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IPAG Youth Engagement Report

This report has been jointly produced by Gurvinder Sandher,
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Chair of the Independent Police Advisory Group (IPAG).

Acknowledgments

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1.0 Objectives of the Report

The key role of the IPAG is to:-

- Be a critical friend to Kent Police
- Challenge conventional thinking
- Improve how Kent Police deliver their services
- Engage with our communities.

Young People are one of the agreed priorities for the County IPAG for the period 2018-2021. The County IPAG view this work as the starting point to developing more work streams engaging with young people through the District IPAGs, the strategic boards such as the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel and through the development of Youth IPAGs (YPAGs) beyond the pilot project in Medway.

Over the period ending in March 2021 the County IPAG is committed to working in partnership to ensure that:

- All District IPAGs have young people represented on it
- Young people continue to attend and contribute to strategic boards such as Stop and Search and others as required such as Use of Force
- Developing YPAGs across the County using the example of Medway as a template
- Involving Kent Police Cadets in elements of the IPAG work at a County and District level as required.

The IPAG's work on young people will also compliment:

- The National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People. This Strategy also mentions Stop and Search
- Kent Police's development of a Child Centred Policing Plan
- The work of the Kent Youth Justice Board which is looking at the over representation of BAME young people in the Youth Justice System.

The objectives of this report were to:

- Gain young people's views and experiences of Kent Police
- Identify how Kent Police engages with young people and how effective young people feel they are
- Identify the benefits for Kent Police in having more effective engagement with young people
- Identify how social media can be used more effectively by Kent Police to engage with young people
- Identify how the use of Stop and Search by Kent Police has an impact on young people's views of Kent Police

For the purposes of this work, using the National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People, **young people are defined as everyone up to and including the age of 24 years**. This can be split into three distinct groups:

- Under 10
- 10 – 17 years of age – subject to the majority of legislation aimed at young people
- 18 – 24 years of age – transition to young adults

2.0 Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used during this research. This included:

- The main agenda item for the October 2018 County IPAG meeting being on youth engagement, with an over view of the work Kent Police is doing with young people and some of the challenges faced. There was also a focus group with members of the County IPAG. Following the focus group a more detailed brief was prepared by the County IPAG Vice Chair Elaine Bolton which was used to deliver further focus groups on a District level.
- Further focus groups took place in some districts led by the Chairs of the District IPAGs:
 - **Canterbury District IPAG** – 30 Public Service Level 3 and Public Service Level 3 students, aged 16-19, with a ratio of 8:1 being male
 - **Medway YPAG** – 4 groups of over 25 young people aged between 8 and 22, with the majority being White British and male

- **Tunbridge Wells District IPAG** – 2 groups of over 95 school students
- On line questionnaire, developed by Hilary Cooke, **Maidstone District** Chair, with 276 diverse young people responding
- Questionnaire completed by 11 young people aged 13-14 in **Shepway District IPAG**

3.0 **Our Findings**

3.1 **What do you think about Kent Police? Positive or negative and why?**

There was a mixture of views on this. The comments below were captured in a focus group with young people aged between 16 and 19:

“...mixed feelings as many officers are very friendly and helpful. However, I feel judgements are made on the youth; hence, the reason why many young individuals dislike the police”

“At the moment, it is seen as negative due to their approach with the youth and to under-funding”

“They help keep the community safe but they can be rude and too aggressive”

“I do not like them, I feel intimidated and scared by them”

“They took a long time to visit the house but were helpful when they came”

“The police are crucial to society and Kent Police specifically work well around the county. This is shown through everything they have done”

“They keep people safe and help the public”.

This mixture of views was echoed in other focus groups where young people were aged between 13 and 15.

“...positive view as they help people”

“...don't like them, just don't”

“...they are ok but they need to step back a bit”

“...waste of time, lazy”

“...good people there to help us”

“...friendly, professional approachable”

“...good at calming people down”

“...try too hard to relate to YP, they stereotype teenagers, ask too many questions”

“...negative stereotype of youth groups, spend a lot of time in process, intimidating, stereotypical towards youth especially boys, reactive not proactive”.

The online response which was divided into 10-17 years category and 18-24 years category was as follows. 66% of those who responded said that they were either positive or very positive about Kent Police, 9% said they were negative, whilst 25% said they were either positive or negative. The response was very similar across the two age profiles.

