



# **NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION**

**FINAL 2023/2024 REPORT TO  
THE NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE,  
FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER**

**APRIL 2024**

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**



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# Priorities

Online Safety



Drugs, Gangs & County Lines



Gender Violence & Safer Streets



Relationships with Police & Authorities



# INTRODUCTION

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission (NYYC) was established in 2015 with funding from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC).

The NYYC enables young people aged 10-25 to inform decisions about policing and crime prevention in North Yorkshire, working in partnership with the PFCC, North Yorkshire Police (NYP) and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (NYFRS).

# ABOUT THE NORTH YORKSHIRE YOUTH COMMISSION

The NYYC gives young people across North Yorkshire a voice on issues of crime and policing and supports, challenges, and informs the work of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner.

A key part of NYYC's role is to gather the views of other young people across the county through peer-to-peer research in the form of a 'Big Conversation'. This peer-led research process provides a safe environment for young people to talk to their peers about relevant issues. The views gathered from young people are analysed by the NYYC in order to create a final set of key findings and recommendations to report back to the PFCC, NYP, and partners.

For more information about NYYC please see: <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/for-you/young-people/youth/about-the-youth-commission/> or go to @NorthYorksYC on Twitter.

The North Yorkshire Youth Commission is facilitated by Leaders Unlocked, a social enterprise that enables young people to have a stronger voice and influence on the decisions that affect their lives. Leaders Unlocked has established Youth Commissions in 18 regions in England and Wales and continues to grow. For more information about Leaders Unlocked please see [www.leaders-unlocked.org](http://www.leaders-unlocked.org)

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is grounded in extensive peer-to-peer research and engagement with **1704 young people across North Yorkshire** between March 2023 and January 2024. These conversations were conducted through interactive workshops, one-to-one interviews, and outreach stands.

The report is structured into six key priorities that outline the NYYC's six areas of peer-led citizen research. Each section features a comprehensive analysis of young people's responses, verbatim quotes from individual participants, and the recommendations that have been put forward by the Youth Commission as a result of their findings.

This report is intended to act as an honest and independent record of what young people have told us through the 'Big Conversation' process. It is also intended to be a basis for further action on the part of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, North Yorkshire Police, and partner agencies.

## WHAT WE DID

### RECRUITED NYYC MEMBERS:

At the start of the 2023/2024 NYYC cycle, 22 members were retained from the previous cohort, with a further 14 being recruited, bringing the **total membership to 36 Youth Commission members**.

Leaders Unlocked carried out a rigorous two-part recruitment process, including an accessible application form and a second-stage telephone interview, to select a diverse group of young people to join the North Yorkshire Youth Commission. We worked proactively with local organisations from the education, statutory, youth and voluntary sectors across the region to ensure that the opportunity was widely distributed, both within mainstream and nonmainstream educational settings and within grassroots community settings. In this way, we were able to ensure that **NYYC members came from a diverse range of localities, backgrounds, and life experiences**.

### IDENTIFIED KEY PRIORITIES AND AIMS:

At the inaugural NYYC meeting, members reviewed their priority aims to ensure they remained up-to-date and relevant to young people. The aims helped to guide the project, providing a focus for the Big Conversation.

The key priorities were :

1. Mental Health and Emotional Well-being
2. Gender Violence & Safer Streets
3. Discrimination
4. Online Safety
5. Relationships with Police & Authorities
6. Drugs Gangs & County Lines

## SKILLS TRAINING:

NYYC members took part in practical training sessions to acquire the key skills and knowledge needed for their role. This training included how to successfully plan workshops and interview techniques as well as targeted training from external partner organisations, including Bystander Awareness Training with All About Respect and The Long Game, County Lines Awareness session. These skills were further developed through practical experience throughout the project.

### CREATED YOUTH COMMISSION RESOURCES:

NYYC members were actively involved in creating the tools that they would use for their peer-led research. They co-designed interactive workshops to address each of their six priorities, which included presentations, quizzes, videos, and discussions.

To capture young people's responses, we developed a Youth Commission postcard depicting the six priorities and providing young people with a structure to record their views and suggested solutions anonymously.

### DELIVERED THE 'BIG CONVERSATION':

To tackle the six priorities, NYYC members delivered a range of **peer-led workshops and outreach stands** with young people across North Yorkshire. At these engagement events, members utilised their co-designed resources. This 'Big Conversation' was taken to a wide range of local voluntary organisations, educational institutions, and statutory partners across the region.

