

# **National Evaluation of the Police Cadets: Summary**

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## **Authors**

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# Headline Findings

- **Cadet programmes across England and Wales are currently being rejuvenated and there has been a +10% rise in cadets across the country (excluding the Met which has conversely seen a 9% fall);**
- **This research suggests that the Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) offers positive impact and value to young people and their future;**
- **Young people were proud to be a cadet and were positive about their experiences in the cadets, especially in relation to gaining confidence, reducing social anxiety and meeting new people;**
- **Cadets valued making a difference in their community, have a strengthened sense of social responsibility, and have a desire for more community involvement and opportunities to volunteer in the VPC;**
- **Cadet leaders were less positive than cadets in how well the scheme is run, with key issues being having enough time to do the role well and having enough cadet leaders;**
- **Strategic leads for the VPC in forces indicate that the VPC is a positive and important programme within local contexts, though there is support for more standardisation on regional and national levels; and**
- **Issues around recruitment of cadet leaders is a key threat to sustainability, which is also consequential to planned growth. More and better training for cadet leaders is a key need of the VPC alongside achieving a sustainable financial model.**

# Introduction

This report provides the findings from a national evaluation of the Volunteer Police Cadets (VPC) in England and Wales. The VPC is a national police uniformed youth group throughout the UK for 13 to 18-year olds. The stated aims of the VPC are to: promote a practical understanding of policing amongst young people; encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship; support local policing priorities through volunteering and give young people a chance to be heard; and inspire young people to participate positively in their communities. The aims of the programme resonate with government strategy that seeks to work with young people to reduce their risk of becoming offenders or victims; build positive relations between the police and young people; and nurture their feelings of social responsibility so that they become active citizens. Units normally meet once a week and are led by police officers, police staff and volunteers. In addition, cadets undertake social action projects in their communities with an expectation that they will volunteer 3 hours a month.

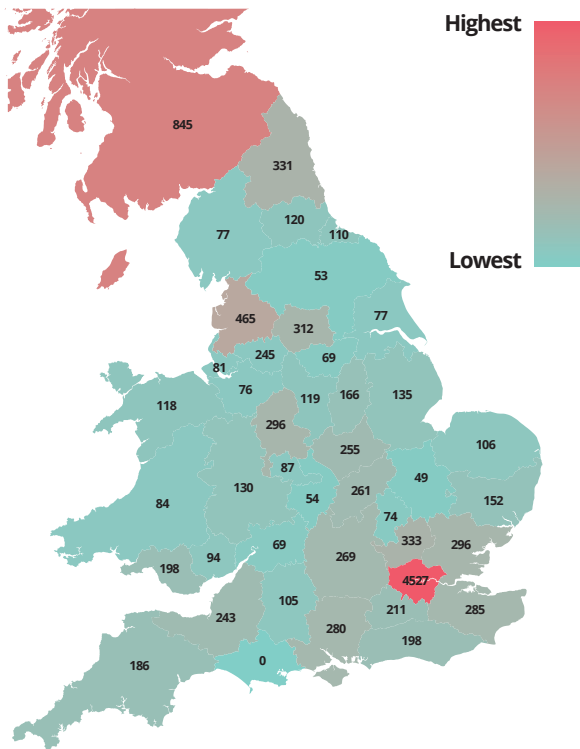
This report draws on evidence from a secondary analysis of a national census of cadets completed by forces in January 2019, primary analysis of national surveys of cadets (n=1,166) and cadet leaders (n=413), 11 focus groups conducted with cadets across four forces and 11 semi-structured interviews with cadet leads in forces. The evaluation takes a significant step in establishing an evidence base for the VPC whilst also identifying challenges and issues in its development and delivery going forward. The findings are presented in three sections:

- (1) An explanation of the size, demography and composition of the VPC
- (2) The evidence that it has positive benefits for young people, the police and society and
- (3) The views of young people, cadet leaders and strategic leads as to how the scheme could be improved and what challenges the VPC faces.

# Size, Growth and Composition

Since its conception, in Lambeth in 1988, the VPC has grown to involve some 12,329 young people, 10,517 senior cadets (13-18 year olds) and 1,812 junior cadets (10-13 year olds). The VPC programme can now be found in nearly all areas of the UK, though there remains significant variance in the size of the programmes locally.

