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Police and Crime Plan 2025-29

Public Consultation Findings Report

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Introduction

This report presents the findings from a comprehensive public consultation undertaken by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to inform the development of the forthcoming Police and Crime Plan for the West Midlands by Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Simon Foster. The consultation was designed to capture a wide range of perspectives from residents, visitors, and key stakeholders across the region. By actively listening to the communities it serves, the OPCC aims to ensure the new plan is not only reflective of local priorities but also responsive to the concerns and aspirations of diverse groups within the West Midlands.

The Police and Crime Plan is a critical document that shapes the strategic direction for policing and community safety in the region. It establishes the priorities for West Midlands Police (WMP), informs resource allocation, and underpins collaborative efforts with partners and stakeholders to tackle crime and its root causes. Recognising that effective policing requires a strong partnership with the public, the OPCC places significant emphasis on ensuring the voices of the community are at the heart of the plan. The consultation process was a vital mechanism to achieve this, enabling a shared vision for policing that aligns with the expectations and needs of the public.

The consultation adopted a multi-method approach to ensure inclusivity and robust engagement across all sections of society. A public consultation survey was launched as a central tool to collect quantitative and qualitative data on residents' perceptions, concerns, and priorities. Open to anyone living or working in the West Midlands, the survey provided an accessible platform for people to share their views on crime and policing issues, offering insights into the general attitudes toward the proposed priorities and principles outlined in the plan on a page, see **Appendix 1**.

In addition to the survey, the OPCC organised in-person public consultation events across various locations in the region. These events allowed members of the public to engage in face-to-face discussions with the PCC and representatives from the OPCC, raising questions and providing feedback in an open and interactive environment. These events served as a valuable opportunity for residents to directly influence the plan, ensuring that localised and community-specific issues were captured.

To further deepen the understanding of key themes, the OPCC conducted targeted focus groups with specific population groups, including vulnerable communities, ethnic minorities, and those affected by particular types of crime. These smaller, focused sessions enabled participants to discuss complex issues in greater depth, providing nuanced insights that might not have been captured through broader consultation methods. Such efforts ensured that the plan would address the diverse and evolving needs of the West Midlands population.

Recognising the importance of capturing the views of young people, a group often disproportionately affected by crime and policing decisions, the OPCC introduced a call for evidence to for use in a youth evaluation. This dedicated initiative sought to amplify the voices of young people, allowing their experiences, concerns, and ideas to be amplified. By incorporating the perspectives of young people, the OPCC aimed to ensure the plan reflects intergenerational priorities and creates a safer, more inclusive environment for future generations.

The consultation also sought to engage with key stakeholders, including local authorities, community organisations, businesses, and the voluntary sector. These stakeholders provided critical insights into systemic challenges and opportunities for collaboration, ensuring the Police and Crime Plan benefits from a holistic understanding of crime prevention and community safety. A broader call for evidence was issued, enabling formal submissions. For a list of the organisations that contributed, please refer to **Appendix 2**.

Through this extensive and inclusive consultation process, the OPCC has worked to develop a Police and Crime Plan that is informed, evidence-based, and rooted in the lived experiences of those who call the West Midlands home. By prioritising transparency and collaboration, the OPCC seeks to foster trust between the police and the communities they serve, building a foundation for a safer, fairer, and more cohesive region. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the data and feedback gathered during the consultation process, outlining the key findings in detail.

Methodology

The methodology for the Police and Crime Plan Consultation was designed to ensure inclusivity, accessibility, and robust data collection to reflect the views and experiences of a diverse population in the West Midlands. This multi-faceted approach included a self-selecting survey, focus groups, and a youth evaluation, each tailored to capture specific perspectives. Ethical considerations were a cornerstone of the methodology, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations and prioritising participant wellbeing. These efforts aimed to provide a comprehensive and credible evidence base to inform the Police and Crime Plan.

Consultation Survey

A total of 5,828 individuals participated in the self-selecting survey, voluntarily opting in to share their views. Participants were recruited through a range of online platforms and dedicated engagement events designed to reach diverse audiences. The survey was widely promoted through the OPCC website, email campaigns, postal outreach, and face-to-face interactions, ensuring accessibility for various demographic groups.

Targeted in-person engagement was a key strategy to reach under-represented and hard-to-reach communities, including minority ethnic groups and individuals with limited digital access. Respondents ranged in age from under 18 to over 75, with balanced gender representation and an emphasis on reflecting the ethnic diversity of the West Midlands population.

The primary data collection tool was an online survey, comprising 13 questions addressing themes such as crime, perceptions of safety, and policing and crime priorities. The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions, alongside seven demographic questions. It was designed to be accessible across multiple devices, including smartphones, tablets, and desktop computers.

Focus Groups

This study included nine focus groups, each facilitated by a different stakeholder, and divided into three categories: Victims, Under 25s, and Main focus groups. Efforts were made to ensure diverse participation, with a specific focus on individuals under 25 to gather insights from younger perspectives.

Participants were not pre-screened by the researchers; however, host organisations flagged any attendees with particular vulnerabilities, risks, or those requiring reasonable adjustments. Risk assessments were conducted with the hosts before the sessions. All participants were briefed, provided informed consent, and given the option to withdraw from the study at any stage. To encourage participation, financial incentive vouchers were offered.

The focus group format was selected for its ability to facilitate dynamic interactions among participants. This setting encouraged open discussions, debates, and the sharing of ideas, allowing participants to challenge and expand on each other's viewpoints. These exchanges often surfaced insights that might not emerge in individual interviews. While the Main and Under 25s focus groups followed a shared set of questions, the Victims forum used a tailored question set designed to address their specific experiences and needs.

To ensure the consistency and reliability of the thematic analysis, inter-rater reliability was calculated across the focus group data. The coding achieved 90% agreement for the Victims focus group and 92% for the Main focus groups, reflecting a high level of consistency between coders, see **Appendix 3**. These results indicate that the identified themes were both reliable and consistently interpreted, ensuring the credibility of the findings.

Youth Evaluation

The youth evaluation draws upon a range of key pieces of evidence to provide a comprehensive understanding of young people's experiences and perspectives. This diverse breadth of materials is intended to strengthen and inform the Police and Crime Plan, ensuring it is both evidence-based and inclusive. By incorporating insights from young people and those working closely with them, the evaluation promotes transparency and inclusivity in policy-making. It ensures that young voices are heard, and their concerns are represented. The evidence includes young people's questionnaires, research papers, focus groups, and an annual report, offering a well-rounded view of their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in the consultation survey were provided with a clear introduction, outlining the survey's purpose and links to relevant privacy notices. Responses were collected anonymously to protect participants' identities, with all data handled securely to maintain confidentiality. Participants could choose to receive updates on the Police and Crime Plan by providing their email addresses and explicitly consenting via a checkbox. Participation was entirely voluntary, self-selecting, and respondents were under no obligation to complete the survey.

All data was handled in compliance with data protection regulations, including GDPR, ensuring responsible and lawful processing. Accessibility and inclusivity were prioritised in the survey's design, accommodating diverse participants with considerations for language and usability, particularly for individuals with specific accessibility needs. For the focus groups, comprehensive risk assessments were conducted in collaboration with facilitators before the focus groups to identify and address potential psychological risks, safeguarding

participants wellbeing. Participants received detailed briefings about the study's objectives, procedures, and any potential risks or benefits.

Informed consent was obtained through clear consent forms, which outlined the study details and emphasised the voluntary nature of participation, including the option to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and privacy were safeguarded by anonymising personal information and implementing secure data handling protocols, ensuring all collected data remained confidential and protected.

Summary

A total of 5,828 individuals participated in the self-selecting survey, promoted through various platforms and events to engage a wide audience, including under-represented groups. The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data across 13 thematic questions and demographic queries. Nine focus groups categorised into Main, Under 25s, and Victims groups, provided dynamic discussions and insights, with a focus on diverse representation. The youth evaluation integrated multiple evidence sources to capture young people's experiences and priorities. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymity, and accessibility considerations, ensuring participants rights and wellbeing were upheld throughout the process. This comprehensive methodology underpins the development of an evidence-based and inclusive Police and Crime Plan.

Events

The OPCC conducted extensive community engagement across the West Midlands during the consultation period, participating in 29 public events and hosting 4 OPCC-led sessions. These engagements centred around key themes, including Faith Communities, Business, Fairness and Belonging, and Victims. The consultation process was officially launched on 14th July at the Sandwell and Birmingham Mela, Europe's largest South Asian music festival. This lively event, featuring music, dance, food, and crafts, offered a valuable opportunity to engage with a diverse audience, gather feedback, and set the tone for the broader consultation efforts.

Key events stood out during the consultation for their significant impact. The Simmer Down Festival, one of the UK's largest reggae music and arts festivals, was a particular highlight. In partnership with the Violence Reduction Partnership, the OPCC hosted the "My Tomorrow Zone," a space dedicated to community engagement. This initiative successfully connected with the Black community through collaborations with organisations such as the NHS and Melanin Moods. Similarly, the Mega Mela Weekend in Washwood Heath, Birmingham, provided an essential platform for engaging with local communities. This family-focused event emphasised crime reduction and safety and was well-received by attendees, who praised the OPCC's proactive approach.

The WMP Open Day at Tally Ho, celebrating 50 years of the police force, was another meaningful engagement opportunity. This event offered an insider's perspective on police work and facilitated consultations with attendees, many of whom had ties to WMP. It created a valuable space for collecting feedback from individuals with direct or indirect experience of the organisation.

Youth engagement was a central focus of the consultation. The OPCC participated in several youth-oriented events, such as the Walsall Youth Summit, Safer Students Event, Newman University Freshers Fair, and sessions at Walsall College. These engagements allowed young people to share their views on youth violence and their priorities for the Police and Crime Plan. A standout event was the OPCC/WMP Football Tournament, held on 5th October at Tally Ho, which brought together approximately 400 young people aged 12-17 from across the West Midlands. The tournament provided a safe and enjoyable environment for meaningful interactions with local officers, while surveys conducted during the event helped capture valuable insights.

In the final week of the consultation, the OPCC focused on engaging the under-represented 18-24 age group by visiting Wolverhampton University, Coventry University, Birmingham City University, and Walsall College. Combining informal walk-up conversations with structured seminars, these efforts significantly increased engagement and diversified the respondent pool. The seminars, in particular, were effective in boosting

response rates and raising awareness of the OPCC's work among young adults. The consultation process underscored the OPCC's commitment to inclusive community engagement. By participating in cultural festivals, youth events, and academic institutions, the OPCC ensured a broad range of voices were represented, enabling the consultation to reflect the diverse perspectives of the community.

Consultation Survey

Introduction

This section of the report details the findings from the public consultation survey on the proposed West Midlands Police and Crime Plan. A total of 5,828 people contributed their views, providing feedback on key issues, including agreement with the proposed priorities and principles, perceptions of public safety, police responsibilities, and experiences with WMP. The responses are helpful for shaping future strategies and ensuring that the plan aligns with public needs and expectations. This report breaks down the findings for each question asked in the consultation survey.

Findings

Question 1: Do you agree with the priorities and principles?

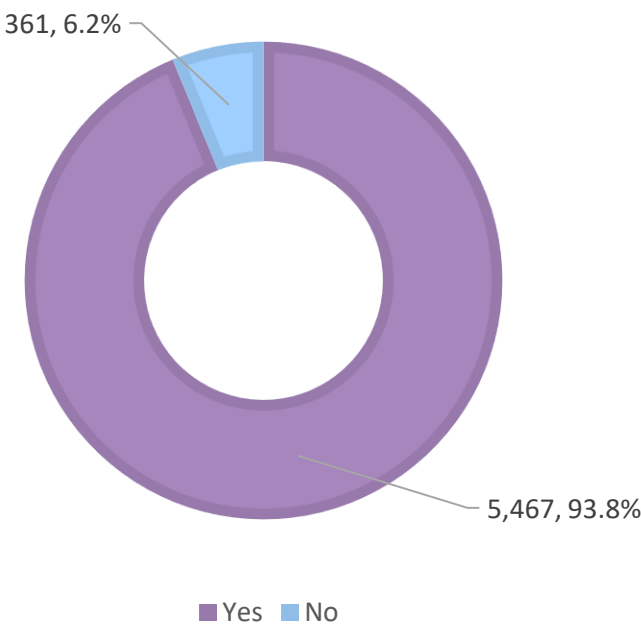


Chart 1

A substantial majority of respondents, 5,467 individuals (93.8%), expressed agreement with the priorities and principles laid out in the Police and Crime Plan. This overwhelming support reflects the plan’s relevance and alignment with public expectations for policing in the West Midlands. The core themes and strategic objectives, such as rebuilding community policing, combating violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, prevent and tackle violent crime, and investing in initiatives to support young people to prevent them becoming victims of crime, or offenders, appear to resonate with most participants.

However, 361 respondents (6.2%) indicated disagreement with the plan's priorities and principles. While a minority, this opposition should not be overlooked. It suggests that a small portion of the West Midlands population may have concerns or reservations about the direction or focus of the plan. Further qualitative perspectives will be included throughout this analysis draw focus on additional views to further shape the police and crime plan focus. However, the overall high level of support suggests confidence in the plan's strategic direction and provides a strong mandate for moving forward with the outlined priorities.

Question 2: Do you think the priorities and principles support good relations?