3.2 How does Kent Police engage with young people? How effective is it?

The response to this was again mixed. Comments from the focus groups for the older age group 18-24 included:

“...yes, they use young officers (PCSOs) to interact and relate, while still being kind and understanding”

“Kent Police officers talk to young people on the streets and try not be seen as overtly authoritative”.

Whilst in the 10-17 age group some of the views were more negative including:

“...they scare me”

“...they need to be calmer with us”

“...very formal, jump to conclusions”.

Positive feedback included:

“I have seen them positively engaging with young people, explaining their jobs”

“They are patient and offer protection”.

Across both age groups there was a consistent message from the participants about the lack of visibility, the need for Kent Police to do more to understand young people and the desire for the engagement to start earlier in schools not when they are into their advanced teenage years.

The online survey response backed up the findings of the focus groups in that there was again a mixed response, but generally it was positive. Of the 266 respondents to the question when asked on a scale of 1-10 whether the engagement of Kent Police was effective, with 10 being the most effective and 1 being the lowest, 50% answered with a 7 or above, 32% were in the middle between 4 and 6, whilst 18% were at the lower end giving a mark of between 1 and 3.

3.3 What are the benefits for Kent Police in having more effective engagement with young people?

Looking at the 10-17 age group first, there was a lot of positive comments about the benefits of more effective engagement. There was a strong view that it would allow young people to have their voices heard, they would learn more about the work of Kent Police and that it would build up more trust. Another key message that came through was around mutual respect. If the young people understood more about the work and pressures of Kent Police and the Kent Police conversely understood more about the issues affecting young people it would lead to better co-operation between all concerned.

Comments included:

“Then Kent Police would be too good”

“...mutual respect, would feel safer speaking to them”

“They would then consider more than how things look”.

The 18-24 age groups also felt that there were many benefits for Kent Police around more effective engagement. There were views shared by many that better communication would result in less push back from young people, that they would be more receptive to Kent Police and that this mutual respect would benefit everyone.

Comments from the focus groups included:

"...an improved relationship, we would be comfortable with talking to them"

"They would also have a better relationship and young people will have confidence in them"

"Their image would change and young people would be more likely to go to the police for help, as they would trust them".

Comments as part of the on-line survey were again broadly in line with the focus group surveys. These included:

"It will help show that police are there to help and not only there when things go wrong or when you've committed a crime"

"It might make them feel protected rather than using weapons to protect themselves"

"I think Kent Police would benefit in having a more effective engagement with young people as, although we are young, we still have valid and sensible ideas and we would like it if they were heard and actually taken seriously more often"

"It would give everyone a learning curve so the police can see what young people think and do, this would give the police a big advantage in their job when dealing with younger people".

3.4 How can social media be used more effectively by Kent Police to engage with young people?

There were a lot of strong views around this. There was agreement across the age groups that Kent Police should be maximising opportunities to use social media especially snapchat and Instagram which the young people are more likely to use.

Some young people from the Tunbridge Wells focus groups for example gave some ideas about possible content:

snapchat – real life stories, 'wanted' and 'lost' people, snapchat maps, police station locations, ads, have snapchat filters for the area, spread awareness, videos, personal stories, surveys, subscriptions that are engaging for YP, 'discover' pages and 'behind the scenes'

Instagram – ads to apply for information, have a public Instagram, posters, updates on events, ‘professional’ pages, celebrities and influence features, meme pages, links to quizzes and more information, safety awareness information, how to get involved, how to join the police, how to become a volunteer officer, how to get work experience, sport ads, recommendations and what the police do

There was a view especially amongst the younger respondents that the use of images rather than lots of words was more effective and that the posts need to be written in language that young people can follow. It was felt that social media would be a good way of also sharing community safety messages especially those on issues that impact the young people. Some of the respondents in the older age group felt that more use could also be made of video clips, which are more likely to be shared, giving Kent Police a wider audience for their key messages.

The online survey respondents were also positive about Kent Police making more use of social media. Comments included:

“Create police memes on a police account – the younger generation love memes now days”

“The British Transport Police use their Instagram account to share their activity and advertise what they are doing, but they also share humorous police related things too, which makes their content significantly more enjoyable and also allows their followers to see the more human side of Police Officers and other staff. Other popular UK Instagram accounts such as TheLadBible and MadInPoorTaste could be asked to advertise the change to the style of the account, encouraging more people to see a better side of Kent Police and other Police forces”

“I would more likely talk to them over social media as it's easier to say what is going on rather than getting over emotional and not being able to say anything as some people may feel pressured”