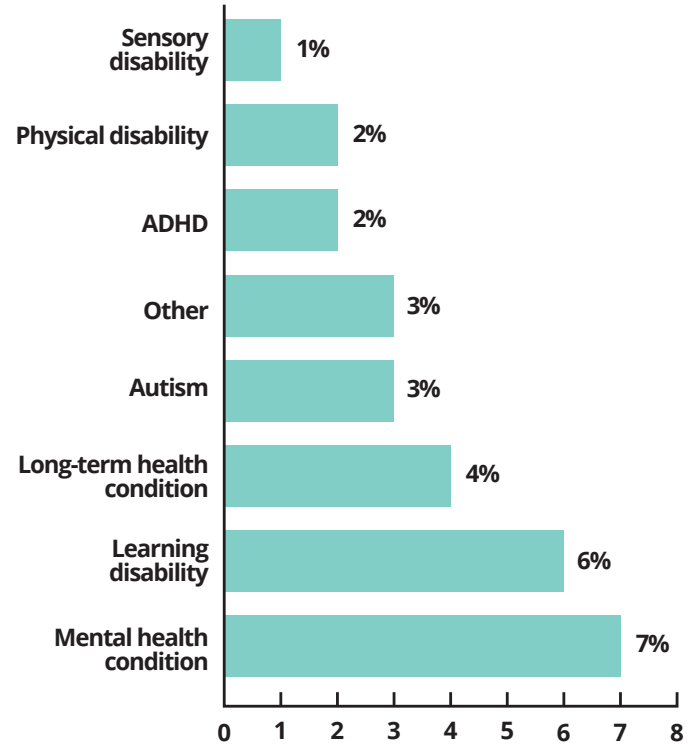
Cadet programmes across England and Wales are currently being rejuvenated and there has been a +10% rise in cadets across the country (excluding the Met which has conversely seen a 9% fall). Forces indicate further planned growth in cadet numbers, with a forecast rise in numbers up to 15,398 in the coming year to 2020, signifying a quite rapid period of planned growth of 25%.



The gender profile of cadets is relatively even between males and females, with females constituting 51% of the senior cadet population and 49% of the junior cadet population. In addition, there is a relatively high level of

engagement with young people from ethnic minority communities, representing 23% of the senior cadet population and 50% of the junior cadet programme.

## Self-Reported Conditions or Disabilities among Cadet Survey Participants



Around a quarter (24%) of the cadet population were recorded as vulnerable in the census. There was evidence of good practice around different vulnerabilities, some VPC programmes reported working alongside other agencies, including Youth Offending, to recruit cadets who it was perceived will benefit from being a cadet.

A little under 1-in-10 (8%) cadets were recorded as having a disability in the census. Within the survey of cadets, 7% self-reported having a mental health condition and 6% a learning disability, a fifth reported that they have one or more of the conditions or disabilities listed.

# Value to Young People, the Police and Society

## Enjoyment and Pride

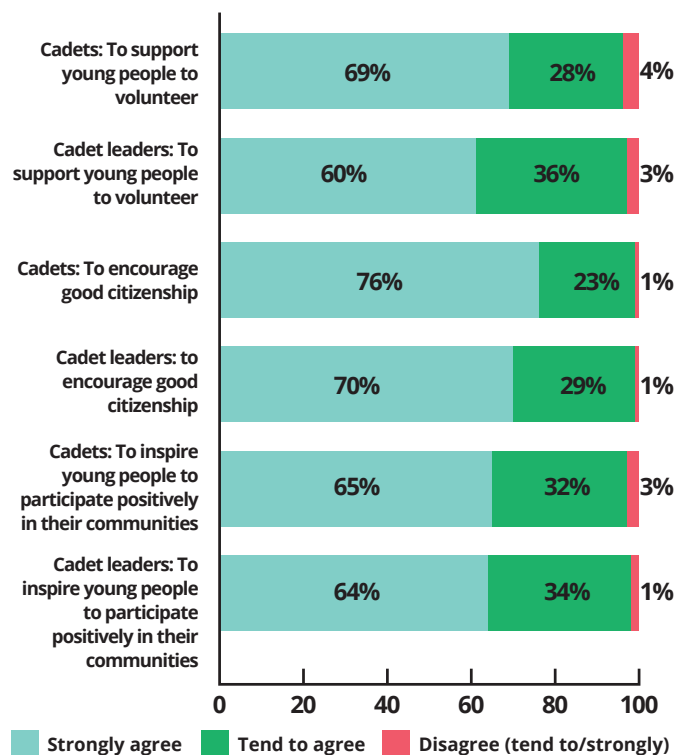
The evidence that demonstrates how the VPC is experienced positively by young people is very strong. Nearly all cadets (98%) agreed that they feel proud to be a police cadet (with 82% strongly agreeing) and 97% agreed that they enjoyed being a police cadet (with 81% strongly agreeing). They were also likely to recommend it to other young people, with 70% indicating that they were 'very' likely to and a further 27% indicating that they were 'fairly' likely to.