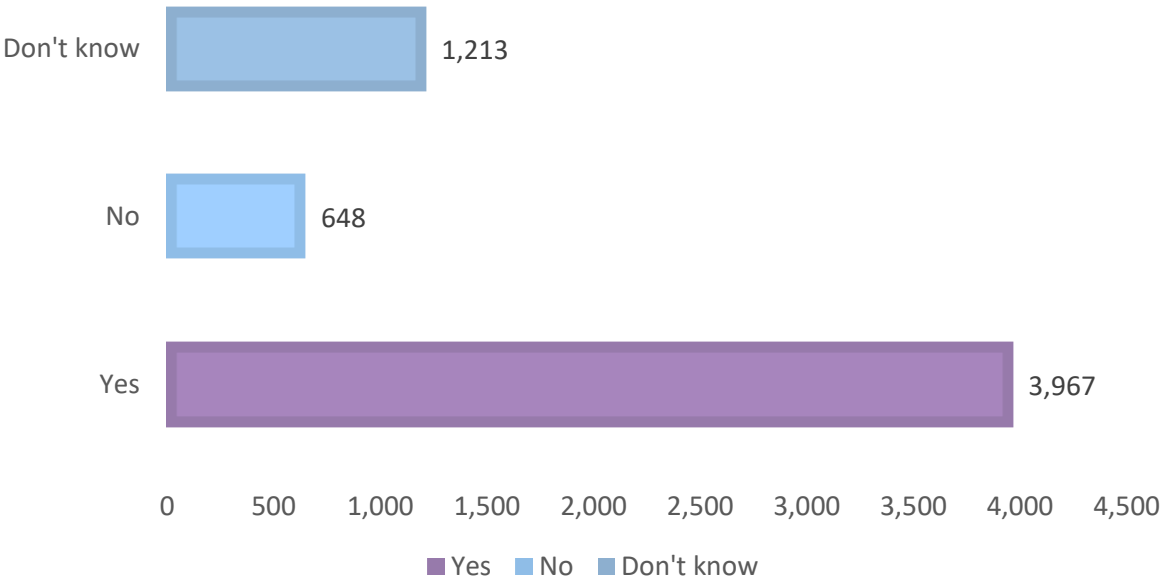


Chart 2

When asked if the priorities and principles support good relations, 3,967 respondents (68.1%) believed they would contribute positively to fostering strong community relations. This feedback indicates that a large portion of the public perceives the proposed priorities as likely to enhance trust and collaboration between police and the communities they serve. The emphasis on building trust, rebuilding community policing, and promoting transparency appears to align well with public expectations for improving these relationships.

In contrast, 1,213 respondents (20.8%) selected "Don't know", signalling that a considerable segment of the respondents are uncertain about whether the priorities and principles will effectively foster good relations. This level of uncertainty suggests that additional communication and clarification may be needed. For example, further outreach and public engagement could be focused on explaining how the Police and Crime Commissioner intends to achieve these goals in a tangible way, helping to build greater confidence in the plan's ability to improve relations.

4. Preventing violence against women, girls, and vulnerable people	3,438
5. Preventing anti-social behaviour	3,344
6. Preventing car thefts, robberies, and burglaries	3,276
7. Preventing street drug dealing	3,262
8. Combating organised crime, such as illegal drug importation	2,684
9. Improve road safety, such as reducing speeding and street racing	2,412
10. Supporting victims and witnesses	2,319
11. Countering extremism and terrorism	2,263
12. Ensuring the highest standards of police conduct	2,134
13. Ensuring safety on buses, trains, and trams	2,083
14. Handling events and emergencies effectively	1,580
15. Preventing business crimes such as shoplifting	1,556
16. Preventing fraud and online crime	1,532
17. Investing in a high quality and diverse police force	1,457
18. Working in partnership to prevent offending	1,372
19. Responding to the climate change emergency	282

Table 1 Public Consultation Survey Top Responsibilities

Moving on to the question about police responsibilities, respondents were presented with a multiple-choice question, with the options randomised for each individual. They were asked to select up to ten key responsibilities that were important to them. The results highlight the top areas where the public thinks focus in the plan should be, ranging from tackling serious violent crime to improving everyday safety. These priorities form the foundation of public expectations and underscore the areas where police efforts must focus to maintain and build public confidence.

Across all local areas, preventing knife crime emerged as the top priority, with significantly more participants selecting it than any other issue. This prominence reflects ongoing public concern over violent crime in the region, particularly considering national events, and related issues with youth violence and gang-related activities. The alignment with broader national efforts to tackle serious violence underscores

the critical need for continued focus in this area. Knife crime remains a significant risk to public safety in the West Midlands, and the public's response underscores the urgency of addressing this issue through proactive policing and community interventions. Over 14 weeks, knife crime was ranked the most important issue for 12 weeks, demonstrating its sustained importance to respondents. However, during the week commencing 22nd July, preventing knife crime dropped to second place, narrowly overtaken by investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice by 1.9%. Similarly, in the week commencing 9th September, investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice again surpassed knife crime, this time by a larger margin of 4.2%.

Investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice ranked second overall, indicating the importance the respondents place on police accountability and effectiveness in detecting and solving crimes. This expectation extends across Birmingham, Sandwell, and Wolverhampton, where concerns about the effectiveness of criminal investigations are heightened, particularly in densely populated urban areas. Additionally, the high priority given to prompt responses to 999 and 101 calls signals the public's desire for a reactive and responsive police force during emergencies and high-priority incidents, especially noted in Solihull, Walsall, Dudley, and Coventry.

Preventing violence against women, girls, and vulnerable people ranks fourth overall, reflecting awareness of gender-based violence and the need to protect those at risk. This responsibility is listed in the top five across all local policing areas except Dudley and Walsall, signalling a public demand for stronger police strategies to safeguard vulnerable populations. Closely related is the public's expectation to prevent anti-social behaviour, which, though not as severe as violent crime, pointedly affects everyday quality of life. The public clearly expects the police to tackle issues like street disorder, noise, and graffiti with commitment, as seen in the high selection of this responsibility in the Wolverhampton, Coventry, Dudley, and Birmingham local areas.

Preventing car thefts, robberies, and burglaries is a key focus in Solihull, Dudley, and Walsall, reflecting concerns about neighbourhood crimes that impact public sense of safety. Equally, the duty to curb street drug dealing and combat organised crime, including illegal drug importation, highlights a broader commitment to addressing activities that undermine community safety and contribute to more serious violence. This concern for combatting organised crime appears consistently across all local policing areas, demonstrating widespread concern in the region.

Improving road safety, including reducing speeding and street racing, rounds out the top ten responsibilities, reflecting the public concern with day-to-day risks on the roads. Supporting victims and witnesses remains a notable priority, particularly in Sandwell, Coventry, and Wolverhampton, highlighting

the demand for services that aid those affected by crime. The word cloud, **Figure 2**, provides insights into responses to the free-text question inviting additional thoughts or concerns about the priorities and principles. Key focus areas identified include concerns about road safety, drug-related issues, and community engagement. References to officers and local presence highlight the importance of visible policing and strong ties within neighbourhoods. Mentions of violence, antisocial behaviour, and the state of public spaces emphasise community concerns about disorder and safety. Similarly, the focus on driving, speeding, and vehicle-related issues signals a need for targeted road safety initiatives. Concerns about knife crime and drug offences also feature prominently, underlining priorities for policing and community safety strategies.



Figure 2 Key Focus Areas Highlighted in Responses to Additional Thoughts on Priorities and Principles

The top ten priorities selected by the survey respondents closely align with the key priorities and principles of the proposed Police and Crime Plan. The focus on preventing knife crime, investigating offences, and responding swiftly to emergencies matches the plan's aim of tackling violence and rebuilding community policing. Addressing serious issues like knife crime, youth violence, and organised crime is central to the plan's goal of ensuring safer neighbourhoods. Additionally, the public's push to combat anti-social behaviour and reduce neighbourhood crime, such as car thefts, burglaries, and street robberies, reflects the plan's objective of enhancing community safety through rebuilding community policing.

Concerns around improving road safety also align with the plan's objectives, which target issues like speeding, street racing, and uninsured vehicles. The public's emphasis on supporting victims and witnesses corresponds with the plan's commitment to victim welfare, access to justice, and amplifying the voices of those affected by crime. Both the public and the plan highlight the need for strong, responsive services for victims, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive police efforts. Overall, the public's expectations and

the Police and Crime Plan are well-aligned, ensuring that critical areas such as violence, neighbourhood crime, and victim support remain central to policing priorities in the West Midlands.

Police Focus Groups

In addition to capturing the publics perspective on police responsibilities, seven focus groups were conducted with policing teams from various areas across the region, encompassing Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley, and Sandwell. Each group identified their top 10 policing responsibilities, offering valuable insights into the shared priorities and distinct concerns of each locality. The findings reveal both common themes and notable differences, underscoring the unique challenges faced by individual areas while also highlighting broader issues that affect policing across the West Midlands. These priorities provide a lens through which to understand the operational focus of local policing teams, shaped by the demographics, socio-economic conditions, and specific crime trends of their respective areas. The analysis below explores the similarities and differences in the selected responsibilities, shedding light on how these align with regional and organisational strategies while addressing localised needs. This comparative overview also offers an opportunity to identify areas for targeted support, resource allocation, and policy development to enhance overall effectiveness.

Rank	Police Responsibilities
1	Investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice
2	Prompt response to 999/101 calls and getting to incidents quickly
3	Preventing knife crime
4	Preventing violence against women, girls, and vulnerable people
5	Supporting victims and witnesses
6	Preventing car thefts, robberies, and burglaries
7	Preventing anti-social behaviour
8	Countering extremism and terrorism
9	Preventing street drug dealing
10	Ensuring the highest standards of police conduct

Table 2 Police Focus Group Top Responsibilities

Investigating crimes and bringing offenders to justice is a responsibility that consistently ranks among the top priorities across all police focus groups. This reflects a shared commitment to holding offenders accountable and maintaining public trust. By ensuring that crimes are thoroughly investigated and offenders face consequences, the justice system reinforces confidence that criminal behaviour will not go unpunished.

Preventing knife crime is a widespread concern, appearing as a top priority across all areas. The urgency of this issue underscores the pressing need for focused interventions to protect communities from the devastating impact of knife-related violence. Addressing this challenge is crucial to improving public safety and reducing harm. Supporting victims and witnesses is another commonly highlighted priority. Ensuring that those affected by crime receive adequate care and support reflects a shared focus on community well-being. It also demonstrates a commitment to minimising the potential for further trauma or neglect experienced by victims and witnesses during and after their interactions with the justice system.

Prompt responses to 999 and 101 calls, along with quick attendance at incidents, are recognised as vital across all focus groups. This priority emphasises the importance of public safety and the need to maintain confidence in the police's ability to act swiftly and effectively in emergencies. A timely response reassures communities and enhances trust in the police service. Preventing anti-social behaviour is a notable concern, particularly in areas such as Wolverhampton and Sandwell, where communities may experience higher levels of disruption. While it may rank lower in some regions, addressing anti-social behaviour remains essential to maintaining order and ensuring a sense of safety within affected areas. Preventing car thefts, robberies, and burglaries is a significant focus in Coventry, Solihull, Walsall, and Sandwell.

Countering extremism and terrorism is a priority that stands out in Coventry, Solihull, Walsall, and Dudley. In these areas, there is a noticeable emphasis on national security concerns, likely influenced by local demographic and political factors. This reflects a broader awareness of the need to address threats that could disrupt public safety on a larger scale. Combating organised crime, particularly illegal drug importation, is a priority in Walsall, Coventry, and Birmingham. Investing in a high-quality and diverse police force is a prominent priority in Solihull, Walsall, Dudley, and Wolverhampton. This reflects a recognition of the importance of having well-trained, diverse officers who are equipped to meet the needs of their communities effectively.

Question 4: Where do you live?

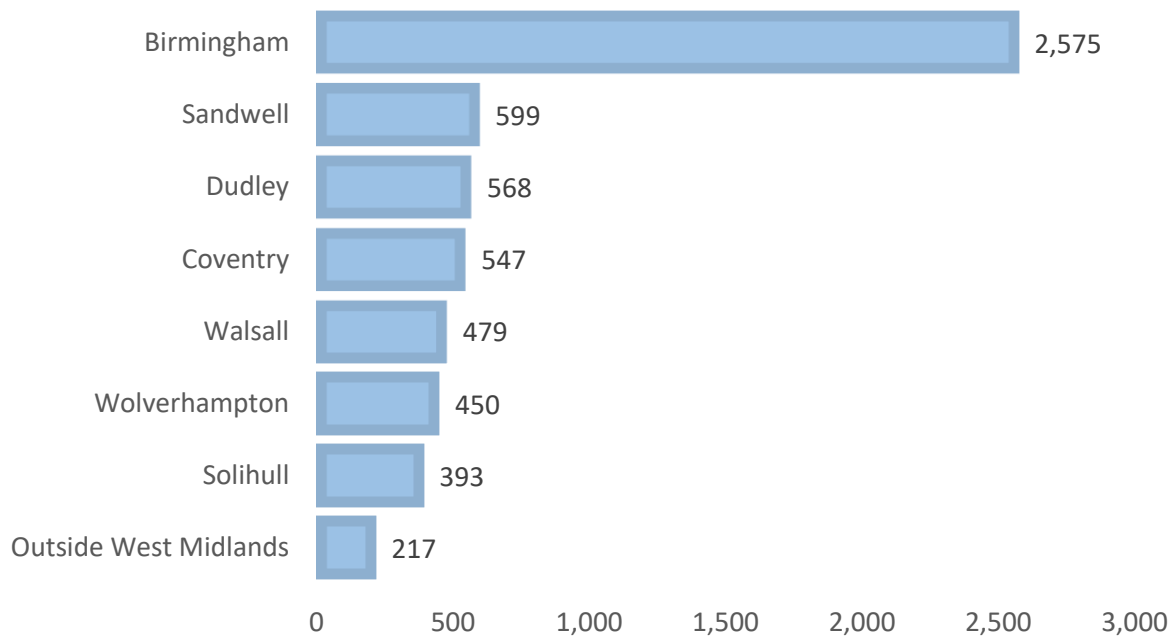


Chart 3

Returning to the survey analysis, the respondents were then asked where they live, with a high proportion of responses from Birmingham reflects its position as the region's largest city and highlights the significant policing challenges in urban centres. Birmingham's representation in the consultation also mirrors the higher rates of crime and public safety concerns often associated with large metropolitan areas.