In order to gather vital insights from those who are most affected by some of the priority topics, the NYYC put particular effort and energy into engaging with underrepresented and more marginalised groups of young people. NYYC carried out workshops and consultations with young carers, those with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, non-mainstream education settings, and young people identified as 'at risk', such as those taking part in the NYFRS intervention programmes.

In total, we engaged in peer research with **1,704 young people across 57 consultation events (See acknowledgements below for the full list of organisations engaged with)**.

### JOINT WORK WITH THE POLICE FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER:

We have continued to act as a sounding board for the PFCC, with two members taking part in the PFCC's Public Choice Award selection panels to represent young people. Additionally, one NYYC member took part in a five-week-long work experience placement at the OPFCC, working on community engagement and website content. Finally, members reviewed and gave feedback on the PFCC's Serious Violence Duty strategies.

## JOINT WORK WITH NORTH YORKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE:

We continued to work alongside North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to embed our Big Conversation workshops within their LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) course, focussing on priority topics most relevant to the individual groups of young people. This helped us reach a more diverse range of young people and listen to voices that may often be underrepresented.

## JOINT WORK WITH NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

This year we have worked closely with NYP on a number of young people's issues and campaigns. We continued our work on young people in custody by conducting a second visit to York Custody Suite to gain an understanding of what young people experience and to provide feedback and advice. We also coproduced a second officer training film, with a new topic of 'young people missing from home'. We worked closely with NYP Communications department as well as the National Police Chiefs Council's youth engagement project Your Police to discuss and explore effective ways to reach young people, through different methods of communication.

Following on from the establishment of the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) last year, we collaborated with the police to discuss and provide advice on a range of topics including: Use of Force, Tasers, and Stop and Search. This allowed members to develop their understanding of these topics, whilst sharing their opinions and views directly with NYP.

NYYC members also reviewed a victim satisfaction survey from the perspective of young people, and one NYCC member completed work experience with NYP at Crucial Crew.

## PARTNERSHIPS:

NYYC has developed strong partnerships with local organisations. We presented our work on Gender Violence at the All About Respect Networking Day. NYCC members also attended Next Door But One's 'She Was Walking Home' performance and provided feedback, to increase awareness surrounding Gender Violence in the local area. We also helped North Yorkshire Council to design a young people's drug and alcohol survey. Finally, we provided feedback to Changing Lives on new drug awareness resources designed for young people. These opportunities have allowed members to continue to be an active voice for young people in a variety of settings.

## THE GOOD CITIZEN AWARD

Following peer research in the Summer of 2021, the NYCC designed the 'Good Citizen Award' to recognize the positive impact young people have in their communities. The award allows young people to pick a cause they are passionate about and take action on it.

The award is jointly presented by the North Yorkshire Youth Commission and The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. So far, 56 young people have received the award with two further projects underway. Projects have included: fundraising, toy donations, mentoring, community litter-picking and more.

For more information on the Good Citizen Award and to see the awards completed please visit: <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/for-you/young-people/youth/good-citizen-award/>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the Youth Commission to consult with the young people in their organisations and supported the work of the NYCC. Thanks go to:

Scalby School	Bentham Youth Group
Door 84	Harrogate Young Carers
NYFRS (LIFE Course)	Education Strive
York College	Selby College
York College Additional Support Center	Settle Youth Club
SELFA	Colburn Young Carers
All Saints School	Northallerton Young Carers

A special thanks to the individual Youth Commission Members\* who have offered their time and efforts to make this project a success:

Angus Gatus	Matthew Davies	Georgina Bell
Arron Simpson	Lennon Moody	Matthew Lomax
Dawid Badowski	Ben Blaxal	Benjamin Lyman
Katie Yates	Noah Smee-Brown	Layton Furnis
James Porter	Samuel Binder	Rebecca Poulton
Katie Yates	Hana Karanxha	Findlay List
Shawndelle Dixon	Olivia Sanderson	Ruby Young
Sophie Sabin	Kitty Hutchinson	Amber Dunn
Francesca Kent	Elinor Bevan	Isabelle O'flynn
Lulu Halloum	Zara Pratt	

\*Some NYCC members names have not been published.