## Citizenship, Helping the Community and Volunteering

Overall, the evidence suggests that being a cadet promotes positive citizenship and social responsibility. Around two-thirds (69%) of cadets strongly agreed that the VPC had a positive impact on their feelings of social responsibility, with a further 28% tending to agree. There was a high level of agreement among cadets and cadet leaders that the VPC supports young people to volunteer, encourages citizenship and inspires positive participation in their communities

In the focus groups, there were two main themes relating to community impact. First, cadets engaged in community work where they were able to mix with others and the public more generally. Young people indicated that this work had led to an increased ability to communicate with others and boosted their confidence.

## Cadet and Cadet Leaders' Perceptions that the VPC Supports Young People to Volunteer, Encourages Citizenship and Inspires Positive Participation in their Communities



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Second, cadets engaged in a range of charity and fund-raising events as well as raising awareness of local public safety and crime issues, further supporting the objectives of policing in the community. Some of the strategic leads mentioned the value to the police, both operationally and strategically, of the VPC programme, with some areas noticing the improvement in community relations through the visibility of the cadets.

**“The communities, when they meet [the cadets], they love it. I think they like them more than the regular officers, because they see young people doing something, standing up and making a difference... and I think they do really appreciate it.”**

Overall, the impact of cadets within the community was noteworthy and commendable, however, young people reported wanting to increase the proportion of activities that achieve these aims to make even more of a local difference.

## Skills Acquisition and Confidence

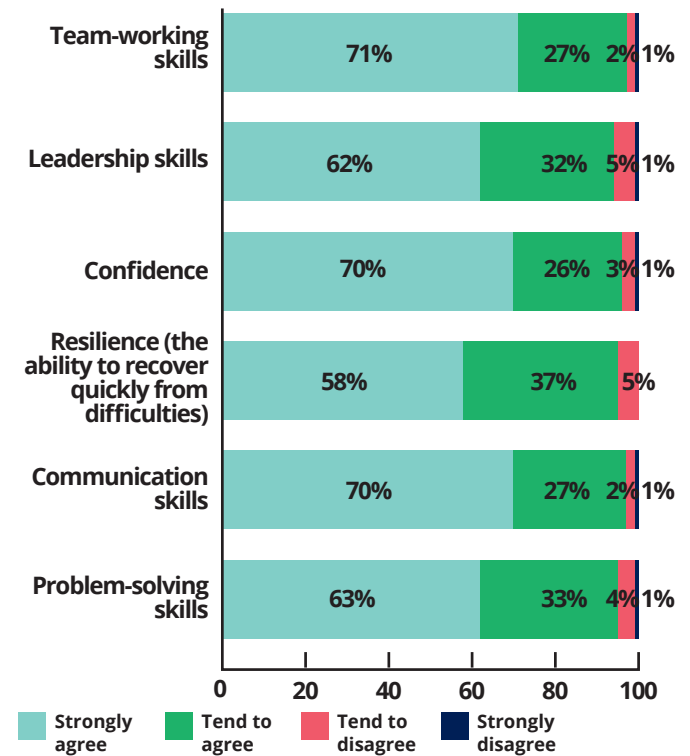
There were a host of skills and abilities that were highlighted in the focus groups as being positively impacted through participation in the cadets. Young people described the Cadet’s programme as offering ‘life skills’ such as first aid, teamwork, independence alongside specific awards such as Duke of Edinburgh.