Other local areas, including Sandwell, Dudley, and Coventry, also provided substantial input, indicating active public engagement across the West Midlands. The 3.7% of respondents from outside the West Midlands may represent individuals who work, volunteer, or frequently visit the region but live elsewhere. Their responses highlight the broader geographic scope of interest in the plan and suggest that policing strategies may need to account for the mobility of people in and out of the area.

Question 5: How safe do you feel where you live?

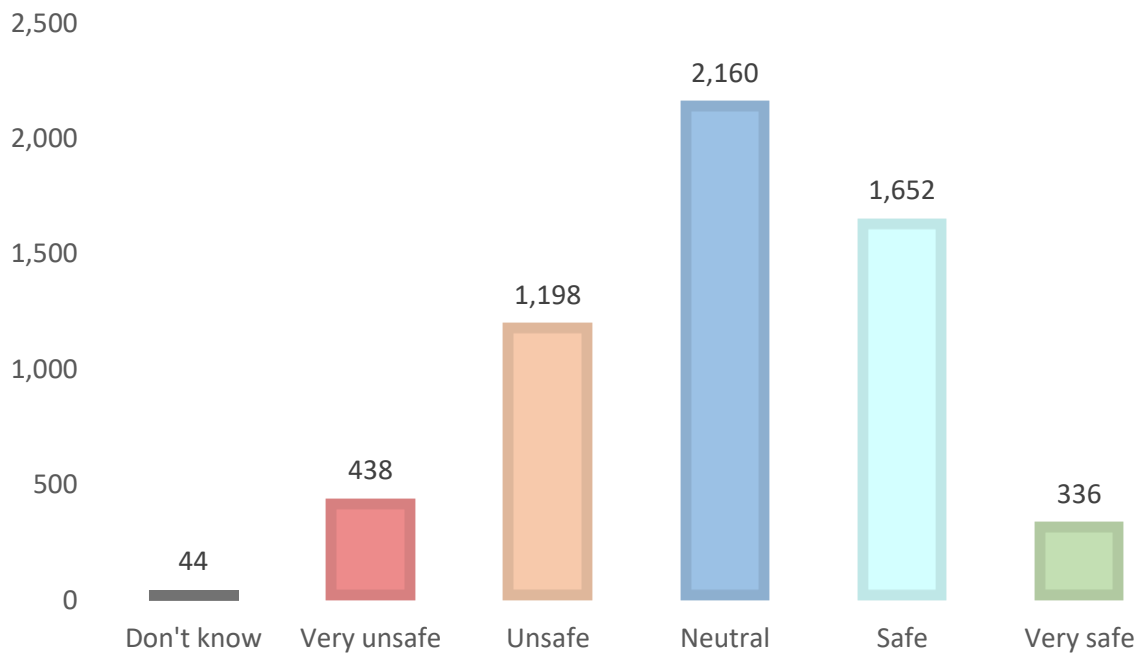


Chart 4

In relation to the perceptions of safety where people live, the largest group of respondents, 37.1%, described their feelings of safety as neutral, suggesting that they neither feel particularly safe nor unsafe. This neutrality indicates a level of ambivalence that could be influenced by future crime trends, police visibility, or specific incidents in their area.

Approximately one-third of respondents reported feeling safe (28.3%) or very safe (5.8%), suggesting that many individuals have a positive perception of safety in their community. This may reflect successful policing strategies, lower crime rates in certain areas, or other factors contributing to a sense of security.

However, 20.6% of respondents feel unsafe, and 7.5% feel very unsafe. These figures highlight areas where localised crime, social disorder, or police presence may need to be strengthened. The proportion of individuals who feel unsafe should be a priority for targeted interventions to address their concerns and improve perceptions of safety.

The small percentage of respondents who selected "Don't know" (0.8%) suggests that most people have a clear sense of how they feel about their personal safety, even if that feeling is one of neutrality, safety or concern.

Question 6: Do you regularly visit, work, or volunteer in another area?

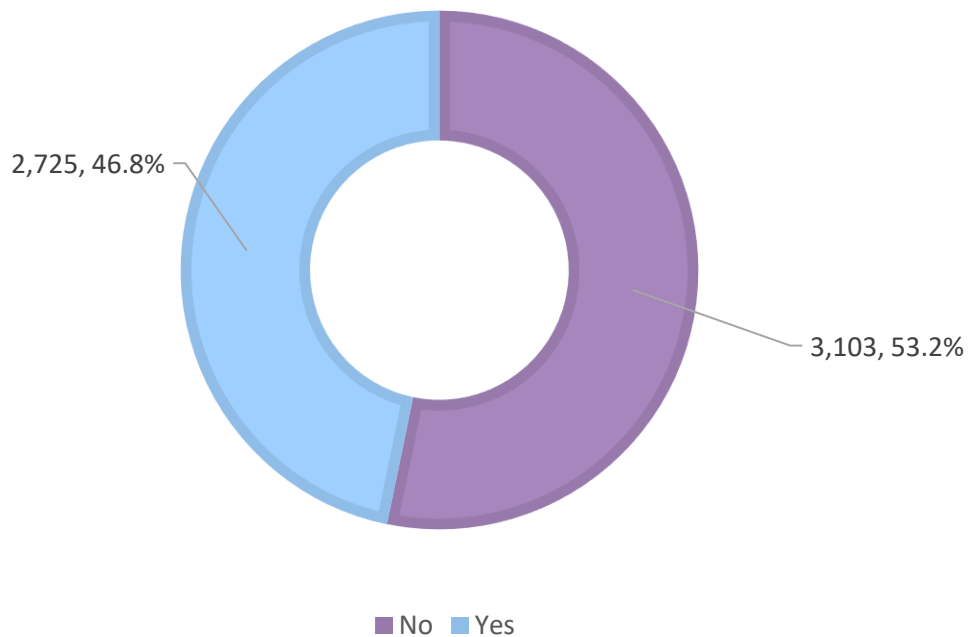


Chart 5

Just over half of the respondents (53.2%) indicated that they do not regularly visit, work, or volunteer in another area, implying that their interactions with the police and their perceptions of public safety are primarily influenced by their immediate community. This suggests that localised policing efforts are essential to addressing the safety concerns of individuals who primarily remain within their own local areas.

However, 46.8% of respondents do engage in activities outside their home area, reflecting a mobile population within the West Midlands. This group, which includes individuals who regularly travel for work or volunteer in other areas, may have broader perspectives on policing and safety, influenced by their experiences in different parts of the region.

Question 7: Which area(s) do you regularly visit, work, or volunteer?

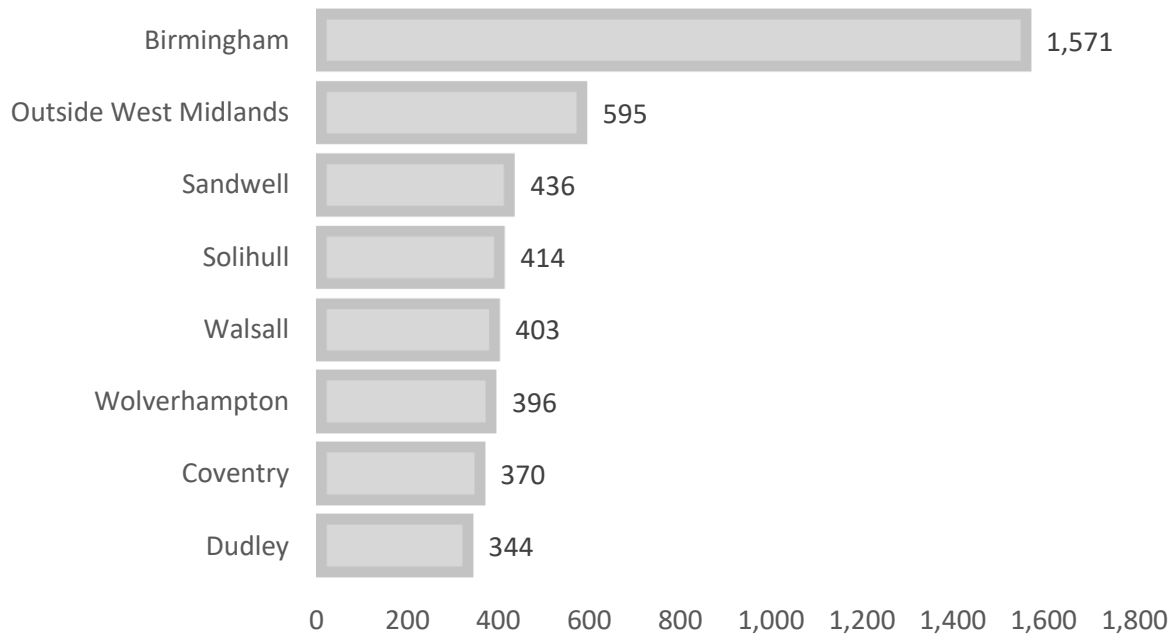


Chart 6

As outlined in the chart above, a notable portion of respondents regularly visit, work, or volunteer outside the West Midlands (10.2%). This highlights the region's strong connections to neighbouring areas and the mobility of its population, suggesting that many individuals have ties to communities beyond the immediate boundaries of the West Midlands.

Within the West Midlands, the most frequently visited area was Birmingham (27.0%), followed by Sandwell (7.5%), Solihull (7.1%), and Walsall (6.9%). These results reflect the importance of Birmingham as a hub for employment and other activities and suggest that significant portions of the population move between various metropolitan areas regularly.

The spread of responses across these areas reinforces the need for a Police and Crime Plan that accounts for the fluid movement of people within the West Midlands, ensuring that public safety and victim support, for example, are maintained in all areas of the region.

Question 8: How safe do you feel where you regularly visit, work, or volunteer?

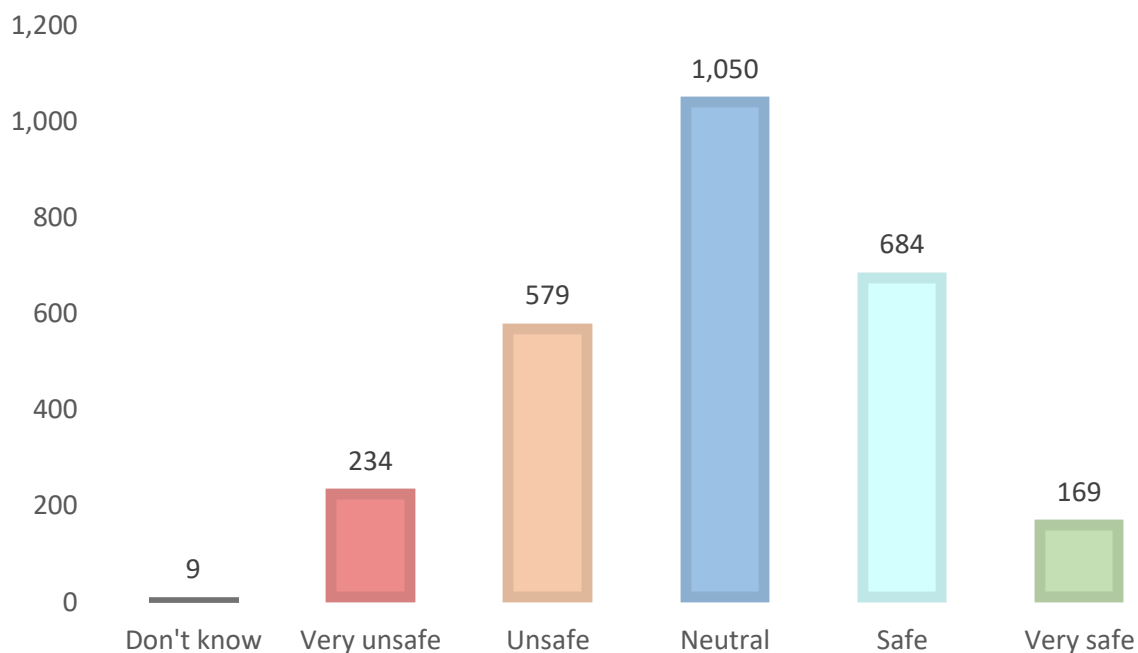


Chart 7

Responses regarding safety in areas where individuals regularly visit, work, or volunteer were similar to safety perceptions where respondents live, with 38.5% of respondents feeling neutral. This suggests that ambivalence about safety extends beyond the local environment, with many individuals unsure or indifferent about their safety in other areas.

Around a quarter of respondents (25.1%) feel safe in the areas they frequent, while 6.2% feel very safe. Together, these responses indicate that roughly one-third of respondents have positive perceptions of safety in areas outside their home location.

However, concerns about safety were slightly more pronounced when respondents considered places they regularly visit, work, or volunteer. In total, 21.2% of respondents reported feeling unsafe, and 8.6% felt very unsafe, compared to 20.6% and 7.5%, respectively, for local safety.

This suggests that, while many people feel similarly about their safety at home and in other areas, there is slightly more apprehension when outside their immediate local areas. Therefore, this finding could point to specific issues in workplace environments, public transport, or certain public spaces that need to be addressed to improve overall perceptions of safety.

Question 9: Have you had contact with WMP in the last 3 years?

