **Leicestershire Police:** The local police beat pages on Facebook are informative and promote transparency with the public.
- **Northamptonshire Police:** Weekly Q&A sessions on Thursdays to enable both adults and children the chance to pose questions to the police about COVID-19 and policing in general.
- **North Wales Police:** Effective use of Instagram to share what the police service is doing in an accessible way for young people.
- **Police Insta:** The yourpolice.uk Instagram channel is active, fun and informative for young people..
- **Suffolk Police:** Effective 'Facebook Live' sessions with key people from the Constabulary to answer questions from people in the community.

EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGING WITH THE POLICE

OUR FINDINGS

We found positive examples of community engagement in local areas

Young people shared many positive examples of community engagement in local areas. Some of their comments were about individual officers who had been particularly friendly or caring. Others were about proactive action being taken by local forces to engage the community – e.g. through information stands, charitable activity and collaborative work with community groups.

"Had a chat with a police officer whilst going Morrisons. She was very friendly and seemed caring for me. She was asking me how I was dealing with this lockdown, what I do to get through it and how my family is. This experience was great"
(17, Merseyside)

"I think the police in my area have been working really well with the park guards and Streetbase. They haven't been as focused on enforcement compared to other parts of London"
(15, London)

"Walking through the town centre, I came across two vans with a table set up between the two with officers giving out advice and leaflets on what we can all do to stay safe. Well done Staffordshire police"
(21, Staffordshire)

When being stopped or dispersed, some young people weren't clear about the rules

We found that young people had very **mixed experiences** of being stopped or dispersed by the police during lockdown. Some young people were not clear about the rules. Others believed they were stopped or dispersed unnecessarily, for instance when they were alone or with one other person observing social distancing.

"I was in the park with my brother, I wasn't aware of keeping at two metres distance. They fined us both even though we explained that we weren't aware of this restriction"
(London, age unknown)

"I was asked if I felt feeding the swans was essential without being able to explain myself and the fact I was on my walk, spoken down to like a child"
(22, Leicestershire)

"I went out to do my exercise which for me is skateboarding. I was told off by the police and made to go home. I tried to reason with them. This gave me a negative impression of the police. I am autistic and my one passion is skateboarding"
(15, North Yorkshire)

"I was taking a walk with my sister who has severe mobility issues and relies on me as her carer. We were approached by officers. My sister made it clear that she has mobility issues and needed a short rest but was told to keep moving or stay at home"
(22, London)

POLICE COMPLAINTS

Through this research we asked young people whether they would feel comfortable to make a complaint about the police if they felt they were treated badly.

We found that 48% of young people would feel very comfortable to make a complaint. These respondents told us their reasons were:

- Wanting the police to learn from it and use feedback to improve
- Believing that misconduct should not go unnoticed or unchallenged
- Standing up for yourself and making your voice heard
- Being aware of the channels to make a complaint
- Trusting in the justice system and believing the UK handles these issues better than other countries
- Black Lives Matter has made some people more prepared to come forward

We found that 34% would not feel comfortable to make a complaint.
These respondents told us their reasons were:

- Feeling that the police are too powerful and strong to challenge
- Feeling that nothing will be done
- Feeling that you will not be listened to or believed
- Not knowing how to make a complaint
- Not wanting people to know about your personal matters
- Wanting to avoid interaction with the police
- Being afraid of the police and the repercussions
- Perception that the police service is corrupt and officers will lie

Young people's experiences of being stopped tended to be more positive when police officers showed respect and gave a clear explanation of the rules.

> *"Had a little chat with them whilst I was out on a bike ride and they just reminded me to stay safe and wash my hands more regularly and to keep my distance from people when outside of the house"*
> *(24, Dorset)*

> *"Out with 4 people and we had to climb over gates to get into the park and the police asked us to move. They said they knew how hard it was to be separate and were respectful so we listened to what they were saying"*
> *(16, Avon and Somerset)*

> *"I was fined for being with a group of my friends and walking together on the streets. Before they fined us, they had a genuine conversation with us to make sure they were doing the right thing. They explained the guidelines that we broke"*
> *(18, London)*

There was a concern that police were not wearing PPE or social distancing

We received many comments about police officers not wearing PPE or observing social distancing when interacting with people in the community. Young people felt that this put them at **greater risk** when engaging with the police, and felt uneasy about this. Situations involving close and sustained contact with police officers, such as being stopped and searched, being arrested and held in police custody, were of particular concern.