# PRIORITY 1: MENTAL HEALTH & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The NYYC engaged with a total of 187 young people about this topic across 11 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Raise awareness of the different types of mental health issues and reduce the stigma and stereotypes surrounding mental health, particularly for young men.
- Hold open, non-judgemental conversations with young people about their experiences and promote positive mental health.
- Explore what mental health support services are available to young people, and the barriers faced in accessing services, particularly for those not in education.
- Promote mental health as a medical issue, not criminal, and support stronger mental health training for front-line police.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Young people frequently identified school, and the pressure it brings, as a key source of stress and anxiety. We heard how exams and grades, extracurricular commitments, and social pressure from peers all have negative impacts on young people's mental health.

Young people frequently shared their experiences with bullying within educational settings, as well as the friction within relationships between them and teachers. Both of these factors are also contributing to the negative influence of school on their mental well-being.

### This key finding came from secondary school-aged young people

*"School damages your mental health. Not just bullying/ peer pressure but pressure from teachers and exams too."*

*"Staff at school should have more understanding of mental health."*

*"I was bullied at school for 12 years and no one did anything."*

While the stigma around some mental health conversations is reducing, lots of boys and young men still feel they can't talk openly about mental health. They said that they wouldn't seek help from friends because it was embarrassing and 'not what boys do.' Forums such as online gaming chats increased these attitudes.

## This issue was particularly strong amongst boys and young men already identified as at risk.

*"Men still don't speak out because they are too ashamed and are worried they won't be seen as manly enough."*

*"Stigma surrounding masculinity still exists."*

Despite the stigma around some mental health issues reducing, misconceptions, stereotypes and lack of awareness are still prevalent. **In one Big Conversation workshop 10/11 young people thought individuals with a mental health issue were more likely to commit a violent crime.**

Young people were able to name some key support services, such as Childline, but were still unaware of other more varied support. More crucially, they reported that when reaching out for help, **waiting lists and response times were the biggest barriers to receiving support.** Often, this made young people less likely to reach out.

*"Everyone says it but the waiting lists. They are too long and put people off from asking for help. I still need help and can't get it."*

*"I had to wait over a year for mental health support because of waiting lists and under-funding."*

*"You wait until breaking point."*

Young people also expressed their struggles with managing their mental health, by highlighting the difficulty of knowing how to make yourself feel better and managing emotions.

*"Difficult to control lots of dysregulated emotions."*

*"It is difficult to get yourself out of a bad mood, it's really easy to start overthinking and feeling overwhelmed."*

Police were not considered the best-equipped group to support young people. Instead, mental health professionals were preferred because of their expert knowledge. However, there was recognition that when there was danger of harm, police may need to get involved.

*"I think that the police shouldn't be there for mental health because they've got other things to do."*

*"If someone's going to kill themselves it's the police that are called so they should know about mental health or they won't be able to stop them."*

Some young people reported that police involvement in their mental health crisis created further trauma because of fear of police, feeling intimidated and at times, situations involving rough physical restraint from police. **These young people felt criminalised because of their mental health.**

## This key finding was particularly strong in Scarborough and York.

*"Police attacking me when I'm having an episode and making it 10x worse. If they knew how to help without making it worse."*

*"Confiding in the Police could lead to further action you do not want."*

Young people **wanted police to better understand their mental health** and how to avoid making situations worse. There was a belief that police can become desensitised to crisis situations and often forget that they can be intimidating to many young people.

*"Important for police to know how to deal with mental health and to know how to get support for people who need it, as their job is to look after people."*

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory Group session with the Youth Commission to share NYP approaches to mental health and current officer training.

Provide debriefings, reflection opportunities and support for officers after attending mental health incidents to avoid officers becoming desensitised to these cases and to look after officers own mental health.

Improve mental health training for police and ensure that training is delivered by mental health professionals, not by other police officers.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Support mental health partners to focus on reducing waiting lists for young people seeking support.

Work with partners to make educational spaces more aware of young people's mental health and to implement more mental health support in schools.

Champion more in-depth mental health training for NYP officers and ensure that mental health partners are involved in delivering this training.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Create a dedicated mental health space on the Youth Commission webpage to signpost to support services and share relevant stories and updates, including specific content on young men's mental health. This will help to destigmatize the conversation around mental health.

Hold a Youth Independent Advisory group meeting with NYP to gain insight on current police mental health training.

Continue the Big Conversation on Mental Health to better understand the issues young people are facing and what improvements they want to see.



# PRIORITY 2: GENDER VIOLENCE & SAFER STREETS

The NYYC engaged with a total of **251 young people** about this topic across 9 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Investigate and listen to young people's experience of spiking, harassment, and violence in public spaces and promote existing safety initiatives.
- Educate the OPFCC and partners on young people's experience of gender violence.
- Challenge 'lad culture' and other environments that accept and minimise the impacts of VAWG.
- Ensure a non-victim blaming approach throughout conversations on gender violence.