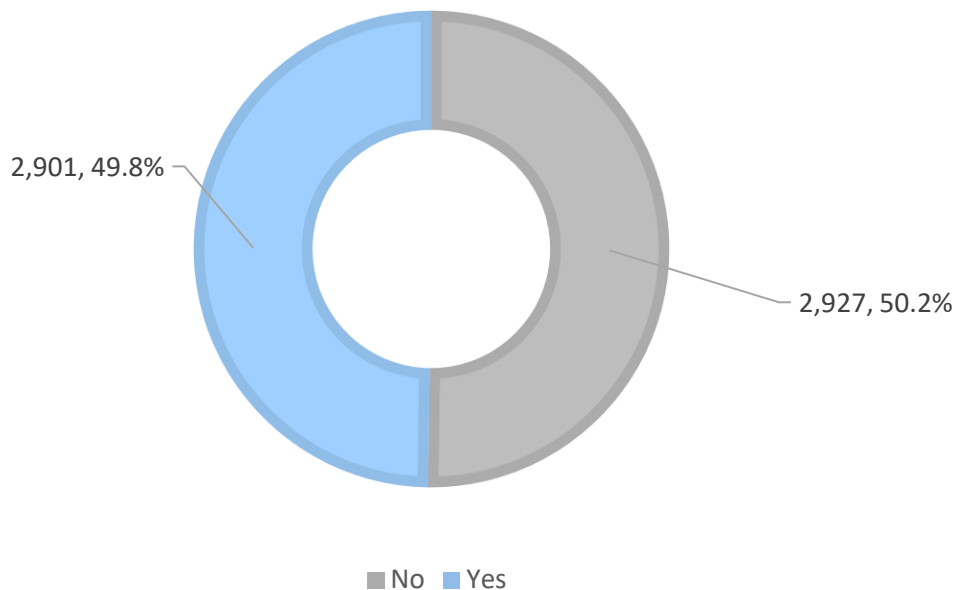


Chart 8

When asking about recent contact with WMP, the responses were almost evenly split, with 50.2% of respondents stating that they had not had contact with WMP in the past three years, and 49.8% indicating that they had. This balance suggests that nearly half of the public has interacted with the police in some capacity, ranging from reporting crimes or incidents to engaging in community activities or receiving assistance.

The detail that such a large portion of the respondents had recent contact with the police underscores the importance of these interactions in shaping public perceptions. Positive and effective communication with the police is crucial, as these experiences are likely to have a lasting impact on how individuals view police confidence, performance, trustworthiness, and responsiveness.

Question 10: How would you rate your experience with WMP?

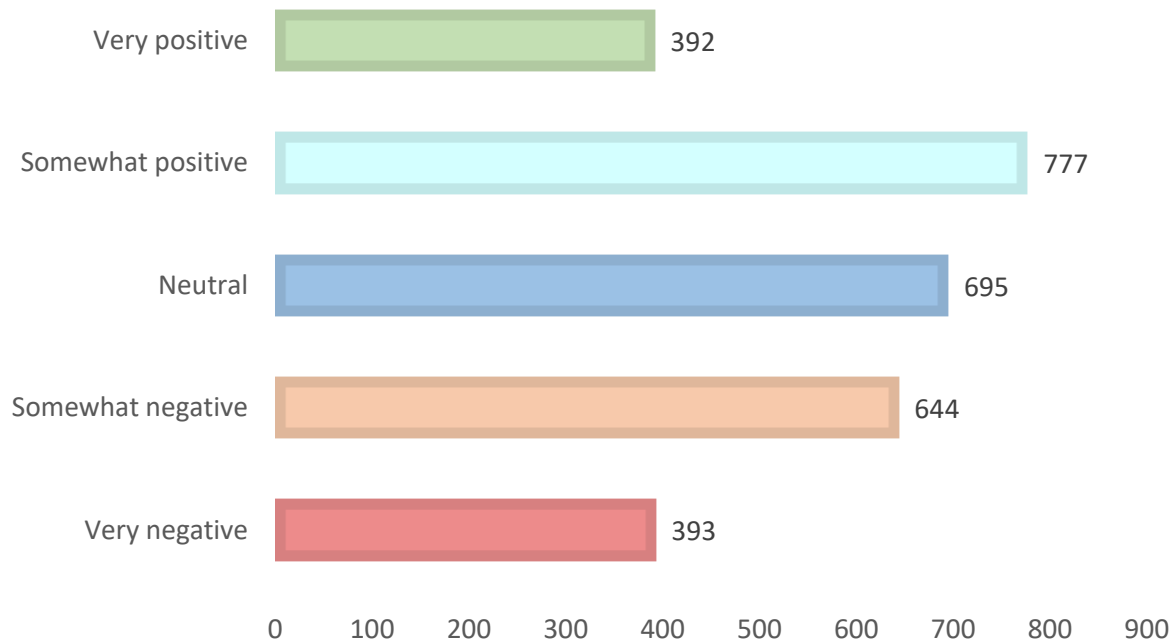


Chart 9

Among those who had contact with WMP, 40.3% rated their experience positively, with 26.8% describing it as somewhat positive and 13.5% as very positive. This suggests that a notable portion of individuals had favourable experiences with the police, which likely reinforces their overall trust and satisfaction with policing in the region.

However, 35.7% of respondents rated their experience negatively, with 22.2% describing it as somewhat negative and 13.5% as very negative. This relatively high proportion of negative experiences highlights that the police need to improve public engagement, responsiveness, and service delivery through victim experience, investigations, and positive outcomes.

A further 24.0% of respondents felt neutral about their experience with the police, suggesting that for some individuals, interactions with the police were routine or non-eventful, neither leaving a strong positive nor negative impression.

Question 11: What is your overall view of WMP?

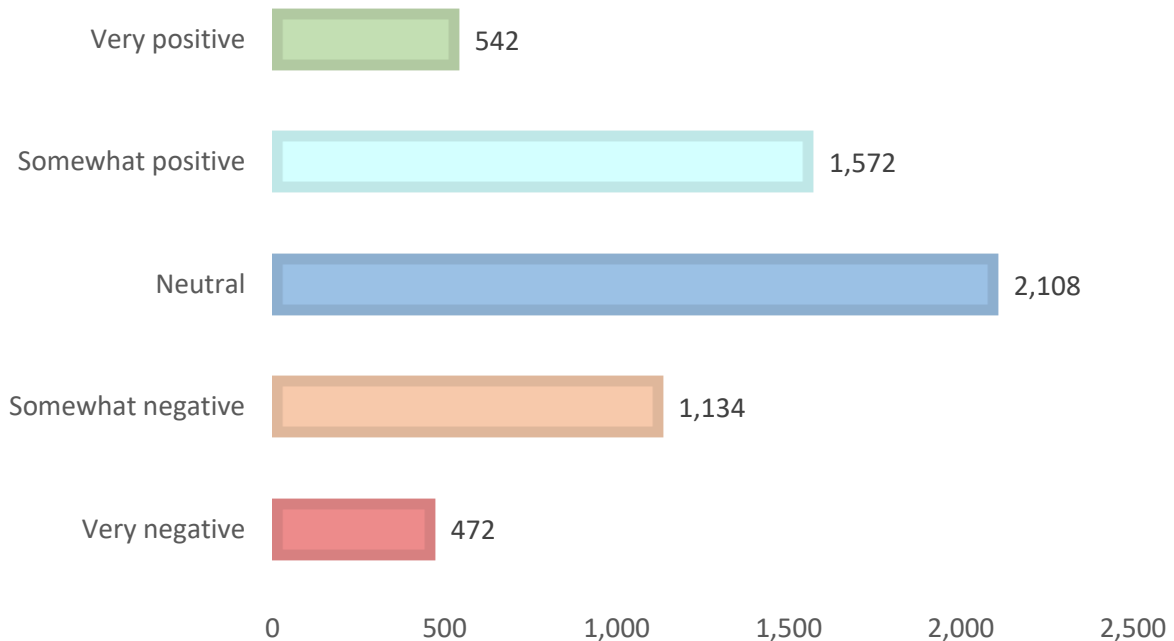


Chart 10

When considering the whole respondent sample, asking about their overall view of WMP, a large portion of respondents (36.2%) expressed neutral opinions, indicating that many people hold balanced or indifferent views. This neutrality could be reflective of limited direct interaction with the police or mixed feelings about police performance in their area.

Similarly, a combined 36.3% of respondents held a positive view, with 27.0% describing their view as somewhat positive and 9.3% as very positive. This suggests that a considerable portion of the respondents has confidence in WMP and views their overall performance favourably.

On the other hand, 27.6% of respondents expressed a negative view, with 19.5% holding a somewhat negative view and 8.1% holding a very negative view. This suggests that some respondents are dissatisfied with certain aspects of police performance, which may stem from personal experiences or broader perceptions of police effectiveness.

When comparing responses about recent police contact (Question 10) with overall perception (Question 11), there is a clear alignment between positive experiences and favourable views of the police. In Question 10, 40.3% of respondents who had recent contact with the police rated their experience positively, while in Question 11, 36.3% of respondents held an overall positive view of WMP.

However, negative experiences seem to leave a stronger impression on those who have had direct contact with the police. In Question 10, 35.7% of respondents rated their recent experience negatively, while in Question 11, only 27.6% of respondents expressed a negative overall view of the police. This suggests that negative interactions may have a more pronounced impact on individuals' perceptions, while the general population, including those without recent contact, may be less critical overall.

The final free-text question in the survey asked respondents to identify additional police responsibilities that should be prioritised. The accompanying word cloud, **Figure 3**, highlights key priorities, with terms like community, officers, and streets which again emphasise the strong public demand for enhanced police visibility in neighbourhoods. Other notable terms, such as crime, drug, and dealing, indicate concerns about tackling drug-related offences, while words like knife violence, behaviour, and children point to a focus on addressing serious youth violence and antisocial behaviour.

Additionally, terms such as road, safety, and local suggest the need for improving road safety and strengthening local engagement. These focus areas collectively emphasise the interconnected priorities of building safer, stronger communities through visible, community-focused policing that fosters trust and addresses key public concerns, highlighting how strengthening police presence can contribute to more resilient and secure neighbourhoods.



Figure 3 Key Focus Areas of Public Responses to the Question on Additional Police Responsibilities to Prioritise

Demographics

The demographic data gathered from the consultation closely aligns with the 2021 census for the West Midlands, ensuring that the responses accurately represent the region's diverse population. For example,

just over half of the respondents identified as female, accounting for 50.9% of the total, while male respondents represented 44.7%. A small percentage, 4.4%, preferred not to disclose their sex. The overwhelming majority, 93.9%, confirmed that their gender identity aligns with what they were assigned at birth. A small proportion, 0.9%, indicated otherwise, identifying as transgender or non-binary, while 5.3% preferred not to answer the gender identity question.

In terms of age, the largest groups of respondents were aged 65-74 (17.5%) and 55-64 (17.1%), followed closely by those aged 45-54 (15.5%). Younger age groups, such as those aged 18-24 (9.5%) and under 18 (9.0%), made up smaller but still significant portions of respondents. The lowest representation among adults was in the 25-34 age group (7.8%). These responses suggest strong engagement from most age ranges, with a slight deficit in those aged 25 to 24.

Regarding ethnicity, 67.3% of respondents identified as White, with 15.5% identifying as Asian or Asian British, and 6.5% as Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African. Smaller percentages identified as Mixed or from multiple ethnic groups (2.5%) or Other (2.1%). Additionally, 6.0% preferred not to disclose their ethnicity. This diverse range of responses reflects the ethnic makeup of the West Midlands. In terms of religion, 45.1% of respondents identified as Christian, followed by 27.5% who reported having no religion, and a further 10.2% identified as Muslim. Smaller groups identified as Hindu (3.0%), Sikh (2.7%), or Buddhist (0.4%), while 8.8% preferred not to disclose their religion. This distribution reflects the multicultural nature of the region and highlights the importance of recognising the needs of various faith communities.

Responses to the question of sexuality show that 83.1% identified as heterosexual or straight, with smaller percentages identifying as gay or lesbian (2.8%), bisexual (2.5%), or other (1.0%). A notable 10.5% preferred not to disclose their sexuality. This indicates that while most participants identify as heterosexual, the consultation successfully reached individuals from a range of sexual orientations, ensuring that LGBTQ+ voices are included. Lastly, in response to the question about disability, 75.2% of respondents reported not having a disability, while 17.4% indicated they do. A further 7.5% preferred not to say.

Summary

The public consultation survey findings on the Police and Crime Plan highlights support for the proposed priorities and principles, particularly in preventing knife crime and improving police responsiveness. However, it also identifies key areas for focus, including addressing public safety concerns, enhancing communication, and strengthening police-community relations.

While many respondents feel safe in their local areas or have a sense of neutrality, a sizeable proportion of respondent's also expressed concerns about safety, both at home and in places they regularly visit.

Feedback from those who have interacted with WMP indicates mixed experiences, suggesting there is room for improvement in how the police engage with and support the public.

These findings will guide the development and implementation of the Police and Crime Plan, ensuring it reflects the needs and concerns of West Midlands communities. The feedback underscores the importance of maintaining positive police-public relationships, enhancing transparency, and addressing safety concerns across the region.

In terms of representation, the demographic data collected from the consultation aligns closely with the 2021 census for the West Midlands, ensuring that the responses reflect the region's diverse population. This strengthens the inclusivity and relevance of the consultation findings, ensuring the Police and Crime Plan is informed by a broad cross-section of the West Midlands region.

Focus Groups

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to detail the findings from focus groups conducted by the OPCC as part of the consultation process for the Police and Crime Plan. The focus groups provided an opportunity to gather direct insights from key participants, including individuals with lived-experience, victims of crime, and young people. The goal was to ensure that the plan is informed by diverse perspectives, creating a comprehensive and inclusive strategy. Participants shared their experiences, needs, and perceptions of the police and wider criminal justice system, offering crucial input to ensure the Police and Crime Plan effectively addresses community priorities and concerns.