> *"Lots of interaction where I work. They've never been in PPE"*
> *(23, Cheshire)*

> *"We had a negative experience with a group of 6 police officers getting out of one vehicle breaking the 2 metre rule and telling my family to go indoors while on our own garden"*
> *(16, West Midlands)*

> *"Wrongfully arrested and held for 16 hours. Nobody wearing PPE"*
> *(19, London)*

> *"When I was walking home, police stopped and searched me. They know me because of my previous offence but that's all I'm the past. When they searched me, they didn't keep their distance. They could have been easily spread and pass on coronavirus to me"*
> *(18, London)*

Many young people reported people breaking lockdown rules to the police, yet most didn't get a response

We heard from many young people who had reported people breaking lockdown rules to the police. The majority said they did not receive any response and had later realised that the police were **unable to act** on such reports. Some young people told us that the reporting process had been lengthy and they felt their time had been wasted.

> *"Called 101 to report neighbour with friends over regularly, on hold for 30 mins, told someone would be round to check up but no one came"*
> *(24, Norfolk)*

> *"When I contacted police about lockdown violations the response was along the lines of "we can't really do much" and "we're getting a lot of reports and are very busy". This makes it seem that they aren't managing the crisis well"*
> *(25, Merseyside)*

> *"I tried to complete an online form to alert the police to a group gathering daily and getting drunk next to my house. This was roughly 16 pages on the form"*
> *(27, Lancashire)*

Police forces aren't consistently good at dealing with vulnerability

We found some positive examples of police forces dealing sensitively with vulnerability, for instance when engaging with victims of domestic abuse. However, there were other examples where officers did not show understanding and compassion for **young people in difficult situations**. This was felt to be particularly important when taking into account the strain that COVID-19 has put on many young people.

> *"I went outside in the night because of family issues and met a policeman he asked me why I was outside at this time, and I told him family issues and he nicely told me to be safe and go home as soon as I feel ready"*
> *(16, Northumbria)*

> *"Someone in my building was using a lot of hard drugs and causing a lot of disturbance. It was a relief at first when police arrived. However some of the police involved were excessively forceful and authoritative. So many police arrived for 1 small girl, who really needed a paramedic in my opinion"*
> *(24, Avon & Somerset)*

> *"I have had dealings with the police a lot during lockdown due to being abused by my family, the care that I have received has been amazing"*
> *(17, Staffordshire)*

> *"On two separate occasions, I was fined by police who were patrolling my area and realised that I've been out for too long. Their lack of consideration and intolerance is inhuman. Many of my friends who are also in temporary accommodation by themselves have also had the same problem. They aren't doing so well and have no one to talk to"*
> *(17, London)*

> *48% said they would feel very comfortable to make a complaint if they were not happy with how the police treated them*
> *34% said they would not feel comfortable to make a complaint*[†]

Many young people experienced intimidation and aggression

We heard from many young people who said the police had used intimidating or aggressive tactics with them. Some commented that they felt harassed, watched or followed by the police. Some mentioned unnecessary **use of force** when being stopped or arrested. Others talked about **too many police officers** attending some situations, which increased intimidation and risked escalating tensions.