**“We get to learn a lot of life skills through the Cadets and it’s really good for us... Because if you see normal people who don’t do Cadets, if something happened they would know nothing about first aid or anything.”**

The positive impact of police cadets on skills acquisition, confidence and resilience was confirmed within the surveys with cadets and cadet leaders. Agreement was particularly strong for the positive impact on team-working skills, confidence and communication, with 7 in 10 cadets strongly agreeing that it had a positive impact.



### Cadet’s Perceptions of the positive impact of the VPC on Skills, Confidence and Resilience



Strategic leads also highlighted that cadets were able to gain valuable skills and even qualifications in some areas and were keen to develop these opportunities.

## Transitions

In the focus groups cadets talked about the scheme offering them new and valuable experiences which were perceived as proving beneficial evidence to enhance their CV’s and prospects of employment.

**“I thought that if I joined and I had Police Cadets on my CV, it would give me more a chance of getting in than someone who didn’t have it, so I thought even if I finish Police Cadets and I think, “The Police isn’t for me”, I’ve still got it on my CV and it’s still something that I’ve done.”**

The evidence suggests that the cadets positively impact the career aspirations of young people,

especially those who are interested in a future career in policing. Around three-quarters (73%) of survey participants were interested in a future career in policing. Most cadet leaders (94%) agreed that the scheme enabled cadets to be more aware of future opportunities (with 67% strongly agreeing) and this was confirmed by comments from cadets.

**“I have a greater understanding of the way the police do their job and this is very interesting and I feel I would like to pursue a career in the police force.”**

It was indicated that being a cadet was beneficial to recruitment processes, both within and outside of policing, though more focus was suggested on how to navigate pathways into employment alongside session content.

**“We learn about a lot of stuff behind it but we don’t really talk about how you get into it and paths we can take.”**

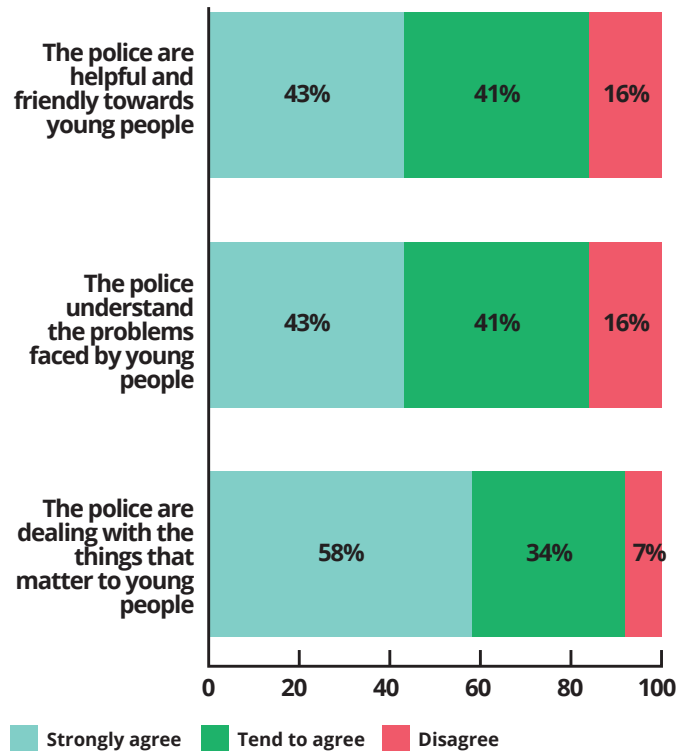
Whilst there were some positive examples of strong links to the Special Constabulary and Police Support Volunteers, such connections were often dependent on the individual cadet leader and there are likely differences across units within force areas.