A total of nine focus groups were conducted between 3rd September and 14th October 2024, each hosted by a different stakeholder. These focus groups were organised into two categories: Victim focus groups and main and under 25 focus groups. Participants were not pre-screened by researchers; however, host stakeholders were asked to identify any participants with vulnerabilities, risks, or the need for reasonable adjustments. Risk assessments were conducted with the hosts before the focus groups took place. All participants received an information sheet, provided informed consent, and were given the option to withdraw from the research at any time.

The focus group approach was selected for this phase of the consultation due to its ability to foster dynamic interaction among participants. The group setting encouraged open dialogue, debate, and the sharing of ideas, allowing participants to challenge and build on one another's perspectives and experiences. This interaction often uncovered insights that might not have emerged in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. While the main and under 25s focus groups followed a common set of questions, adapted slightly for younger participants, the Victims focus groups were presented with a customised, victim-specific question set to address their distinct experiences and needs.

To ensure the consistency and credibility of the thematic analysis, inter-rater reliability was calculated for coding across the focus group data. For the victims focus group, inter-rater reliability reached 90%, while the main and under 25 focus groups achieved 92%. These values indicate a high level of agreement between coders, demonstrating that the coding process was robust and that the identified themes were reliably and consistently interpreted.

Given the nature of the activities, it was deemed most effective to utilise the expertise of service providers and OPCC staff to facilitate the sessions. A researcher was present to support evidence collection and provide research ethics guidance, alongside a staff member from the host organisation to ensure

safeguarding for participants, and a notetaker. The focus group question set was reviewed by the project lead and data team. Participants included victims of crime and individuals with lived experience of the criminal justice system. To protect identities, demographics were not recorded as group sizes were small. Participants were selected through a quasi-randomised method, with host organisations randomly choosing individuals connected to their services who were available to participate.

Findings

The focus group data was analysed using an inductive thematic approach. Codes and themes were derived directly from the focus group discussions, allowing insights to emerge naturally from participants responses. The findings have been organised into two distinct sections, corresponding to each forum of focus groups: Victims focus groups and the main and under 25 groups. Within each section, the results are further structured into overarching themes and subthemes.

Victims Focus Groups

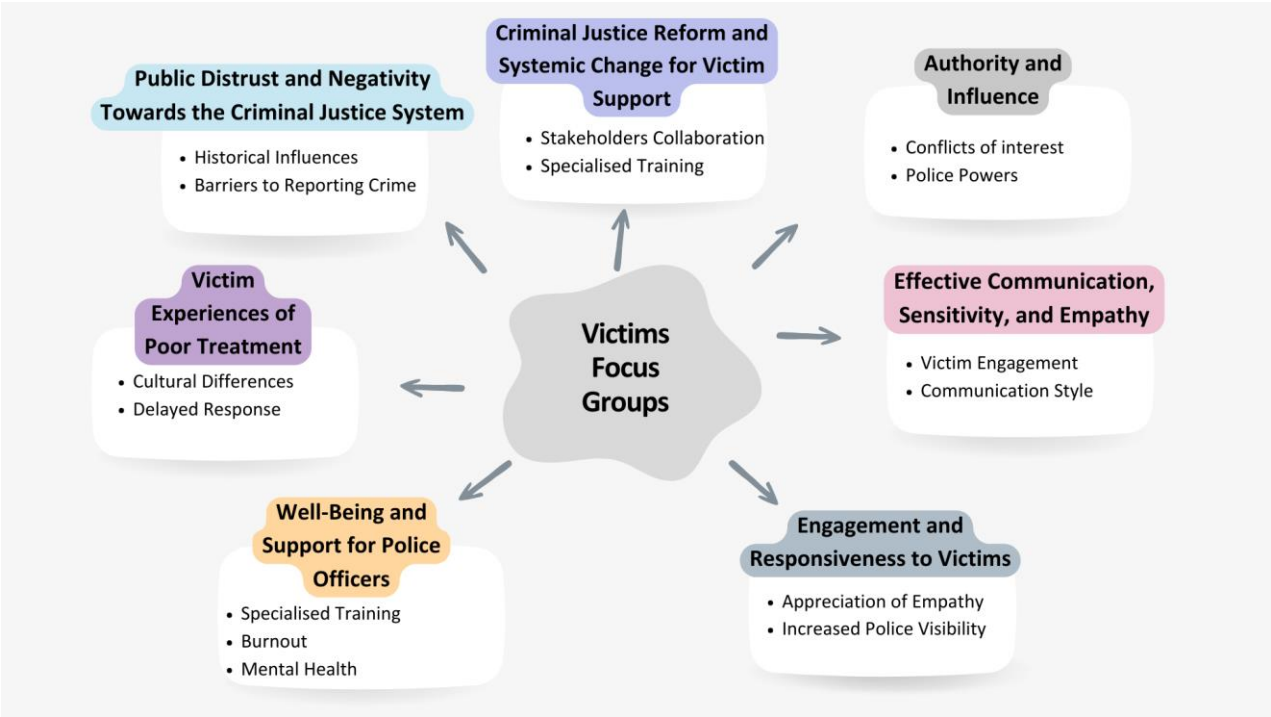


Figure 4 Victim Focus Groups Theme Map

Authority and Influence

A prominent theme emerged surrounding authority and the influence of people with powers such as police officers. Participants identified the police as figures of authority. Some participants across the focus groups identified conflicts of interest within the criminal justice system, “the police are protecting the military

offender rather supporting me". This suggests that victims feel that when offenders hold influential roles, police are more lenient or protective toward them. This theme addresses perceived institutional biases or favouritism in the criminal justice system.

A negative sentiment here reflects frustration that certain offenders may receive preferential treatment due to their status, creating a sense of injustice for victims. The theme of perceived institutional bias was further reinforced by a participant's experience attempting to report problematic police behaviour: *"making a complaint about the police didn't go anywhere"*. This emphasises how authority and influence can interfere with fair treatment within the complaints system, affecting victims trust and perceptions of processes.

Furthermore, participants raised concerns about how police communicate their authority. The quote, *"offender behaviour is a response to the abuse experienced; officers show up with the same control and authority as abusers"*, illustrates how police interactions can unintentionally mirror the dynamics of abuse victims have experienced. For abuse survivors, authoritative behaviour from the police can sometimes be perceived as aggressive, making their presence feel counterproductive and misaligned with the needs of the victim.

There were also concerns around vetting for people with authority. *"There is a need for proper vetting of officers to ensure that individuals with abusive tendencies or misogynistic beliefs are neither allowed to join nor remain in the force"*. Concerns about officers potentially being abusers or misogynists underscore a fear that some may use their authority to reinforce personal biases or cause harm rather than protect.

Communication and Engagement

Engagement and responsiveness to victims was another prominent theme throughout the focus group discussions. Many participants commented on insufficient and inconsistent responses from officers. This highlights victims' feelings of neglect or lack of priority in their interactions with the police, most participants felt that *"the police had failed them in many ways, with them feeling dismissed and trivialised throughout their engagement with the police"*.

Additionally, there was a perception that police are more responsive to offenders than victim needs, which leads to frustration among victims. Participants emphasised *"there's a noticeable difference in response; they're quick to act when I'm accused of an offence, but when I'm the victim, their support is lacking"*. This underscores the need for improvement in engagement and consistency with victims.

Another issue that emerged was the lack of awareness and communication regarding the Victim's Code. This links to the theme of a need for clearer guidelines and adherence to victims' rights. Many participants expressed frustration and disappointment, noting that they had not been informed about their rights under the Victim's Code during interactions with the police and other criminal justice agencies. Participants stated, *"Come and tell us"*, demonstrating the desire to be informed. The Victim's Code is intended to protect and empower victims by setting out their rights within the criminal justice process. However, when these rights are not communicated or upheld, it creates a perception of inattention. This highlights a sense of systemic failure, where victims feel that their needs are overlooked.

Effective communication, sensitivity, and empathy were recurring subjects noted throughout the discussions. Participants often felt a lack of compassion from officers, stating, *"their lack of sensitivity leaves us feeling terrible"* and *"police only care about the process and not the journey"*. This sentiment is largely negative, as many participants reported feeling disregarded by police officers apparent focus on procedure and *"tick boxes"* over empathy. This perception indicates a sense of disconnection between victims and the police, which can hinder trust and discourage victims from seeking help.

The perceived lack of compassion often left victims feeling devalued and dismissed by the very people meant to protect and support them. The theme underscores the importance of specialised training for police officers in identifying abuse and adapting communication styles. Many victims felt officers lacked the skills and awareness to respond compassionately. Training in trauma-informed approaches could help officers better understand victims emotional states and enable them to communicate in ways sensitive to victims' complexities. Focus group participants stated how victims are put into a *"one size fits all"* box, with no adjustments for individual needs, adding how *"more officers need training on how to treat victims with empathy, patience, and understanding"*.

While criticisms were common, some participants from the victims focus groups expressed appreciation when officers engaged effectively and demonstrated empathy. Positive interactions were highly valued by victims, who felt acknowledged and supported when officers took the time to listen, validate their experiences, and provide clear updates on their cases, with participants adding how *"support services are life changing"*.

Criminal Justice Reform and Systemic Change for Victim Support

A central theme that emerged from the focus groups was the need for criminal justice reform and systemic changes to better support victims. Participants frequently highlighted how the criminal justice system failed to address their needs, particularly in providing compassion and understanding. A closely related theme was the inadequate treatment of victims, with participants describing experiences in which they were

treated as criminals when seeking help, participants remarked *"no one sought to understand my childhood abuse or offer support, I was labelled a criminal"*, others described interactions with police and the justice system as *"invasive, re-traumatising, and problematic"*. These sentiments underscore significant gaps in the system's ability to support victims effectively, illustrating the pressing need for reform.

Moreover, a recurring theme across the focus groups was Public Distrust and Negativity towards the criminal justice system, closely tied to the issues discussed above. Some participants expressed fear and apprehension toward the police, *"we are fearful of the police"*. Rebuilding trust, they explained, would require substantial effort and time. Many participants conveyed pessimism about the criminal justice process, *"there's no justice; it makes things worse"*. This pessimistic outlook created additional barriers to engaging with the system. For some participants, mistrust stemmed from being told that their cases were not *"live"* and therefore not prioritised. This sentiment was echoed across examples of inadequate support, ranging from the initial reporting of incidents through to court proceedings. Addressing the lack of prioritisation and the perceived indifference in handling cases is critical for restoring public faith in the system and ensuring victims feel heard and supported.

A notable subtheme was Cultural Differences as a Barrier to Victim Support. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of accessible and culturally sensitive support services. They offered suggestions for improvement, such as, *"make sure support is accessible, increase awareness campaigns, and provide more culturally sensitive and multilingual options for different communities"*. Misunderstandings or a lack of awareness about cultural norms and practices were seen as significant obstacles to assisting victims effectively. Such barriers often result in inadequate support and leave victims feeling underserved.

Participants also raised concerns about Delayed Response Times to incidents and investigations, expressing significant frustration with prolonged case handling and inefficiencies. These delays were perceived as obstacles to justice and further highlighted the need for further reform. Quotes such as *"timescales are ineffective"* and *"improve investigations"* emphasised participants calls for more timely and efficient processes to ensure victims feel supported and that justice is pursued without unnecessary delays.

Support and Well-Being

Another significant theme that emerged was the Well-Being and Support of Police Officers themselves. Participants observed that many officers appeared burned out, overwhelmed, and under-supported in their roles, which could negatively affect the quality of service provided to victims, participants noted *"Police officer welfare is important; there are so many burnt-out officers"*. The intense demands of policing, combined with limited resources and constant exposure to traumatic situations, were seen as contributing factors to officer fatigue and emotional exhaustion. This theme highlights the need for greater awareness

and investment in the mental health and well-being of police officers to ensure they can perform their duties effectively and with empathy.

Participants also emphasised the need for Outsourced Training by Experts rather than in-house training conducted by other officers. Participants observed how “*police officers shouldn’t always be trained in-house by other officers; they need outsourced experts*”. Such training would equip officers with additional skills and knowledge, enabling them to approach sensitive cases with greater confidence and competence. This, in turn, could improve employment satisfaction and reduce frustration, with officers feeling more supported and capable in their roles.

Therefore, this theme revealed a mix of sentiments. On one hand, participants expressed empathy and concern for officers' mental health, recognising the challenges they face. On the other hand, there was frustration, as some felt that officer burnout and stress could lead to dismissive or inadequate interactions, ultimately harming victims experiences.

