

The Kids Are All Right How the Metropolitan Police Service can gain the trust of young Londoners

A report by Jenny Jones
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(This report sets out my individual views as an Assembly Member and is not the agreed view of the full Assembly)

Introduction

"Public confidence in the police is crucial in a system that rests on the principle of policing by consent. Public confidence in the police depends on police officers demonstrating the highest levels of personal and professional standards of behaviour".
- The Home Office Guidance on Standards of Professional Behaviour for the Police.

I believe the Metropolitan Police Service has a trust problem with young people, who are the victims of a growing number of crimes. If it doesn't address this, the Mayor will struggle to achieve his aim of boosting confidence in the police by 20% by 2016. I looked into previous research in this area and went out on a series of visits to find out more about what the police can do to earn the trust of young Londoners².

I should like to thank all of the youth projects and groups I visited as part of this report. I should particularly like to thank the young people I met who gave me an insight into their relationship with the police. I was impressed by how articulate and motivated the young people were.

Young people and crime

It's clear that although young Londoners have been living with increasing levels of violence over the past four years. Two-thirds of the crimes that affected 10-15 year olds in England and Wales in 2010/11 were violent crimes³. Levels of Serious Youth Violence⁴ now appear to be remaining steady.

Research has begun to expose the extent of crime experienced by young people, and shows that young victims and young offenders are often one and the same, particularly where violence is involved⁵.

Younger victims of crime also report having a lower opinion of police prior to coming into contact with them as a victim⁶.

Responding to the needs of young people

It is the perceived legitimacy of the police and not their effectiveness that is the most important motivating factor in abiding by the law and reporting a crime⁷. For the public, the legitimacy of the police is not primarily based on how good they are at catching criminals, but on the belief officers will treat them with respect, make fair decisions and explain them, and be approachable. This is referred to as Procedural Justice. Crime overall may be going down but research would indicate that the legitimacy of the police

may be an equally important factor in public confidence. With this in mind it is of concern that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) found a significant minority – around a third – of the public has doubts about the integrity of the police and these doubts are marginally more prevalent in London⁸.

While some of the broader research paints a mixed picture there is strong existing research which identifies poor a relationship between young people and the police in London, which is reducing young people's willingness to report crime⁹. The Met in particular was cited by The Riots, Communities and Victims Panel as having an issue around positive or quality contact with the public¹⁰. Many officers from other regions were shocked at the lack of interaction and constructive dialogue between the Met and the public.

The British Crime Survey recently started looking at the attitudes of young people aged 10-15 years old and found a mixed picture¹¹. The majority of young people were satisfied with the contact they had with the police (79% satisfied with the contact they had initiated). Young people were generally supportive of the police although they tended to respond more positively to broader statements rather than those specifically relating to young people. This is supported by the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) youth report finding that 40% of young people were not confident the police would be able to respond to their needs as young people¹². Those respondents who had had some form of contact with the police in the last 12 months were more likely to indicate that they were not confident that the police would respond appropriately to their needs (64% compared to 34%). Satisfaction levels for 15-24 year olds are consistently found to be lower than for any other age groups¹³ indicating an ongoing problem in the relationship between the police and young people.

A poll by the Safer London Foundation – the Metropolitan Police's official charity – found half of young people in London questioned said that relations between young people and the police were negative, compared to only 17% saying that it was positive. Over three quarters of those surveyed felt if the relationship with the police improved, young people would be more likely to report crime¹⁴.

The overall message that came from the visits I conducted was that Met officers need specific training on how to work with young people. I heard from several of the groups I visited that they had previously trained the Met either at Hendon or locally in boroughs. However, as budgets have been cut it seems that specialist training for young people has been dropped in order to save money, in spite of the knowledge that crime prevention is cost effective. If young people are to have the confidence to report crime to the police and if we expect the police to respond to the needs of young people then they should receive training in this area.

The Safer London Foundation is about to begin a pilot scheme in three London boroughs (Southwark, Newham and Ealing) with local people and the police. Led by the Safer London Foundation's Youth Ambassadors, trained by the Greater London Authority's Peer Outreach Team the pilot will develop training for the police to work with young people by listening to their concerns and understanding more



The Greater London Authority's Peer Outreach Team

about the issues young people face. While I am very supportive of this, I am concerned it is not ambitious enough. We know there is a trust problem between young Londoners and the police and we know some of the solutions. I believe we should tackle this issue immediately.

Recommendation 1

The Met should work with the Greater London Authority's Peer Outreach Team and the Safer London Foundation to devise a youth led training scheme to be delivered to all new Met recruits, either as part of a specific module or as a part of each training strand. The training should be a compulsory aspect and trainees who do not complete it should not be eligible to qualify as police officers.

However, it is not enough for this youth led training to happen only once in a police officer's working life. Young people as a group are constantly changing and their concerns and the dangers they face will be constantly changing too. Therefore a one off training session will quickly become outdated and the police officers will lose touch with the concerns of young people.