> *"They were very unnecessarily aggressive. We were out exercising and they stopped us and got out of the car and threatened handcuffs and everything. It was awful"*
> *(15, West Yorkshire)*

> *"When I go out sometimes they stop and stare at me and it makes me feel that I have done something wrong and they have actually followed me as well and I hadn't done anything wrong"*
> *(17, North Yorkshire)*

> *"I am 14 years old. 13 police officers arrested me at home and it was very frightening for my mum and little brothers and sister age 4. They were very rough and rude to my mum. The arrest was because my electronic tag went off. They did not need to act like they did"*
> *(14, London)*

> *"They came in my house 5/6 of them and they didn't need to bring that many. They were too tight with the handcuffs and I felt that they were too rough with me"*
> *(Age unknown, London)*

[†]32% said they would feel completely comfortable to make a complaint if they were
not happy with how they were treated by the police
16% said they would feel very comfortable to make a complaint
18% said they would feel somewhat comfortable to make a complaint
13% said they would not feel very comfortable to make a complaint
21% said they would not feel at all comfortable to make a complaint

Stop and searches during the lockdown have been seen as 'points scoring' and opportunistic

We heard from many young people who had been stopped and searched over during the lockdown. The majority of these young people were from **BAME backgrounds** and many were from **London**. There was a sense that the police were using the lockdown as an opportunity to 'catch up' with known young people and to 'score points'.

"All the times I have been stopped during covid-19 it has been to harass me and it has not been to do with covid-19, they do not ask about social distancing and they just want to search me because they see me outside"
(18, London)

"Yesterday an under cover vehicle came up to me stood outside my friends house and searched me with no reason; they said it is because I had two pairs of trousers on but they did not know this prior to the search"
(18, London)

"It was during lockdown that I and two of my friends got stopped by 3 undercover police cars and they first checked us for guns and drugs and only after that they told us that it's lockdown and we should be indoors"
(19, London)

"I have been searched during this lockdown but they didn't say anything about going home."
(17, Northumbria)

Many believe the police may be over reaching their powers at this time

There is a fear that the police may be over-reaching their powers during the pandemic. Many feel there has been a lack of clarity about the role of the police and their powers. Some responses warned that this lack of clarity could easily lead to abuses of power and the **unnecessary criminalisation** of young people.

"Police start policing over the law if the law is not clear"
(16, Thames Valley)

"In our borough we've seen a rise in the number of people who are being arrested. Most young people in our area including me, feel like the police are using this as an opportunity to criminalise people"
(21, London)

"One of my friends was arrested and one was given a fine. Because they were playing football with other people on my estate. It's not fair that we get a fine and arrested when we're young people. We don't have much to do at home so that's why we go out and play with our friends"
(16, London)

PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME AND SAFETY

OUR FINDINGS

32% said they felt safer during lockdown
12% said they felt less safe during lockdown†

Many think that crime has decreased during lockdown. This is generally felt to be a temporary trend

Young people generally felt that crime had decreased during lockdown, due to more people staying inside. Around a third of young people said they **felt safer** during this time, largely due to reduced crime and increased police presence.

"There is a lot less crime happening within my area and I makes me feel a lot safer going out at night to work knowing I'm in less danger"
(18, North Wales)

"For young people who are scared of knife crime and being robbed like me, to know police presence has been more evident, it makes us feel safer. Especially because I live on an estate that's well known for gangs"
(15, London)

Despite the general trend, young people also highlighted the harms associated with more **'hidden' crimes** that happen behind closed doors, including abusive relationships and cyber crime. Some also warned that the reduction in certain crime, such as serious violence, was likely to be short-lived.

Many young people do not feel mentally well at this time – due to fear, uncertainty, or a lack of hope

Our research suggests that many young people felt mentally unwell during lockdown. Young people **expressed fears** about the health risks facing them or their families. Such fears were amplified for young people with disabilities and health conditions, those shielding, and young carers. Some said they were concerned about the easing of the lockdown and the re-opening of schools. Others talked about feeling a **lack of optimism** and hope for the future.