Main and Under 25s Focus Groups

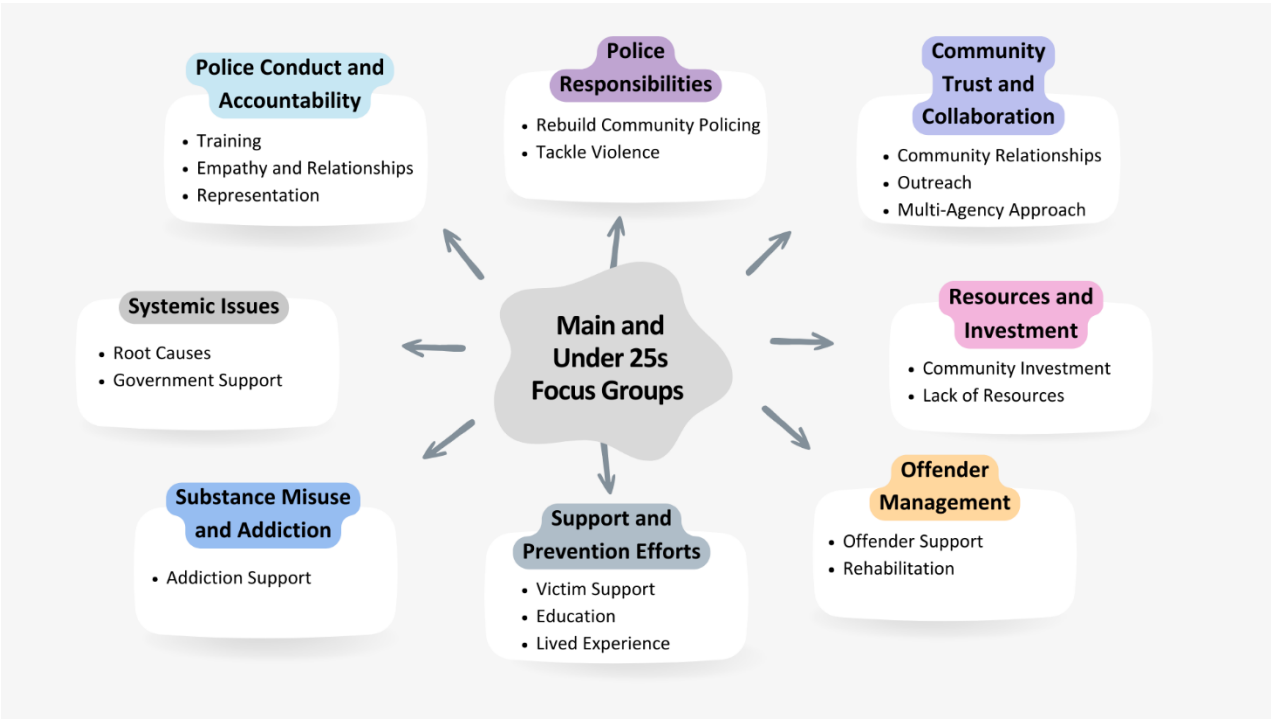


Figure 5 Main and Under 25 Focus Groups Theme Map

Police Responsibilities

An overarching theme throughout the main and under 25s focus group was Police Responsibilities. Participants from the under 25s focus group shared detailed views on what they believe the core responsibilities of the police should be. Their responses highlighted specific areas of priority. Many

participants expressed a strong emphasis on the police's role in preventing violence, particularly against women, girls, and vulnerable people. Statements like *"preventing violence against women, girls, and vulnerable people"* and *"preventing knife crime"* were repeated by multiple contributors, reflecting a concern about safety and the pervasive risks of violence in their communities. There was a clear frustration with the perceived over-focus on minor offences. Participants stated that officers should prioritise serious crimes over petty issues, *"instead of focusing on petty crimes, they should concentrate on serious crimes"*.

The participants also saw police responsibilities extending beyond preventative crime measures, emphasising the importance of rebuilding trust and communities through active engagement. Statements like *"tackle violence and rebuild communities"* and *"more community policing in the city"* suggest a call for greater presence in local areas. These reflections underline the importance of aligning policing strategies with the priorities of young people, who expect the police to take a proactive approach to their communities' specific needs.

Participants from the primary focus groups shared similar views with those under 25, agreeing that addressing *"violence against women and girls and domestic abuse as significant issues is essential to the plan's priorities"*. They also emphasised the importance of tackling organised crime, highlighting its role in reducing smaller, related offences.

The main focus groups raised concerns about the clarity of police responsibilities, with participants criticising the Police and Crime Plan priorities as overly complex and suggesting they *"need to be simplified"*. They highlighted the importance of using clear, straightforward language, questioning, *"what actions are going to be done to actually prevent crime?"*. This underscores the need for easily understandable strategies and greater public engagement. Additionally, several participants felt there were *"too many responsibilities"*, describing them all as unrealistic and expressed pessimism about the ability of the police to fulfil the responsibilities.

Community Trust and Collaboration

A strong theme from the under 25s was the need for greater community collaboration, especially by creating safe spaces and support systems. For instance, *"more community workers, more places for young people"* reflects the desire for proactive initiatives that engage and support young people, reducing the chances of them turning to crime. Many young participants highlighted the poor state of trust between communities and the police. Contributions such as *"relationships between the community and police are not good"* suggest that some feelings of mistrust stem from poor community engagement and interactions. Young participants emphasised the importance of trust and confidence to eliminate fear of the police. As one quote affirmed, *"trust and confidence is important so young people don't fear police"*. This reflects the

need for policing approaches that are adapted to young people and the need for strategies to foster trust and confidence in the police amongst young people.

The participants from the main focus groups strongly emphasise the need for police to be more invested in communities, suggesting that officers should stay longer in the same areas rather than being “parachuted” in for short periods. This call for greater investment and longevity in community policing suggests that people want more consistent relationships between officers and the communities they serve. The idea is that police need to be seen as part of the community rather than a reactive service.

Many participants from the main focus group emphasised that respect and trust can only be established through consistent engagement with communities. They stressed the importance of police officers understanding and empathising with the communities they serve. This aligns with the under 25s' focus on the need for police to target the right individuals. However, the main focus group placed greater emphasis on building trust through long-term, relationship-driven approaches rather than solely prioritising targeted enforcement.

The main focus groups also emphasised that community resources should be better utilised. This idea parallels the under 25s suggestions for more support and involvement from community organisations in helping young people make better choices. A consistent subtheme across the main focus groups was the importance of working in partnership with other organisations, the collaboration between the CJS and other agencies. Participants talked about the need for “*better partnership working*”. This can interrelate with utilising community resources in a more efficient way, community services need to work better with the CJS in order to improve support and prevention methods.

Police Conduct and Accountability

The insights shared by the under 25s group highlight how police conduct can directly impact the experiences of young individuals, particularly in terms of communication, respect, and sensitivity. Participants in this group stressed the importance of clear communication, with one stating, “*when people have difficulty understanding what is happening, it should be explained differently*”. This highlights the need for officers to adapt their explanations to ensure understanding. Effective communication is a critical aspect of professional police behaviour, and the suggestion to explain situations differently when individuals struggle to understand reflects a need for officers to prioritise clarity and empathy in their interactions. Furthermore, participants revealed the importance of recognising the needs of young women, with one participant noting, “*the police need to treat girls with the consideration of female specific needs*”. This contribution underlines the importance of training and a more empathetic approach from officers to ensure respectful and fair treatment, particularly for young and vulnerable groups.

Additionally, instances of racial profiling, such as being disproportionately subjected to stop and search procedures, were highlighted as examples of negative experiences with police conduct. One participant shared, *"I have been stopped and searched many times"*, underscoring a perceived lack of fairness and equity in policing practices. This statement reflects not just an individual experience but a broader sentiment that such actions may contribute to distrust and a sense of systemic bias within affected communities.

The participants within the main focus groups highlighted the need for lived experience-informed practices to improve police conduct and empathetic interactions. Participants expressed a shared belief that it *"comes down to training"* and that proper training should go beyond basic instruction, such as *"pressing a computer button"*, to include face-to-face, person-centred learning, this training would in turn improve police conduct. Participants expressed frustration with the culture of police misconduct and the lack of accountability within the police. Many participants attributed police misconduct to inexperienced *"rookie"* officers, emphasising the need for mentorship. They highlighted the importance of pairing new recruits with experienced role models to promote professionalism and set a positive example. Accountability also emerged as a central subject of discussion, with participants calling for a cultural shift within policing to prioritise responsibility and oversight. As one participant succinctly put it, *"a lot of it circles back to accountability"*. However, there was noticeable scepticism about the feasibility of achieving such change, with a participant remarking, *"good luck changing that culture"*, reflecting a sense of resignation and doubt about the capacity for the police to reform culture and accountability.

Resources and Investment

Participants in the main focus group stressed that effectively tackling issues of crime and policing demands substantial investment in resources. They unanimously agreed that funding is insufficient, with one participant stating, *"it is underfunded, all police forces are"*. Others pointed out that a better allocation of resources could address deeper systemic issues, with participants suggesting, *"the organisation of resources is not good enough and needs to be sorted if the police and crime plan is going to work"*. This interrelates with the theme of community collaboration, where several participants called for greater investment in community support services. One participant highlighted the importance of early intervention, stating, *"neighbourhood crime could be prevented if support services, including youth clubs and addiction services, were available"*. This reflects a shared view among participants that investment in prevention and support services is crucial for addressing the root causes of crime.

Furthermore, the group was particularly vocal about the need for more police presence in communities. Many felt that an increased police presence would make people feel safer and help reduce crime in local

neighbourhoods. Participants remarked, *"If we saw police on our streets, then there would be less crime"*. However, an increase in police presence would call for an increase in investment to the workforce. The idea of redirecting proceeds of crime to fund community initiatives was widely supported. Participants suggested that money, property, and possessions seized from criminals should be reinvested into communities to fund youth programs and services.

Support and Prevention Efforts

Young people in the Under 25s focus group expressed concern about the lack of adequate support and preventive measures in their communities for their age group. Participants shared how *"the police don't do enough to protect people"*, highlighting the perceived inadequacy amongst young participants. The need for improved protection and support for victims and witnesses was also a key concern, with several participants highlighting that these individuals often feel neglected and unsupported. One participant stressed, *"listen to victims and treat them with respect, not like criminals"*. This sentiment underscores a demand for a more empathetic approach, particularly in cases involving vulnerable groups. Participants in the under 25s group expressed concerns that the current system fails to prioritise listening to victims voices. Across the main focus groups, there was a strong emphasis on victim-centred support, with participants highlighting significant gaps in how victims are treated. They discussed the harm caused by mislabelling and a lack of understanding from criminal justice agencies, emphasising the need for a more compassionate and responsive system.

Many young participants highlighted the importance of providing targeted support for youth aged 10–25, identifying this group as particularly in need of interventions to prevent engagement in harmful activities. They suggested measures such as increased school visits to educate children about the risks of criminalisation. One participant remarked, establishments should *"do more school visits and make children aware of the risks of criminalisation"*, reflecting a shared belief that education and early intervention can serve as effective deterrents. Likewise, the main focus groups strongly agreed that targeted interventions could help break the cycle of harm. A recurring theme was the vital role schools play in early education and engagement. Participants advocated for the inclusion of life skills in the curriculum, with one remarking, *"teach life skills in schools"* emphasising the importance of early intervention to deter offending. Another noted, *"kids will revert to crime if this support is lacking"*, linking the absence of preventative measures to an increased likelihood of repeat offences.

Substance Abuse and Addiction

The theme of substance abuse and addiction featured prominently in the main focus group discussions, revealing systemic challenges and opportunities for reform. Participants consistently called for a shift from

punitive responses to a more rehabilitative approach to addiction. A key point raised was the need to address societal perceptions of addiction. Comments such as *“break the stigma of drug users typically being unemployed”* highlighted the importance of public education and campaigns to challenge stereotypes and demonstrate that addiction affects individuals from all walks of life. One participant observed, *“the public say, lock them all up”*, pointing out how punitive public attitudes hinder meaningful efforts to address addiction.

Negative sentiments were expressed about the criminal justice system’s current approach to addiction, with participants advocating for rehabilitation rather than punishment. *“Police punish, not rehabilitate”*, one participant noted, urging a shift in focus to treatment and recovery. Another added, *“it should be treated like an illness”*, calling for addiction to be reframed as a health issue rather than a crime. Barriers to accessing recovery services emerged as a recurring concern. Participants shared frustrations over delays in receiving help, with one remarking, *“appointment times are too distant in the future”*, emphasising the need for more streamlined and accessible services.

The importance of incorporating lived experience into shaping policies and interventions was also highlighted. As one participant stated, *“lived experience should guide rehabilitative processes”*, underscoring the value of evidence-based, empathetic approaches in designing effective recovery programmes. Together, these insights reflect a strong desire for systemic change that prioritises education, timely support, and a focus on recovery over punishment.

Systemic Issues

The main focus group discussions revealed deep concerns about systemic failures in tackling crime, inequality, and broader societal challenges. Participants highlighted broken structures and emphasised the need for transformational reform. A strong sense of frustration with the current political climate emerged, encapsulated by one participant’s comment: *“the government is letting us down, and has done for a long time”*. There was a clear call for greater honesty and accountability from leadership, with participants expressing a desire to understand how policy changes will unfold in the future.

Generational dynamics in policing and community relations were also a recurring theme. Participants identified *“differing expectations”* between older generations, who favour visible policing, and younger generations, who have become accustomed to minimal police presence and engagement. They advocated for a shift in policing strategy from reactive *“crisis management”* to a more proactive, community-based approach, emphasising the need for police to be present and engaged beyond moments of emergency.

Knife crime arose as a key concern, with participants pointing to poverty and fear as driving factors. One participant noted, *“young people carry knives and join gangs because they’re afraid”*. There was a strong call for a root-cause approach to address these issues, urging the criminal justice system to focus on underlying factors such as socioeconomic deprivation, mental health struggles, and unstable home environments, all of which were seen as exacerbating the problem.

The intersection of the cost-of-living crisis and crime was also frequently discussed. Participants linked economic deprivation to rising crime rates, with one stating, *“people shoplift and steal because there aren’t any police”* highlighting both economic hardship and perceived gaps in police presence as contributors to offending. These reflections underline a pressing desire for systemic reform aimed at addressing the root causes of inequality and crime. Participants also called for greater governmental accountability and decisive action to create meaningful change.

Summary

The insights from the main, under 25s, and victim focus groups highlight both common concerns and unique perspectives regarding public perceptions of policing. Several recurring themes emerged: police responsibilities, communication, community engagement, accountability, and systemic challenges. Collectively, the feedback underscores a desire for a police service that is more empathetic, community-focused, and accountable. Central to the discussions is the need for clear priorities, deeper engagement with communities, and systemic reforms to address the root causes of crime while rebuilding trust and confidence in the police.