*Jenny with Janette Collins, Project Manager of the Crib
Picture from Archant Newspapers*

One excellent example of training at a local level I witnessed was the Trading Places workshop at The Crib in Hoxton. The workshop involved the police and young people role-playing situations and swapping roles with each other so the young people act in the situation how they believe the police act. These workshops are excellent and show both the police and young people how to manage their expectations of the other group. They also promote an understanding of each others' perspective of situations.

Recommendation 2

All police officers in public facing roles should periodically undergo training in how to work with young people. The Mayor should bring together the various community and local groups already doing this work and link them up to boroughs to deliver the training to local officers and young people.

Neighbourhood policing

If neighbourhood policing is to be the bedrock of policing then the behaviour of certain officers must be addressed. No matter how positive the relationship between the local community and its neighbourhood police teams, all it takes is one poor interaction from an officer from another police team and confidence is damaged. For example, I heard on one visit that the local neighbourhood team had very good relations with the young people in the area but they viewed the Met officers who were on bicycles as a gang. Their perception was that this team would come into their local community and cause lots of tension and resentment with the local young people which would then impact on the safer neighbourhood team long after the bicycle team had left.

Recommendation 3

As far as possible officers should be rotated between teams so that all police officers spend time in neighbourhood teams and in schools. All officers need an understanding of young people, the fears they have and how to interact with them. Officers from Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Safer Schools may have excellent relationships with young people because they are embedded with the community. This needs to be spread to all officers in public facing roles.

Territorial Support Group

The young people I met were able to distinguish between different police teams within the Met. Young people saw a clear distinction, for example, between their Safer School officer and Territorial Support Group (TSG) officers. The TSG is a specialist squad within the Met that responds to outbreaks of disorder anywhere in the capital. They are used in public order and riot situations and receive the highest level of public order training every five weeks. These officers must pass a rigorous fitness test in order to be part of the team. The TSG units patrol London in marked vans. Young people referred to the TSG vehicle as “the bully van” and would talk about this team in a particularly negative way, while talking positively about other parts of the Met.

Young men talked about the difference in how they were treated if they weren't wearing their school uniform. They commented that the police were more likely to jump from the van and harass them with questions when they were not in school uniform. This was also reported at The Crib where I heard that the relationship between the local police was positive but other teams from outside had far worse relations. I heard across my visits how the relationship between the TSG is damaging the relationship young people have with the police overall. This one team appears to exemplify the problems between young people and the police. They were repeatedly mentioned for not only having a poor relationship with young people, but for having a negative effect on other areas of the police. The TSG has been heavily criticised in other areas, for example in their policing of demonstrations, and I think it is time to rethink their purpose.

Recommendation 4

The Met should scrap the TSG and use that funding to train a greater number of police officers for public order situations. If the Mayor is unwilling to call for this then he should prioritise youth training for TSG officers and ensure this is a compulsory element of their training.

Familiarity or visibility?

While the agreed perception is that the presence of police officers on the streets provides reassurance and reduces the fear of crime, there appears to be a discrepancy between the views of adults and young people. Young people in high crime areas do not necessarily find a police presence reassuring. Familiarity rather than visibility may be the answer to making young people feel safer and more trusting. There needs to be more interaction from both sides and there needs to be more talking between the police and young people. The police should look to increase the number of positive interactions they have with young people.

When the MPA looked at the most common reasons for why young people had had contact with the police in the previous 12 months, it was either that they had been a suspect of crime (23%) or they had been stopped and searched by the police (18%). These young people were more likely to have a negative opinion of the police¹⁵.

Young people reported that seeing more police on the streets did not make them feel safer. I was told by young people that when they see police officers on the streets it made them feel there must be a negative reason for them to be there. It made them worry that a crime had recently taken place and in some cases they would worry that a friend may have been hurt or killed. This conflicts with the notion that more police on the streets and a more visible presence is reassuring to the public which may reflect the views of adults rather than those young people.

I was also told by some of the young people I met that when they see the police on the streets they feel the police are “just standing there” and not doing anything. They commented that faster response times would provide them with more reassurance, rather than simply a visible police presence.

When speaking to the young people I found differences in perception of crime. I was particularly struck by how boys and girls see dangers differently. Girls reported a fear of being approached by older men in a manner they found sexually harassing. Boys reported a fear of gangs and possible acquisitive crime against them. Both reported finding different areas dangerous and were often surprised to hear the locations the opposite gender found to be dangerous. When I asked if putting more police into the specific locations they thought of as dangerous would make them feel safer, I was surprised that the response was an overwhelming ‘no’.

Although contact with the police seems to have a negative impact on young people’s attitudes to some aspects of policing, whether a young person knew an officer by name and/or sight seemed to have a positive impact – with those young people being more likely to think the police treat young people the same as adults. Contact with the police has not been associated with any difference in young people’s overall opinion of the police¹⁶.