## WHAT WE FOUND

**There is a significant lack of trust in police on the topic of gender violence.** Young people told us they wouldn't report to police if they were victims because they didn't feel anything would be done. Some also felt police can, at times, be perpetrators or enablers of sexism.

**This key finding was reported by young people of all ages, across the county.**

*"I wouldn't report harassment due to it being verbal, I can't prove it and wouldn't know who the person is. If it was physical I would report it."*

*"Calling the police feels extreme."*

*"More should be done to help women become more comfortable to talk about their experiences no matter how severe they all should be valid."*

Many young people, particularly in rural parts of North Yorkshire, felt unsafe at night. Almost all the women and girls we spoke to would not like to walk alone. **Dark streets and infrequent and unreliable transport increased fears.**



## This key finding was highlighted in rural areas, including Settle and Skipton.

*"There isn't enough done about harassment and women feel scared to walk alone- This should be stopped."*

*"Things like this are quite common in this town, especially in places like the dark areas of the town."*

*"Don't like waiting for the bus on my own in the dark. Especially if it's late."*

We found that young people felt the need to defend themselves from gender-based violence but were unsure about the best way to do so. Some reported carrying makeshift weapons such as keys or sprays. We also found that increasing numbers felt the responsibility to change should be on perpetrators, not victims. **There needs to be a focus on personal safety as well as education and prevention for offenders.**

*"People should be able to go out alone and not be worried about people following you."*

*"I carry keys as a weapon, that way I could attack them before they attack me."*

*"I think girls are more at risk, especially at night. That's why all of us said no we wouldn't walk alone but all the boys say it's fine."*

Image-based sexual abuse is more common amongst young people than parents and professionals may realise. We found that some young people had misconceptions about the level of seriousness and did not know that it was a crime. Additionally, victim blaming from both peers and adults was often a factor that stopped victims/ witnesses from reporting or seeking help.

## This key finding came from school and college-aged students- largely in York and Scarborough.

*"It would be too scary to tell police because you could get in trouble for sending it too. Also, your parents might find out."*

*"They say they'll help and that you can call the police but it happens all the time and nothing would actually happen."*

While most gender violence conversations focussed on CIS women and girls' safety, young people highlighted that all genders can be victims. In particular, **violence against transwomen was a growing concern for young people**, with some experiencing harassment and violent threats. Such groups face significant barriers to reporting and accessing support.

*"I was bullied in year 12 because I came out as trans and not a lot was done about it, I feel like no one feels as though they can talk about stuff that happens."*

*"I've been harassed and assaulted because of my gender identity."*

*"There's a lack of education for men and women about sexual harassment and violence. Men are also neglected when it comes to these issues."*

Young people have highlighted the prevalence of misogynistic 'jokes' and 'banter' within educational environments such as schools and colleges. They shared concerns that Gender Violence isn't talked about enough and needs more awareness. More open conversations should be had about the topic to improve young people's understanding of Gender Violence and the harms caused.

*"I think that gender violence is an issue that is not talked about enough. We need more awareness around this topic. Jokes to women like 'go to the kitchen' are normalised."*

*"I think that gender violence is a big issue in my area because of what people say at school and on the streets. People may think it's a joke but the person on the receiving end of the 'joke' might not take it as a joke."*

*"I think gender violence is unacceptable and everyone deserves respect and equality. I believe it's somewhat crucial to raise awareness and let younger kids become aware of the issues."*

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Develop a culture change that allows officers to more easily hold each other to account for sexism and victim blaming, regardless of rank. We believe very few officers are the problem, but that they need to be called out.

Support the Youth Commission's image-based sexual abuse campaign and promote the legal consequences of sharing other's private images.

More readily take action surrounding gender violence cases, such as spiking and image-based abuse. This will increase confidence in reporting.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Demonstrate support for all victims of gender violence, regardless of gender identity, including transwomen.

Increase practical safety features, such as more police patrols and street lighting in problem areas, while also focussing on longer-term behaviour change for offenders.

Develop and promote alternative ways for young people to report gender violence. This could include a QR code to encourage online reporting.

Support the Youth Commission's image-based sexual abuse campaign and promote anti-victim blaming messages on the issue.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Include information on the laws and personal safety surrounding gender violence in our next Big Conversation.