A consistent theme across all focus groups was the lack of meaningful communication and engagement from police officers. Participants in the under 25s group expressed feelings of being dismissed and misunderstood, sentiments echoed by victims who described a lack of adequate support. Concerns about authority figures and perceived biases were also raised by the under 25s, aligning with victims frustrations. Across all groups, there was a shared sense of distrust toward the criminal justice system.

While participants acknowledged the challenging nature of police work, they emphasised that officer well-being should not come at the expense of community needs. Many called for enhanced training to improve interactions and outcomes. These recurring themes provide a clear framework for shaping policies that respond to the needs and expectations of diverse communities, fostering greater trust and collaboration.

Youth Evaluation

Introduction

As part of the Police and Crime Plan consultation process, an extensive call for evidence was issued to partners, stakeholders, and subject matter experts. This formal request aimed to gather valuable information, data, and insights to inform and shape the plan. By collecting diverse perspectives and experiences, the process ensures that the Police and Crime Plan is grounded in robust evidence and informed by legitimate knowledge. Involving a wide range of organisations and individuals makes the development process more inclusive and transparent, ensuring that a broad spectrum of voices is heard and considered. This section of the findings report highlights the evidence provided regarding young people.

Youth Evidence

- Violence Reduction Partnership – Public Perceptions Survey.
- Safer Together – Research Project titled *"Perspectives on Violence: Youth Voice"*.
- The Positive Youth Foundation – Youth Assembly Consultations.
- The SHAPE Programme.
- Youth Assembly and Young Combined Authority Meeting.
- Violence Against Women and Girls Survey and Focus Group.
- Digital Youth Event – Addressing Young People's Perceptions of the Police.
- Independent Office of Police Conduct Youth Panel National Survey Report.
- My Tomorrow *"A conversation with"*.
- West Midlands Young Combined Authority – Race Equality Youth Summit.

Findings

Perceptions of Safety in the West Midlands

In the summer of 2023, the Violence Reduction Partnership conducted an online survey to explore public perceptions of safety across the West Midlands and gain insights into local crime issues. The survey attracted 1,259 responses, providing valuable perspectives on community safety, particularly concerning young people.

A key finding identified drug accessibility and use among young people as the leading safety concern (12%). When respondents were asked, *"what issues are affecting the safety of young people?"*, the survey also highlighted distinct concerns across different age groups:

- **Ages 14-17:** The primary concerns were robbery and violence.

- **Ages 18-21:** Issues related to their living environment, mental health, and safer driving.
- **Ages 22-25:** The main concerns were violence, knife crime, and harassment.

Overall, 28% of respondents reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe in their local area, underscoring significant concerns about community safety, particularly for younger residents.

Insights from Youth on Violence and Safety

Safer Together, a West Midlands-based organisation, conducted a research project titled *"Perspectives on Violence: Youth Voice – A Summary Report"* on behalf of the Violence Reduction Partnership. This study focused on youth engagement and aimed to inform the Partnership's broader strategy. Utilising qualitative methods such as focus groups and interviews, it revealed three prominent themes: Policing, Local Community Investment, and Violence.

Policing was a key concern for many young participants, who expressed a strong desire for more visible policing in their communities. They believed that increased police presence would enhance their sense of safety and security.

Community investment emerged as another significant theme. The research revealed that young people, particularly those from disadvantaged areas, often felt a deep sense of hopelessness about their future prospects. They reported a lack of opportunities or accessible positive activities in their communities, with some even unaware of the resources that were available. This disconnect appeared to amplify feelings of disappointment and frustration.

Violence and poverty were also prominent issues raised by the participants. Young people shared their fears about violence and harm in their communities, explaining how poverty and deprivation profoundly shaped their experiences. Some expressed that engaging in criminal activities, often linked to violence, was seen as the only viable means of achieving financial stability in adulthood.

These findings highlight the intersection of socioeconomic factors and youth violence, emphasising the need for targeted interventions that address both safety and opportunity within disadvantaged communities.

Youth-Led Initiatives and Community Investment

The Positive Youth Foundation, based in the West Midlands, is dedicated to enhancing opportunities and raising aspirations for young people aged 8 to 25 who face challenging circumstances. By leveraging partnerships, advocacy, and co-commissioning, the foundation aims to improve the life outcomes of these individuals.

In collaboration with the Violence Reduction Partnership, the Positive Youth Foundation is co-developing a West Midlands Youth Assembly to tackle issues related to youth violence. Ahead of the assembly's launch, consultations were held with young people in Coventry and Walsall to gather their views on how to improve their communities.

A key theme emerging from these consultations was the need for greater investment in community resources. Young people highlighted the importance of specific facilities, including food banks, youth centres, and homeless shelters, in addressing community challenges.

These findings emphasise the critical role of community investment and the provision of essential services in alleviating poverty, promoting well-being, and preventing youth violence.

Insights from School-Aged Children: The SHAPE Programme

The SHAPE Programme, a Child's Voice Initiative in Sandwell, focuses on engaging with children and young people to influence decisions impacting their well-being. In 2024, the programme conducted a survey with participants aged 8 to 18 to gather insights into their experiences with mental health, their local communities, and education.

The survey identified knife crime, gang activity, and youth violence as the most pressing concerns for young people in the West Midlands. These issues have been consistently highlighted in surveys since 2015, demonstrating their ongoing relevance. Over 1,000 young respondents indicated that reducing crime would significantly improve their local area, underscoring the profound impact of crime on their daily lives.

In addition to concerns about crime, mental health challenges were also prominently reported. The survey emphasised the need for improved support within schools and communities to address these issues, particularly in the context of safety and violence. These findings highlight the critical need for targeted interventions to enhance both safety and mental well-being for young people.

The SHAPE Programme also facilitates the *National Takeover Challenge*, an initiative that empowers children and young people by allowing them to step into adult roles within organisations. On 20th March 2024, the challenge was hosted by the WMP board, where young participants shared their perspectives on critical issues such as gangs, youth crime, stop and search practices, and hate crime.

A recurring concern raised by the young participants was the underlying reasons for knife carrying. Many highlighted that individuals often carry knives out of fear or due to peer pressure, with some viewing gang affiliation as a form of protection against external threats. These insights shed light on the connection

between knife crime, gang involvement, and feelings of vulnerability, suggesting that such behaviours are frequently driven by a need for self-defence rather than criminal intent.

One of the most debated topics during the event was the use of stop and search tactics by police, particularly when conducted in schools. Young people expressed alarm over the potential harm caused when these searches are carried out without parental notification or adequate support. A poignant example was shared about a student being strip-searched at school without their parents being informed, leaving the child traumatised. This incident highlighted serious concerns about the balance between maintaining school safety and safeguarding students' rights, as well as the need for better support systems following such interventions.

Hate crime was another key topic of discussion. Young participants voiced concerns about how prejudice and discrimination perpetuate fear and exclusion within their communities, stressing the importance of addressing these issues to create a more inclusive and supportive environment. Therefore, these presentations underscored the importance of listening to young people's experiences to shape policies that foster safety, fairness, and well-being.

Youth Assembly and Young Combined Authority Meeting

In September 2024, the Violence Reduction Partnership engaged with 27 members of the Youth Assembly and Young Combined Authority during their monthly meeting in Coventry. This session offered young people a platform to voice their perspectives on safety, policing, and crime in their communities.

The participants expressed a profound mistrust of policing, citing poor communication and an inconsistent police presence as key issues. They reported that the absence of visible policing, particularly in deprived areas, left them feeling neglected and unsafe. They emphasised that simply increasing diversity in police recruitment would not rebuild trust; instead, they called for consistent and meaningful engagement to develop stronger relationships.

Concerns were raised about a perceived rise in youth violence, theft, and robbery within their communities. Social media was identified as a significant driver of violence, with participants frustrated by what they saw as adults' and authorities' inability to effectively address the issue. Girls and young women, in particular, reported feeling unsafe, with some being advised to stay indoors as a precaution against potential harm.

There was also widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of investment in deprived areas. Participants noted that wealthier neighbourhoods appeared safer and better resourced, while their own communities felt

overlooked. They called for greater transparency in how public funds are allocated and questioned whether their areas were receiving any meaningful benefits.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Survey and Focus Group

As part of the evaluation, a survey and a series of focus groups were conducted to explore young people's views on VAWG, harassment, and broader social issues impacting their safety and well-being. The survey received 25 responses, and 10 individuals, including four Youth Commissioners from the OPCC, participated in the focus groups. All sessions adhered to safeguarding protocols to ensure participants safety and comfort.

A recurring theme was the widespread concern about VAWG. While some participants expressed a sense of hopelessness about meaningful change, others were more optimistic, suggesting that education and awareness campaigns could lead to progress. Verbal harassment, such as catcalling, was identified as a *"gateway"* harm, normalising more severe behaviours.

Discussions highlighted the lack of positive male role models, with many boys and young men being influenced by controversial figures on social media. Participants called for more school-based interventions and teacher training to address and challenge problematic behaviours effectively. The phrase *"boys will be boys"* was often mentioned as a justification for verbal harassment, reflecting a culture of toxic gender norms and ingrained misogyny. Many participants were concerned that some boys appear indifferent to the harm they cause, treating such behaviour as a way to gain social status among peers.

Parenting, education, cultural, and religious influences were identified as critical factors shaping boys' attitudes towards acceptable behaviour. Participants also raised broader issues linked to gender norms and violence, such as female genital mutilation and domestic abuse, underscoring the need for a holistic approach to addressing these challenges.

Digital Youth Event – Addressing Young People's Perceptions of the Police

As part of ongoing community engagement efforts, a session was held involving young people, police officers, mentors, and developers to examine the strained relationship between the police and youth in the West Midlands. The event, titled *"Addressing Young People's Perception of the Police"*, aimed to foster dialogue on the factors driving mistrust and explore potential solutions.

The discussions uncovered a wide range of emotions and insights regarding young people's experiences with the police. A common theme was a pervasive lack of trust, with many young attendees expressing fear of police interactions. They felt these encounters often lead to judgement or dismissal rather than support. This distrust discourages young people from reporting crimes or seeking police assistance, as they believe their concerns will either be ignored or not taken seriously.

Body-worn video was proposed as a tool to improve trust during police interactions. However, scepticism emerged regarding its effectiveness in holding officers accountable. Some participants expressed frustration, feeling that even when videos capture misconduct, proper consequences rarely follow, fostering a perception that officers can act with impunity.

A recurring sentiment among young attendees was that many officers appear to lack empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by young people. They suggested that adopting a more compassionate and approachable attitude could help reduce feelings of power imbalance and build bridges between the police and the youth.

Social media's influence on perceptions of the police was another key topic. Platforms like TikTok and Snapchat were identified as the primary sources of news and information for most attendees, with traditional media like newspapers or official news websites rarely consulted. Young people noted that police are often portrayed negatively on social media, where viral content tends to highlight incidents of poor conduct. They acknowledged that they seldom encounter positive stories about the police, contributing to an imbalanced and predominantly negative perception.

The session provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving relationships between the police and young people, highlighting the need for trust-building, accountability, and a more empathetic approach.

Independent Office of Police Conduct Youth Panel National Survey Report

The Independent Office of Police Conduct Youth Panel conducted a national survey to explore young people's views on policing and the police complaints process across England and Wales. The West Midlands emerged as one of the regions with the highest number of respondents. The survey revealed a continued decline in trust in the police among young people, with 37% of respondents reporting that their trust had decreased over the past year. A key factor driving this decline is the negative portrayal of police in the media, particularly following high-profile incidents. The murder of Sarah Everard remains a pivotal event, deeply affecting young people, especially young women. Many expressed serious doubts about the police's

ability and willingness to protect them from violence and harassment. A significant number of young women stated they would not feel safe around male officers and would hesitate to report incidents of sexual assault or harassment. This highlights a profound and ongoing crisis in trust regarding the police's response to VAWG.

Young people from the LGBTQ+ community also voiced concerns, citing a lack of confidence in the police's seriousness when handling reports of hate crimes. Many feared their identity would influence how they were perceived and treated, leading to doubts about being understood or believed. This mistrust has fostered feelings of vulnerability, with LGBTQ+ respondents worried that interactions with the police might result in further marginalisation. Additionally, individuals shared experiences of racial profiling and excessive use of force, often based solely on their appearance. These incidents have contributed to a significant erosion of trust, with many young people feeling that the police do not see them as worthy of protection or assistance. The survey underscores the urgent need for policing reforms and community engagement to address these concerns, rebuild trust, and ensure all young people feel safe and supported.

My Tomorrow "A Conversation With..."

The aim of the *My Tomorrow* conversation space sessions is to provide young people with an opportunity to influence decision-makers and shape policies that impact their lives. These sessions serve as a platform for youth voices to be heard and considered in the decision-making process. The following insights stem from an action plan formulated following one such session. For example, young people highlighted that communication from the police is often insufficient and rarely aligns with their preferred platforms. A key action point identified was the need to review current communication strategies and explore specific training for police recruits. This training would aim to enhance officers' ability to engage effectively with young people and build stronger connections.

To foster trust, participants stressed the importance of the police gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by young people, such as feeling unsafe in public spaces. There was a strong call for increased police patrols in key hotspot areas to enhance visibility and safety. Additionally, young people advocated for regular consultations with them regarding violence prevention and planning. This approach ensures that policing strategies are informed by their perspectives and lived experiences. Another concern raised was the lack of awareness among young people about available youth services and safe spaces in their communities. Addressing this issue by improving access to information and resources would further support their well-being and safety.

The Race Equality Youth Summit

The Race Equality Youth Summit, held on 11 July 2024, was organised by the West Midlands Young Combined Authority in partnership with the Race Equality Taskforce. This youth-led event aimed to empower young people to shape the policy development of the West Midlands Combined Authority and its partners. Approximately 200 young people, policymakers, and professionals attended, participating in workshops and a youth panel discussion that centred on career pathways, youth justice, and mental health.