"I am worried about my safety in terms of health when I leave the house for any reason and I become anxious"
(14, London)

"Being isolated is impacting my mental health and I can't do purposeful activities. Because I'm constantly worried and thinking about when the lockdown is going to end"
(London)

"I am worried that I will unknowingly become infected, I am high risk and live in a high risk family, and feel unsafe just collecting prescriptions - or going to get my monthly blood test"
(18, Norfolk)

"I think crime overall has decreased but I believe that the mental well being of people has also decreased significantly"
(15, Hampshire)

†32% said they felt safer during lockdown
56% said there was no difference in how safe they felt during lockdown
12% said they felt less safe during lockdown

For some young people, their mental state had caused them to leave the house as an escape. This led them to break the lockdown rules, which sometimes brought them into contact with the police and the risk of being fined or arrested.

"Arrested due to being out in lockdown without reasonable excuse (due to mental health)" (20, Dorset)

Some young people are in unsafe homes. This may cause them to break lockdown rules by being outside

We heard from young people who were very concerned about domestic violence and abusive relationships during lockdown. Some were worried for their peers, while others said their own home situation was **unsafe or unstable.** Young people in these situations may have been forced to spend time outside, breaking the lockdown rules as a result. We heard from some people who had been fined or arrested in these circumstances.

"Many people have told me that they (or someone they know) have experienced an increase in domestic violence." (17, Avon & Somerset)

"I've been arrested and fined for being out. The reason I didn't want to go home was because I had problems with my family. My brother was released from prison recently and whenever there was an argument at home, he would threaten to hit me or actually do it" (London)

Drug and alcohol abuse is widespread and may be rising at this time. This is sometimes a way of coping

Many young people highlighted drug and alcohol abuse in their communities during lockdown. Young people commented on the **visibility of drug dealing** in their areas, and often felt the police were not paying sufficient attention to this problem. There was also a sense among young people that anti-social behavior had increased, with many comments referring to vandalism and littering in local areas.

"Drug dealing and possession and violence is a common thing recently in our area which has come more to the attention of the community since lockdown" (19, North Yorkshire)

"Drug related crime has increased, I have reported drug use and dealing in the area but this is increasing drastically. Easily 2-5 deals happening in our street and in view of children daily" (24, Norfolk)

Young people have noticed increased tensions between people in their local areas

Our responses show that young people have noticed increased tensions between people in their communities. Some responses mentioned members of the public showing **animosity towards key workers and carers.** Other responses talked about the rise of **racism and hate crime.** There is a sense that the crisis has put a strain on people, with the effect of stirring up resentment and hate.

"I am a young person out doing the grocery shopping for my household and I've had people make a lot of comments about both how young I look but I have also been accused of being reckless. I've been threatened by some people who think that I'm out for no good reason" (18, Dorset)

"From communicating with friends and people in my local community I am aware that instances of hate crime have increased, making people of certain ethnicities feel more unsafe than prior to the pandemic" (18, Staffordshire)

Young people remain fearful of knife crime, with many stating that the issue has not disappeared

We found that knife crime remains a real concern for young people, despite a downward trend in the data. Some young people commented that there had been knife incidents in their areas during lockdown. Others warned that the issue had **not disappeared** and believed there may be a spike in incidents after lockdown is eased.

"Decreased knife crime but people are still out here" (18, London)

"Still having knives pulled" (13, West Midlands)

62% would be very willing to report crimes to the police during lockdown
18% would be reluctant or unwilling to report crimes during lockdown[†]

Some are concerned that the police are over-stretched and are unable to respond to crime reports

Our research indicates that most young people would be willing to report crimes to the police during lockdown, but not everyone. Some young people shared positive experiences of reporting crimes to the police, however others were dissatisfied with the response. There was a general concern that the police have been over-stretched and unable to respond to crime reports at this time.

"Fail to respond and when they do appear ineffective" (21, Leicestershire)

[†]42% said they would be completely willing to report a crime during lockdown
20% said they would be very willing to report a crime during lockdown
20% said they would be somewhat willing to report a crime during lockdown
9% said they would not be very willing to report a crime during lockdown
9% said they would not be at all willing to report a crime during lockdown

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence gathered through this research, our young leaders worked as a group to develop 11 key recommendations for the policing sector. We believe that these recommendations, if implemented well, will make a real impact on young people's trust in policing and the effectiveness of the next stage of policing the pandemic.