“An engagement page targeted at the youth in Kent - police led social media. Would like to see young people, like myself, understanding who the police are and what they do for us in Kent”

“I think social media could be effective as Kent Police would be able to reach out to a lot more people more easily however I don't think it would get the same impact on making young people understand the dangers that the force are trying to keep us safe from and thus I think in person and/or meetings would be most effective in making young people comprehend the impacts of their actions”

“School drop-in sessions, an Instagram page (asking about concerns or tips about crimes taking place), snapchat (as majority of young people with smartphones use snapchat) of police officers in action or talking about their day not just going out arresting perpetrators, but their paperwork as well”

In the online responses there was a strong view that social media on its own was not sufficient however, that it should be seen as one medium, but not the only one when it comes to engaging with young people. Despite this it was important and should be used more effectively by Kent Police.

3.5 How does the use of Stop and Search by Kent Police have an impact on young people's views of Kent Police?

Stop and search is still seen as a contentious issue in some communities and this was reflected in the feedback from the focus groups. Looking at the respondents from the older 18-24 age groups comments included:

“... as long as the Police have a genuine reason and have told me before the search has begun, I would be receptive and understanding and with reasonable cause and justification”

“If the Police feel they have a reason, not a problem, however, it is not justifiable without good grounds”

“If a search is justifiable, they are fine, however they could be nicer about it as it is a very 'touchy' subject”

“Stop and Search should be undertaken only with a valid reason”.

In terms of the younger respondents there was an understanding of the impact of stop and search but also the view that it was a necessary tool for Kent Police. The responses were fairly even with the benefits of it and the negative impact of it. Comments included:

"... makes you feel intimidated. Makes you feel victimised if only you are picked on in your group. Makes people argue with the police, makes us feel that the police are against us"

"They search teens over adults who do more bad stuff it's because YP are easier to push over"

"Makes you feel targeted, intimidated"

"Reasons for search can be subjective for example the smell of cannabis, stops can be intimidating"

"Better to be safe than sorry"

"Can cause harm and mental health issues if stopped and nothing found"

"Enforces stereotypes – not good"

"Kent Police needs to make sure prejudices don't affect stop and search"

"Restates that people can't do what they want and get away with it"

"The youths feel like they are just getting stopped because they are young and that they are getting stereotyped by the police"

"A lot of young people who don't understand the police, might view stop and search in a negative way. Thinking the police has targeted them on purpose"

"I've never been stopped and searched, but I suppose that it's one of those things like marmite, some people would think it's a good and safe idea, like me, some people will be completely against it and would think it's pointless"

"It may cause a rift between the police and the community and make the police seem untrustworthy or unfair"

"Personally I think it's very important for the safety of others as well as ourselves but some people may see it as a privacy invasion"

“They only pick on people who match stereotypes (black people, young people wearing joggers and a hoodie), which may not necessarily be the case. Young people may rebel and go against that causing more crime than necessary, so.... STOP! Not every black person or person in joggers and a hoodie has a knife or drugs on them, it's wrong to judge people based on what society thinks. Honestly, Kent, GROW UP!”

“...stop and search makes the police seem rude by forcing ordinary people who most of the time are of an ethnic minority to give over their belongings just to ensure the safety of no one”

“Stop and search powers help the police to tackle crime. It's targeted and intelligence-led and practised on people who are suspected of being involved in crime. Can help everyone by allowing the police to know what's not right”.

5.0 Recommendations

1. Build upon the current work taking place in schools and do further engagement in informal settings including sports clubs, youth groups and community groups where young people participate in activities outside of an educational environment.
2. Look at social media and see how these mediums can be used to better engage with young people, exploring the use of language and developing a more dynamic style for example making use of memes and informational videos which are more likely to be shared.
3. Explore the possibility of creating a snapchat account which could be aimed primarily at young people as we know this is one of the more popular apps with fast growing usage.
4. Review the Medway YPAG and use this as a template to roll out across Kent to ensure on going engagement with young people.
5. Utilise the YPAGs and police cadets more to gain feedback on how best to engage with other young people and involve them in engaging with young people, especially using social media.
6. Develop more effective messaging around Stop and Search with easy to follow guidance which could be shared with young people as part of Kent Police's community engagement work. Also to make use of key partners including IPAG's, YPAGs, cadets, local authorities, youth councils and community groups to cascade messaging out around Stop and Search.

7. Having named officers/staff as internal leads within Kent Police to progress these recommendations in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair of the County IPAG.
8. A review of the progress of these recommendations in 12 months.