## Views of the Police

The results show that the VPC had a positive effect on young people’s knowledge and perceptions of the police. Nearly all cadets (98%) agreed that their cadet unit is achieving the aim of promoting an understanding of policing, with 77% strongly agreeing. Importantly, 45% of cadets indicated that being a police cadet has changed their perception of the police a lot, with a further 41% indicating that it had changed their perception a little. This impact to the perception of policing was positive, with young people commenting how being a cadet had fostered and strengthened the respect they had for the police.

“Most of my family don’t like police and even my nana jokes and calls me a pig whenever she sees me, but because I grew up with that perspective of not liking police I didn’t like them, however joining police cadets has changed my mind completely and I fully respect the police and wish to become a police officer in the future.”

### Cadet’s Perceptions of the Police Understanding and the Relationship with Young People



Cadets’ changed perceptions of policing relate to concepts such as procedural justice, with participation in the VPC reconstituting the relationships between young people and the police. Most cadets (93%) agreed the police are helpful and friendly towards young people and there were many comments that suggest how participation in the cadets had made young people aware of police efforts to engage with young people and their strategies to help young people in need. Overall, young people had positive views of the police, which participation in the VPC strengthened. For those young people who previously had negative views of the police, the VPC was instrumental to changing such attitudes.

**“Yes, because before that I didn’t really like police forces because I used to be in a gang in which had lot of police involved and they arrested my friends but as I joined police cadets my life changed instantly and my view of police and now I understand that the police force are just trying to help young people like us to not make bad mistakes.”**

## **Impacts to Young People with Challenging Behaviour or Attitudes**

Being a cadet supported young people to regulate their behaviour and exercise a higher degree of self-control. Cadets described how they had become calmer and more respectful of others because they were a cadet. It was suggested that the rules and ethos created within the cadet environment was translated by young people into their everyday lives, having a positive effect within school, home and community domains.

**“I’ve gained a lot more respect for people, since joining. Not that I was horrible before but my behaviour has improved.”**

Being a cadet helped some young people to keep out of trouble, giving them a positive alternative to that which was offered within their local community. As well as providing a positive space for young people, the programme offered important knowledge related to issues such as drug use and county lines enabling cadets to make more informed and responsible choices in their lives.



**“I think Cadets has kept us away from the people who are troublemakers around the area. So other people our age are smoking and stuff like that. But through Cadets it’s kept us away from that and really seeing the dangers of smoking and taking drugs and all this, it’s really helped us realise what the consequences are if you are taking drugs or possession of drugs or selling drugs or so on.”**

One young person described how being a cadet had impacted their behaviour significantly and had altered their perceived life course trajectory, from one that would lead to negative involvement in the criminal justice system to a positive and productive life.

**“I used to get in quite a lot of trouble with the Police before I joined. I used to be part of this group where I used to live and they were just – I got arrested at one point. There was drugs and it was just a horrible scene. I decided in my last year at school that I would knuckle down and get my GCSE’s. I saw the Police Cadets advertised on Facebook, so I signed up for it and got in.”**

Strategic leads also provided anecdotal evidence of cases where involvement in the cadets has enabled young people to move away from negative pathways such as criminal behaviour.

# Improvements and Challenges

## Views of Cadets

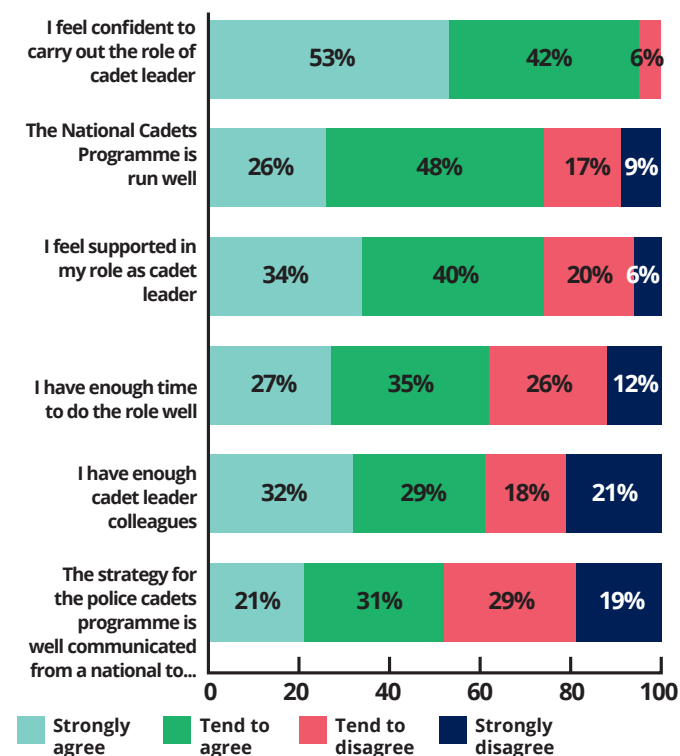
There was a high level of agreement amongst cadets that the scheme is run well (92%) and that the leaders are doing a good job (96%). This did not mean that cadets did not also have ideas for suggested improvements, key improvements from the survey and focus groups included:

- More opportunities to be involved in the community, including events and having more opportunities to volunteer;
- Have more activities or learning that is police-related to increase knowledge of police specialisms and have a diverse range of inputs to showcase the width and breadth of roles;
- Get “out and about” more often, get out of the classroom and do more visits;
- Make cadet sessions more dynamic and interactive, involving more than presentations. Different session formats should be considered to keep the programme creative and different (including role plays, scenarios and problem-solving opportunities);
- Better organisation and structure to sessions so that cadets know what is going to happen from week to week and to ensure that time is used efficiently;
- Ensure that plans, or changes in plans, are effectively communicated to cadets;
- Have equitable and similar uniforms across units, allowing for a more collective identity; and
- Create connections with other police cadet units as well as other uniformed youth groups to enable shared events and new insights into other roles and services.

## Views of Cadet Leaders

The results from the cadet leaders are less positive compared with that of cadets in terms of the running of the scheme. Although 95% of cadet leaders felt confident in their role, a quarter disagreed that the national VPC programme is run well (25%) and that they feel supported in their role (26%). Nearly half (48%) disagreed that the police cadets programme is well communicated from a national to local level. Key issues for cadet leaders included having enough time to do the role well and having enough cadet leader colleagues, with nearly 4 in 10 disagreeing that they had either (38% and 39% respectively).

### Cadet leader perceptions of the VPC



The top suggestions on how they could be better supported in their role were to:

- have access to high quality lesson plans and resources;
- have time within work to plan lessons, attend events and do administration (for those that were police officers or police staff);



- be given more support from management and the organisation;
- have more communication with the central team/ co-ordinators or with other cadet leaders to know what is going on and share best practice; and
- have more leaders and volunteers.

They were also asked about safeguarding and 8 in 10 (80%) would like to see more guidance and consistency in respect of safeguarding and a quarter (25%) disagreed that they currently have a clear framework and guidance for safeguarding.

### Views of Cadet Strategic Leads

The VPC programme was seen by strategic leads as a positive activity for young people to take part in, helping them to develop skills and confidence, and particularly beneficial for those from marginalised and vulnerable groups. Moreover, a key benefit of the programme was the ability of the VPC to empower young people and give them a voice in their community. As with cadet leaders, strategic leads highlighted challenges faced by the scheme as well as future opportunities.

### Strategy and National Direction

Strategic leads were aware that there could be very different versions of cadets being delivered across England and Wales. While flexibility to provide locally designed content was valued, there was support for more standardisation on a regional and national level. This included suggestions of more structured guidance around a curriculum for cadet leaders to work from and more support for leaders in terms of training provision. It was felt that the national VPC organisation could provide guidance to police forces regarding what opportunities should be made available to cadets, especially in relation to strategic partnerships with national organisations. This should include training and qualifications in specific skills as well as awards

such as the Duke of Edinburgh.

There was limited use of the national information portal (the Marshall Platform), however, some strategic leads expressed hope that it could become a useful tool in providing resources and information for delivering more impactful and standardised learning. The desire for a mobile app was raised, with potential for use as a management tool, for cadet leaders to communicate quickly with volunteers from their unit.

## Meeting the Needs of Different Young People

There is a challenge in balancing the needs of those young people who join the cadets with ambitions of joining the police and those who are referred or signposted in by other agencies with challenging behaviours. This points to a need for significant thought around programme content as well as session delivery to ensure all get what they want and need from the cadets.