A significant focus was the criminal justice system, where young people from racialised communities raised concerns about fairness and equality. They emphasised the need for a justice system that is empathetic, culturally aware, and reflective of the communities it serves. Several key areas for improvement were identified:

- Young people highlighted the importance of addressing the root causes and vulnerabilities that lead to offending, advocating for an approach that recognises them as valued members of their communities.
- Specialised training for police officers and educators was suggested, focusing on cultural awareness and systemic factors that influence youth behaviour to ensure interactions are fair and non-discriminatory.
- Participants stressed the importance of relatable role models and a police workforce that represents the diversity of the communities they serve.
- They called for increased engagement between police, schools, and young people to foster meaningful and positive relationships.

The discussions at the summit stressed a collective aspiration for a justice system and community institutions that actively prioritise equity, respect, and inclusion. Participants expressed a clear vision for a system that goes beyond traditional enforcement to address systemic barriers and societal inequalities that disproportionately impact communities. They called for the justice system to adopt a holistic approach, recognising, and responding to the diverse needs and lived experiences of young people. This includes fostering trust through transparency, ensuring accountability in practices, and creating safe spaces for dialogue between young people and those in positions of authority. By prioritising these principles, participants believed that the justice system and related institutions could build stronger, more inclusive communities where every individual feels valued and empowered to contribute.

Key Themes

The following themes and subthemes emerged from the evaluation.

Themes	Subthemes
<i>Community and Youth Safety Concerns</i>	Community safety concerns Age-specific safety concerns Drug accessibility and youth safety Knife crime, gang activity, and youth violence as persistent issues Gang involvement and protection
<i>Policing, Trust, and Perceptions of Crime</i>	Policing and safety Perceptions of crime and its impact on the community Young people's concerns about stop and search tactics Gender differences and trust in policing
<i>Social and Economic Drivers of Crime</i>	Violence, poverty, and crime as economic solutions Hate crime and discrimination Misogyny and gender norms
<i>Impact of Safety Concerns on Wellbeing</i>	Impact of safety concerns on mental health Social media influences
<i>Youth-Led and Community-Based Solutions</i>	Youth-led initiatives and community resources Community investment

Table 3 Youth Evaluation Themes and Subthemes

Summary

The evaluation findings underscore critical issues surrounding youth safety, community resources, and violence, emphasising the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of violence in disadvantaged communities.

The evidence reveals frustration among young people, driven by inadequate investment and crime prevention efforts in deprived areas of the West Midlands. Many contributions to the evaluation report highlight feelings of insecurity and a desire for enhanced community engagement. They call for a more visible police presence, increased transparency regarding police funding, and proactive action to address concerns about discrimination. Improved police engagement with local communities would help rebuild trust, enabling young people to share their concerns directly with frontline officers and fostering stronger relationships.

Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of policing. Platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat, frequently used by young people for news, often amplify negative portrayals of the police, including viral incidents of misconduct. While some acknowledge that social media may not fully reflect reality, the consistent exposure to negative content fuels mistrust, especially as positive interactions with the police rarely receive similar attention.

Trust in policing is further undermined by gender and racial inequalities. For instance, young women often lack confidence in the police to protect them from sexual violence, with high-profile cases like Sarah Everard and David Carrick reinforcing their fears. Many believe their concerns would not be taken seriously if they were victims of such crimes. Similarly, young people from ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ communities frequently report experiences of profiling, excessive force, and a lack of understanding from the police, further entrenching feelings of exclusion and mistrust.

The evaluation also highlights the connection between socio-economic factors and crime. Young people emphasise the importance of greater community investment, increased opportunities, and resources to provide alternatives to criminal activity. Poverty and deprivation are seen as key drivers of crime, with some describing how financial pressures leave them feeling that criminality is their only viable option. Addressing these root causes of crime through preventative measures is essential.

Gang violence and knife crime are highlighted as particularly concerning issues, with many young people expressing fears of victimisation or being drawn into such activities. This underscores the need for targeted education and prevention programmes to raise awareness of the risks and harms associated with gang involvement and knife crime.

Accordingly, the evidence underscores a need for comprehensive strategies to enhance youth safety, prevent crime, and invest in communities. Young people's perspectives reveal mistrust in policing, shaped by social media, personal experiences, and systemic inequalities related to gender and race. This distrust, compounded by the socio-economic drivers of crime, calls for more transparent community engagement, targeted prevention efforts, and a concerted focus on addressing the root causes of violence and disadvantage.

Discussion

The findings from the public consultation on the Police and Crime Plan 2025-2029 reveal detailed insights into community priorities, perceptions of safety, and expectations for policing in the West Midlands. This discussion synthesises these insights, addressing the implications for policing strategies and community engagement while highlighting areas requiring attention to achieve the Plan's objectives.

A key takeaway from the consultation is the alignment between public concerns and the proposed priorities. The overwhelming support (93.8%) for the priorities and principles on the plan on a page underscores public agreement with the strategic focus areas, including preventing knife crime, combating violence against women and girls, and rebuilding community policing. This alignment provides a strong mandate for implementing the priorities in the Plan but also highlights the need for robust action to meet these expectations.

The emphasis on visible policing, community engagement, and addressing knife crime reflects a public desire for proactive and preventative measures. Addressing these issues requires targeted strategies, such as enhanced neighbourhood policing and youth-focused interventions, to ensure tangible improvements in safety and public confidence in policing. The mixed perceptions of safety, with 37.1% of respondents feeling neutral about safety where they live, reveal an opportunity for improvement. While a notable proportion feel safe (34.1%), the 28.1% who feel unsafe or very unsafe indicate the need for targeted efforts in areas experiencing higher crime or a lack of visible policing.

The reported apprehension about safety in locations beyond home areas, as highlighted by those who regularly work or volunteer elsewhere, suggests the need for broader regional strategies that ensure consistency in safety measures across the West Midlands. Addressing public concerns about safety could involve increasing police presence in high-risk areas, enhancing public communication about safety initiatives, and building partnerships with community organisations. Moreover, developing the community alert system further and increasing collaboration with neighbourhood watch initiatives can aid in increasing a sense of security within communities.

In addition, the consultation findings reveal a dual narrative about police conduct. Positive interactions, as noted by 40.3% of respondents, reinforce trust and satisfaction. However, the 35.7% reporting negative experiences highlight areas requiring attention, particularly around communication, empathy, and procedural fairness. The focus group discussions further emphasised concerns about racial profiling, insufficient victim support, and perceptions of police misconduct.

Rebuilding trust and improving community relations necessitate systemic changes in training, accountability, and cultural practices within WMP. The call for trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches, along with outsourcing training to experts, provides actionable pathways for addressing these issues. Developing consistent, transparent accountability mechanisms will also be critical for fostering public confidence in policing practices.

Youth engagement also emerged as a central theme, with young people calling for safe spaces, education on criminalisation risks, and more direct engagement with police officers. Events such as the WMP Football Tournament exemplify successful strategies for connecting with younger demographics. However, the findings underscore the need for sustained efforts to build trust and collaboration between the police and young people across the region.

Participants in both the main and under 25s focus groups highlighted the importance of community-based solutions, including greater investment in youth clubs, addiction recovery services, and neighbourhood support programs. These initiatives align with public expectations for proactive prevention and intervention strategies. Strengthening partnerships with local organisations can amplify these efforts, ensuring resources are effectively mobilised to address community-specific needs. Creating mentorship programs and workshops tailored for young individuals could also foster positive relationships and deter criminal behaviour.

The focus group findings on victim experiences highlight significant gaps in the criminal justice system, particularly around communication, timeliness, together with knowledge and adherence to the Victim's Code. Participants expressed frustration over being treated insensitively or feeling dismissed. Addressing these concerns requires systemic reforms to ensure victims are treated with respect and empathy throughout their interactions with the police and the broader justice system.

Enhancing victim support through specialised training, clear communication of rights, and streamlined processes can help rebuild trust. The emphasis on trauma-informed practices and culturally sensitive support services reflects an urgent need to adapt approaches to the diverse needs of the West Midlands population. Expanding victim advocacy initiatives and ensuring robust follow-up mechanisms could also enhance the overall experience for victims navigating the justice system.

The consultation findings underscore the importance of adequate resources for achieving the Plan's objectives. Concerns about underfunding, inefficient resource allocation, and officer burnout point to systemic challenges within WMP. Investing in officer wellbeing and providing adequate training and support can enhance service quality and workforce resilience.

Additionally, the public's support for reinvesting proceeds of crime into community initiatives highlights an opportunity to address funding gaps creatively. This approach could fund youth initiatives, community policing initiatives, and support services, aligning with the Plan's focus on prevention and engagement.

The findings from this consultation provide a robust evidence base for the Police and Crime Plan 2025-2029. While there is strong public support for the Plan's proposed priorities, addressing the highlighted challenges, including perceptions of safety, police conduct, victim support, and resource allocation, will be critical for success. By fostering trust, enhancing communication, and investing in community-focused strategies, the OPCC and WMP can ensure the Plan delivers meaningful improvements in safety, justice, and public confidence across the West Midlands.

Appendix 1

West Midlands Police and Crime Plan on a Page.

My priorities...

<p>REBUILD COMMUNITY POLICING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make neighbourhoods safer • More officers visible in communities • Solve local problems with communities • Work with local businesses • Combat anti-social behaviour • Tackle hate crime 	<p>TACKLE VIOLENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence Against Women and Girls • Domestic Abuse, including children • Serious Youth Violence and knife crime • Organised Crime Gangs and guns • County lines and criminal exploitation • Violence against retail workers
<p>REDUCE NEIGHBOURHOOD CRIME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House burglary • Street robbery • Car theft and theft from vehicles • Fraud • Online crimes 	<p>IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase prevention and enforcement against speeding, phone use, drink/drug driving and failure to wear a seatbelt (the fatal 4) • Increase 3rd party reporting • Tackle organised street racing • Clamp down on uninsured vehicles
<p>PROTECT VICTIMS AND WITNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim's Rights and Welfare • Access to justice • High quality support services for victims • Support 'by and for' specialist services • Amplify the voice of victims 	<p>MAKE WEST MIDLANDS POLICE EXCELLENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair funding and efficient use of resources • High quality, well trained, well supported and representative workforce • High performing, trusted Force • Effective and ethical use of data/new technology • Decarbonisation: Net Zero

My principles...

BRINGING OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crimes accurately recorded• Efficient and effective investigations• More crimes detected and positive outcomes• Greater use of Out of Court Disposals and Civil Orders• Efficient and effective criminal justice system	PREVENTION & REHABILITATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protecting the vulnerable• Children and young people focus• Reduce harm from illegal drugs• Support and challenge people to turn their lives around
PARTNERSHIPS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bring WM partners together to make a real difference• Work with government to deliver change• Effective local, regional and national collaboration	BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fairness and belonging• Best policing for people and in places that need it most• Listening and responding to the public• Understanding and addressing disproportionality• Learning from our history

Appendix 2

Here is a list of the organisations that provided contributions to the consultation's call for evidence.

1. Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid
2. Birmingham Domestic Abuse Local Strategic Partnership Board
3. Cardiff Metropolitan University
4. Children's Services Dudley
5. Centre for Crime, Justice and Policing, University of Birmingham
6. College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham
7. Coventry Council
8. Cranstoun
9. Headway
10. Missing People Charity
11. National Health Service England
12. Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
13. Safer Together
14. Sustainable Travel West Midlands
15. The Children's Society
16. The Pioneer Group
17. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
18. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
19. Violence Reduction Partnership Youth Assembly
20. West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner Advisory Panel Members
21. Young Combined Authority Meeting

Appendix 3

Focus group questions and inter-rater reliability results.

Victims Focus Group Questions

1. Simon Foster has outlined victim priorities for the next four years. How do you feel about these priorities? Do they align with your own experiences and expectations?
2. When you needed police services, how accessible did you find them? Can you share any barriers while accessing these services?
3. Are you aware of your rights under the Victim's Code? How have these rights influenced your experience?
4. What kinds of support do you think are important to victims of crime? How can we ensure this support is accessible to everyone?
5. Reflecting on your experience with the criminal justice system, how satisfied were you with the process and its outcomes?
6. What suggestions do you have for Simon Foster to enhance the experience and support for victims of crime?

Main Focus Group Questions

1. Simon Foster has outlined the priorities and principles for the next four years. How do you feel about these priorities and principles? Do they resonate with your experiences and expectations?
2. What additional thoughts or concerns do you have regarding these priorities and principles? Please share any specific feedback or ideas you think are important.
3. In your opinion, do these priorities and principles help build and maintain good relationships between the police and the communities in the West Midlands?
4. Can you suggest any ways to improve these priorities and principles to further enhance the relationship between the police and the communities in the West Midlands?
5. Among the various responsibilities of the police, which ones do you think should be the top priorities for the Police and Crime Commissioner?
6. What are your overall thoughts and experiences with WMP?

Under 25s Focus Group Questions

1. Simon Foster, the Police and Crime Commissioner, has given us the priorities and principles for the next four years. How do you feel about these? Are they what you expected?

2. What else do you think about these priorities and principles? Please give feedback you think is important.
3. Do they help create good relationships between the police and the communities in the West Midlands?
4. Can you give ways to improve these priorities and principles to help better the relationship between the police and the communities in the West Midlands?
5. From the responsibilities of the police, which ones should be the priorities for the Police and Crime Commissioner?
6. What are your overall thoughts and experiences with WMP?

Victims Focus Groups Inter-Rater Reliability Scores

	Percent Agreement	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	90%	90	10	100	200

Main and Under 25 Focus Group Inter-Rater Reliability Scores

	Percent Agreement	N Agreements	N Disagreements	N Cases	N Decisions
Variable 1 (cols 1 & 2)	92%	81	7	88	176