1. **Work with local areas to ensure people are well informed.**
   At a time of 'information overload' it's more important than ever to find ways to focus information and get it to the people who need it most, including those without access to the internet. Young people and communities need access to clear and consistent information in digestible formats. The information provided should cover police powers and young people's rights, as well as more health-focused information.

2. **Use social media more effectively to target young people and key demographics.**
   There is a need for more proactive engagement with young people on social media, using the platforms that are most relevant to them, such as Instagram and Tik Tok, instead of relying on Facebook and Twitter. The yourpolice.uk Instagram channel is a positive development and should be further developed in collaboration with young people, using targeted marketing to reach different demographics. This channel should collaborate with trusted youth organisations and community groups across to share important content.

3. **Change the narrative.**
   To prevent young people from being demonised. When putting out stories and information to the public, think about the language being used and talk about 'rule breakers' rather than young people. Remember that younger people aren't the villains of this crisis; they are equally concerned citizens and should not be vilified in the media.

4. **Take a clear stance on Black Lives Matter and police brutality.**
   We believe it's vital for the police service to take a stance on the Black Lives Matter movement and the issues of police brutality and racial disproportionality. Crucially, the police need to show collective responsibility and a willingness to be self-critical. We believe that a public statement and an action plan for the police service would be an important step in establishing trust with communities who have had their trust eroded.

5. **Develop police training to challenge bias and stereotypes around race and age.**
   Disproportionate policing practices are partly a product of entrenched bias within the police service, which negatively labels BAME communities and younger people. There is an urgent need to develop training and development approaches to confront and challenge bias among police officers. This training should be developed with involvement from young people and BAME communities, drawing on their lived experiences of policing.

6. **Develop police training on empathy and vulnerability.**
   Our research has shown that police services are not consistently good at dealing with vulnerability. We believe police officers need training and development to take a flexible approach, show compassion, and use different techniques when dealing with vulnerability. Involve members of vulnerable groups in doing this.

7. **Focus on community engagement to combat rising mistrust.**
   When anger builds up towards the police, community engagement is even more vital. We believe police forces need to focus more on proactive community engagement to combat rising levels of mistrust. The pandemic should be treated as an opportunity to boost community engagement.

8. **Share good examples of community engagement to promote more consistency.**
   In the approach across police forces. We found that there is a lack of consistency in community engagement. We believe good practice should be shared, and this could draw on positive examples identified through this research.

9. **Police officers to wear PPE and adhere to social distancing.**
   Young people feel there should be no excuse for police officers not to wear PPE and adhere to social distancing. It would also help to build trust if police could give out PPE to the public

10. **Find alternatives to fines, as fines disproportionately punish the poor.**
    Moving forward we would like to see alternatives to fines, because they are disadvantaging the poorest members of society. We believe that alternative deterrents should be explored, alongside consideration of more positive incentives for young people to engage in other activities.

11. **Carry out scrutiny of arrests and searches over this period.**
    There is a concern coming through our research that some young people have been unfairly criminalised during the pandemic. We would like to see the police working with young people and the wider community to carry out proper scrutiny of arrests and searches over this period. This scrutiny should review the evidence available (e.g. statistics and anonymous case studies) to assess fairness, identify lessons and suggest actions.

CONCLUSION

We are enormously grateful to all of young people across England and Wales who took the time to share their experiences and views of policing during the pandemic. We also extend thanks to the dedicated young leaders who have driven the project forward, and to all the partners who supported and promoted this piece of work.

At the end of June, an audience of police professionals came together to hear the young leaders present the key findings and recommendations you have read in this report. At this event, professionals posed questions to the young leaders and asked the group for their thoughts on current challenges within the sector. We hope this leads to further collaboration between the police and young people to solve some of the issues identified in this report.