Strategic leads were keen to provide cadet leaders with more training to be better prepared to deal with different vulnerabilities and challenges that young people attending cadets might experience. This included mental health training, in addition to behavioural issues, physical and learning disabilities.



## Training

As well as the need for training to meet the needs of young people with different challenges, there was also an identified gap in knowledge and skills around session design and delivery, which was considered to be a priority in ensuring a high-quality experience for young people attending cadets.

Although all strategic leads confirmed that safeguarding training was mandatory for any adult involved with cadets, safeguarding always presents a risk to an organisation that focuses on young people. The national VPC organisation must ensure that safeguarding training of leaders and volunteers across all of the VPC programmes meets the required standards.



## Funding and Resources

Some VPC programmes were able to provide fully funded opportunities for cadets to achieve awards and qualifications, as well as having access to transport, enabling a broader range of activities on offer. Differences in funding across force areas means that some VPC programmes cannot offer these opportunities, resulting in some inequalities in the experience young people are receiving. Some programmes have considered charging subs and some already do. Some strategic leads highlighted that provision is in place for support with finance for those who

can't afford it, however, this may still present a barrier for those who don't feel comfortable asking for help.

## Leaders

Some areas struggled to recruit leaders with the required experience and there were issues around compensating cadet leaders for their time. The sustainability of VPC units vis-à-vis availability of cadet leaders represents a key strategic challenge especially within planned strategic growth.

Approaches to leadership within cadet units widely varied across VPC programmes with some led by volunteers and others having paid police officers or staff leading units. This presents further inconsistencies for the young people attending cadets across different programmes nationally.

## Geographical Footprint and Reach

The number of spaces for young people in some large geographic areas limited opportunities for engagement significantly, with some areas having waiting lists and demand that would justify expansion. Large geographical areas, especially areas that are predominantly rural, are difficult to provide resources for, resulting in young people potentially having to travel long distances to attend cadet sessions. This could be limiting the reach and impact of the cadets to vulnerable young people in areas where there is not a local VPC unit.

## Regional and National Events

Some strategic leads stated that their cadets had enjoyed the few occasions when they got to interact with VPC programmes from other areas, but that opportunities to do so were limited. The VPC could host more regional and national events that bring VPC programmes together, which would enhance a sense of belonging to something much larger whilst also providing an

opportunity for programmes to learn from each other and present what they have achieved

## Measuring Impact

Measuring impact has been largely anecdotal to date, making it difficult to accurately report outcomes for individuals or any return on investment. This presents a threat as obtaining future or additional funding may be negatively affected if impact cannot be evidenced.

Developing Junior Cadets to Fill Gap between

## Mini-Police and Cadets

In areas where mini-police existed in primary schools, some strategic leads had identified that the police lose an opportunity to continue engagement with young people between the ages of 11 and 13 years. This highlighted an opportunity to develop a junior cadets programme to keep young people involved following being a mini-police officer.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

The VPC offers positive impact and value to young people and their future. Young people were proud to be a cadet and were positive about their experiences in the cadets, especially in relation to gaining confidence, reducing social anxiety and meeting new people. Cadets valued making a difference in their community, have a strengthened sense of social responsibility, and have a desire for more community involvement in the VPC, more events and opportunities to volunteer.

Although positive about the scheme's objectives, cadet leaders were less positive about the running of the scheme than cadets, with key issues being having enough time to do the role well and having enough cadet leaders. Strategic leads for the VPC in forces indicate that the VPC is a positive and important programme within local contexts, though there is support for more standardisation on regional and national levels. Issues around recruitment of cadet leaders is a key threat to sustainability, which is also consequential to planned growth. More and better training for cadet leaders is a key need alongside achieving a sustainable financial model. As a result of the findings the authors make the following recommendations in relation to strategy and practice.