Recommendation 5

The Met should commit more officers to visit schools, taking part in workshops and interacting with the young people. They must become part of the furniture of everyday life so that young people have predominantly positive interactions with the police.

Young people involved in a youth project or other work with the police felt it was useful because it provided them with a better understanding of the law and rights, policing and community safety, and an exploration of career options. Working on these projects tackled negative stereotypes young people had of the police¹⁷.

There is a clear cost justification to youth schemes as a way of preventing and reducing crime. I heard on one visit that it costs more to send a young person to prison than it does to stay in a room at the Hilton for a year with a champagne breakfast. I heard from young people when I visited the Kickz Project that being part of the scheme meant they spent less time on the streets and were getting into less trouble. I heard from some

young people how the scheme had given them career ideas and that they were open to the idea of having people come along to the training to talk about skills and training to help them find employment.

It was clear to me that the young people genuinely appreciated the involvement of senior police officers and local councillors because it made them feel that people did care about them. I was told that young people's fear of being let down prevents them from getting more involved. It is essential that any involvement in work with young people from the police is consistent and meaningful; tokenistic involvement can risk doing more harm than good.

However, there are times when police involvement is not an advantage. I heard from workers at the St Giles Trust that when working with ex-offenders and former gang members, it is important to have 'credibility' which is something the police themselves can be seen to be lacking. I was told by members of staff working at the St Giles Trust, some of whom are former gang members, that being able to speak from their own experiences gave them a credibility in speaking to the people they are working with. A police officer telling a young person they are making the wrong decisions just does not have the same impact as someone that you are able to relate to and trust.



Jenny with three members of staff at the St Giles Trust in Camberwell

Recommendation 6

Local Safer Neighbourhood Teams should be more involved in Kickz and similar community projects. Consistent engagement from local police in projects such as Kickz go a long way in breaking down the barriers between young people and the police and give the police the chance to demonstrate they are engaged with the community. Safer Neighbourhood Teams should designate a member to be their link to specific community projects in order to, over time, build a positive relationship with young people.

Recommendation 7

MOPAC and the Met should maintain a list of youth projects and schemes in London so that they are always aware of what is happening. This should be a dynamic list that is updated every six months and used to link groups together to support each other.

Police and Crime Plan

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) has challenged the Met to boost public confidence by 20% by 2016. The Mayor is also about to begin consulting on his

Police and Crime Plan. Following what I have learnt from the visits I made I believe the Met should focus specifically on addressing the issues that are damaging the confidence young Londoners have in the Met. The consultation process for the Police and Crime Plan should seek to engage young Londoners.

Recommendation 8

The Police and Crime Plan should include a specific aim to improve the confidence young Londoners have in the Metropolitan Police.

Summary

This report is an anecdotal snapshot of problems of trust between young people and the Metropolitan Police Service. I will continue to assess their work with young people as it is essential that young Londoners trust the police if we are to improve confidence and prevent crimes. It will take work from both the police and young people to improve the relationship between these two groups. I believe the recommendations I have outlined will go some way in addressing this problem and can begin to improve the situation for young people in this city.

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References

¹ The Home Office Guidance on Standards of Professional Behaviour

² The Crib in Hoxton; the St Giles Trust in Camberwell; a Safer London Foundation Panel in Southwark; the Kickz Project in Ferry Lane, Tottenham; and a meeting with the Greater London Authority Peer Outreach Team.

³ Children's experience and attitudes towards the police, personal safety and public spaces: Findings from the 2009/10 British Crime Survey interviews with children aged 10 to 15

⁴ Serious Youth Violence is defined as any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime where the victim is aged 1-19 and is measured by the number of victims not offences – Metropolitan Police Service.

⁵ Hoodie or Goodie, Victim Support, 2007; Listening and learning: improving support for victims in London, Victim Support, 2012

⁶ User Satisfaction Survey, Metropolitan Police Authority, 2009.

⁷ It's a fair cop? Police legitimacy, public cooperation, and crime reduction: An interpretative evidence commentary by the National Policing Improvement Agency and London School of Economics

⁸ HMIC Without fear or favour – a review of police relationships, 2010

⁹ Listening and Learning: Improving support for victims in London, Catch 22 (2001); What works: Developing a welfare approach to supporting young victims. London: Catch 22; Listening and learning: improving support for victims in London, Victim Support, 2012.

¹⁰ **After the riots:** The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012.

¹¹ Ibid, 2009.

¹² Seen and Heard – young people, policing and crime: An MPA report, 2008.

¹³ Independent Police Complaints Commission's Confidence Report 2011

¹⁴ Safer London Foundation 2012

¹⁵ Seen and Heard – young people, policing and crime: An MPA report, 2008.

¹⁶ Children's experience and attitudes towards the police, personal safety and public spaces: Findings from the 2009/10 British Crime Survey interviews with children aged 10 to 15.

¹⁷ Seen and Heard – young people, policing and crime: An MPA report, 2008.