Over the coming months, we will work to ensure that these findings and recommendations are acted upon as widely as possible. We will share local findings in the areas where we have generated a significant volume of responses. At the national level, we will work with the NPCC, the IOPC and other agencies to champion the recommendations across the policing sector. We are excited to continue working with system leaders, policy-makers and other professionals to act upon what young people have told us.

APPENDIX 1: BREAKDOWN OF RESPONSES BY REGION

Police force	Number of responses
Avon and Somerset	56
Bedfordshire	3
Cambridgeshire	220
Cheshire	48
Cleveland	7
Cumbria	4
Derbyshire	42
Devon and Cornwall	110
Dorset	112
Durham	4
Dyfed-Powys	4
Essex	49
Gloucestershire	8
Greater Manchester	13
Gwent	10
Hampshire	366
Hertfordshire	8
Humberside	6
Kent	21
Lancashire	17
Leicestershire	55
Lincolnshire	3
Merseyside	113
Met	818
Norfolk	292
North Wales	43
North Yorkshire	75
Northamptonshire	6
Northumbria	30
Nottinghamshire	75
South Wales	2
South Yorkshire	16
Staffordshire	157
Suffolk	150
Surrey	71
Sussex	35
Thames Valley	22
UNCLEAR	81
Warwickshire	65
West Mercia	61
West Midlands	532
West Yorkshire	101
Wiltshire	32

APPENDIX 2: POLICING THE PANDEMIC SURVEY QUESTIONS

This questionnaire is a part of a youth-led project to influence policing across England and Wales. Your views as a young person are really important to us and will be used to create recommendations for change.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous and you will not be asked for your name, contact information or any information that will reveal your identity. It is managed by Leaders Unlocked www.leaders-unlocked.org

Q1. How old are you?

Q2. What is your local area?

Q3. How effective have you found the policing approach in your area? (Please use the star rating scale below or click N/A if you're not sure)

1 star = Not at all

5 stars = Completely

N/A (optional)

Q4. How effective have you found the policing approach in your area? (Please use the star rating scale below or click N/A if you're not sure)

1 star = Not at all

5 stars = Completely

N/A (optional)

Q5. Please explain your answer.

Q6. Could you tell us about any experiences you've had with the police over the lockdown period? (Tip: we'd like to hear about positive and negative experiences. These could be face to face or online)

Q7. If you have come into contact with the police and were not happy with how you were treated, would you feel comfortable to make a complaint? (Please use the star rating scale or click N/A if you're not sure)

1 star = Not at all

5 stars = Completely

N/A (optional)

Q8. Please explain your answer.

Q9. Do you feel safer, or less safe, during lockdown? (Please choose: Safer / Less Safe / No difference)

Q10. Please use this box to explain the reasons for your answer (Tip: we'd like to know if you think certain types of crime have increased or decreased, based on your experience)

Q11. Would you be willing to report crimes to the police during lockdown? (Please choose from the star rating scale and click N/A if you're not sure)

1 star = Not at all

5 stars = Completely

N/A (optional)

Q12. Are you more willing to report crimes now than you were before lockdown? (Please choose 1 from the 3 options below: More willing/ Less willing / No difference)

Q13. What are your ideas for improving the policing approach to COVID-19 restrictions?

Q14. What do you think could be done to improve relationships between the police and young people? (Tip: Consider online and face to face)

Q15. Please use this box to say anything else you wish to say about policing and crime during lockdown.

Diversity

Q16. We'd like to find out how experiences might be different for different groups. Please click if any of these apply to you:

- Black, Asian and/or Ethnic Minority

- Disabilities or additional needs

- Currently or previously in receipt of free school meals

- LGBTQ+

- Personal experience of mental health issues

- Previous experience of the criminal justice system

- None of the above

- Prefer not to say

For information on Coronavirus and police powers:
https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-52106843

For more information on policing rights: https://www.police.uk/pu/policing-in-the-uk/

For information about how to make a complaint about the police:
https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/complaints-and-appeals/make-complaint

For advice on Stop and Search:
https://y-stop.org

For advice for young people and Mental Health:
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/for-children-and-young-people/

CONTACT US

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