## Strategy

**R. To reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the strategic position of the VPC within the Citizens in Policing portfolio, creating better connections with other strategic areas, such as Children and Young People.**

There are benefits to the VPC being located within the Citizens in Policing portfolio, most notably at creating strong connections with the Special Constabulary and Police Support

Volunteers. However, the VPC is relatively poorly positioned within other strategic areas, such as the Children and Young People portfolio, and often seems to not be sufficiently considered in plans to address societal concerns such as knife crime, online safety and other risks that young people face. The VPC would be stronger if it was aligned to multiple portfolios, facilitating important social action and awareness opportunities for cadets to make a difference.

### **R. To create a sustainable financial and resourcing model to underpin planned growth of the VPC.**

Whilst the VPC has grown over recent years in terms of its national footprint, it remains a relatively small programme within some large geographic areas, with limited spaces in the VPC for young people who are interested. Planned growth is limited by two entwined factors: 1. the financing and resourcing of the VPC and 2. the recruitment and training of cadet leaders. Strategies should be developed to address these issues, with local programmes being supported to flourish.

### **R. To develop a national evidence-base for the VPC that focuses foremost on the social value and impact of participation for young people.**

There is a need to embed processes to capture the activities and outcomes for young people in the VPC. Evidence at present is largely anecdotal, with limited evidence relating to behaviour change or social value. Also, there is a need to identify good practice and share this across sites to avoid duplication and save resource. It is important that such evidence generating practices are coordinated across programmes to ensure that the value of the VPC can be demonstrated. This would better position the VPC programme within national funding opportunities to expand and embed the provision locally.

### **R. To mature police-led uniformed youth**

### **engagement programmes, designing pathways between mini-police, junior cadet and cadet initiatives.**

In many sites, there is a gap of provision between the mini-police and senior cadets. A larger strategic vision for all uniformed children and young people engagement (from mini-police age 8 through to cadet age 18) would create continued opportunities for children and young people to get involved and stay involved. Junior police cadet initiatives have begun in some sites, having great strategic promise at bridging the gap between mini-police and senior cadet programmes.

### **R. To strengthen support for young people in their transitions following being a cadet.**

Most young people currently involved in the cadets are interested at joining and building a successful career in policing. It is recognised that adult volunteer programmes have experienced local and national policy shifts, and it is important that the VPC is positioned to facilitate successful trajectories whereby the contributions young people make as a cadet are recognised and valued. However, it is equally important to provide support to young people who see their futures outside of policing.

### **Practice**

### **R. To consider all developmental points made throughout this report by young people and cadet leaders.**

There were many developmental points raised in this report made by cadets and cadet leaders to improve the VPC. It is important to consider such views on a local level, engaging with cadets in a constructive dialogue to improve the experience and impact of units.

### **R. To increase opportunities for cadets to engage in positive social action projects.**

Young people valued opportunities to engage in social action projects and make a difference within their local communities. Cadets wanted to engage more in initiatives in communities to address local issues or raise awareness, facilitating them to make the most of time given to being a cadet and increasing the impact they can make. Opportunities exist to engage in shared social action campaigns between units, either on a regional or national level, which would both serve to increase the contribution of cadets to the specific cause but also strengthen feelings of belonging to a regional/national cadet family for young people.

**R. To reflect on session timings and structures, to maximise the time young people give to cadets and ensure a range of activities.**

There was a need to ensure that the time young people give to police cadets was used effectively within a set of activities using different formats (e.g. presentation, group discussions, activities etc.). Whilst young people were very positive about what they get from being a cadet, sessions at times had too much free time and required more purpose. It is important that inputs from officers and departments are coordinated around topics or issues across multiple sessions, to achieve a coherence to programmes.

**R. To develop training and guidance concerning behaviour management and good practice in terms of support for young people with problematic behaviours or attitudes.**

Whilst there were several examples provided of positive impact for young people with problematic behaviours or attitudes, these impacts were inconsistent across and within programmes. More training and knowledge is needed for cadet leaders in how to best support young people with specific needs and good practice concerning how to keep them engaged in the cadets.

**R. To improve the provision of materials for cadet leaders available through the Marshall Platform.**

The content and materials on the Marshall Platform were useful to cadet leaders and strategic leads, though it was suggested that the system could be improved to be more intuitive and provide more useful resources. In particular, content and materials that were provided were useful starting points for sessions, though were developed locally before they were suitable for delivery.

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