Within Big conversation workshops, include conversations about gender violence against all gender identities.

Develop a campaign to bring awareness to image-based sexual abuse and tackle victim blaming within the issue.



# PRIORITY 3: DISCRIMINATION

The NYYC engaged with a total of **246 young people** about this topic across 6 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Explore the impacts of discrimination and unconscious bias within the police and authorities on young people, with a particular focus on marginalised and underrepresented groups.
- Raise awareness of hate crime, mate crime, and discrimination faced by young people, including incidents that sometimes go unrecognised.
- Encourage victims and witnesses to report discrimination and hate crime and explore what barriers they may face in doing so.
- Work directly with and share the voice of young people with lived experience of discrimination to support and empower others.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Most young people are still **unable to identify what hate crimes and hate incidents** are. They were also unaware of the law surrounding hate crime.

*"I have nothing to say because I don't know what a hate crime is really."*

*"Not many of us knew hate incident or hate crime. But I think we all knew discrimination."*

Verbal discrimination is often labelled as 'banter' amongst young people, invalidating the harm caused and making victims and witnesses feel that they can't report it because it's seen as not serious enough. There was also a strong stigma around not 'grassing people up'.

*"Back in primary school around year five, I got told to go back to where I came from. It seems small but I'm in year ten now and I still remember it. People don't realise it would stay with someone that long I don't think, especially at that age."*

*"A lot of it is overlooked as 'just a joke' and not really taken seriously by anyone."*

Young people told us they would report hate crimes and discrimination to their school/ college rather than reporting to police. Often, they said that school **had more power to enforce consequences** and felt that police wouldn't take incidents seriously or would be too busy to deal with the situation.

*"Police probably won't do much because that's how it's been in the past, but school would be able to separate them from you and do whatever needed to be done."*

*"I don't think police have the adequate resources to stop every hate crime. It's not their fault it's because of funding and government cuts that are to blame."*

*"My first thought was police, but thinking about it, school would actually probably be able to do more if you want something done about it."*

School and friends or family were also popular forms of support that young people would seek, with many being unaware of other support service options, particularly those specialising in hate crime and discrimination.

*"More support for people who get discriminated for stuff."*

*"Make it easier to access support and promote getting support."*

*"Your friends can hopefully give you support. Hopefully, they aren't the ones standing by."*

We heard that, while young people did want action to be taken against offenders, many felt education and **raising awareness of the harm caused by discrimination amongst those committing it was most important** in tackling the issue.

**Lack of awareness on support services, including interventions for perpetrators, was a consistent issue across the county.**

*"Support and intervention for the people who discriminate because there has to be something wrong with them to do that and it needs addressing."*

*"More workshops like this in school so more awareness."*

Young people felt that police can sometimes be perpetrators of discrimination themselves which further broke down trust and confidence in reporting.

*"One black member of group has been stopped and searched 6 times over the last 6 months, none of the white members have ever been. Felt personally discriminated against because he 'fits' what police look for."*

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Share with the public examples of successful hate crime prosecutions to increase confidence in reporting.

When engaging with victims, signpost them to relevant and specific support services.

Address biases within the force and amongst officers by engaging more with different community groups to ensure young people don't face discrimination from police.

Where possible, opt for educational solutions for discrimination-related offences.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Promote specialised support services for specific community groups to encourage confidence in seeking help.

Where possible, encourage and support NYP to opt for educational solutions for discrimination-related offences.

Support the Youth Commission in developing an awareness campaign on hate crime vs hate incidents, including what acts can be reported to police or other reporting routes.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Work with the PFCC and partners to educate young people on hate crimes and hate incidents.

Signpost young people to relevant support services in Big Conversation workshops and investigate the barriers to accessing help.

Raise awareness of the harms of verbal discrimination by using lived experience voices.

Work alongside educational organisations to ensure that reported incidents are passed along to police or other agencies where appropriate.



# PRIORITY 4: ONLINE SAFETY

The NYYC engaged with a total of **314 young people** about this topic across 13 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Raise awareness of various forms of exploitation and risk young people are exposed to online, including the early warning signs to look out for.
- Investigate young people's experiences with misinformation and hate speech online and how this impacts their views and perceptions.
- Explore the impact of social media on mental health and promote appropriate support services.
- Work with the PFCC and Police to assist authorities in engaging more effectively with young people online.

## WHAT WE FOUND

Young people face many challenges online. Some key issues they **frequently identified were: abuse and harassment; grooming; hacking and online scams; image-based sexual abuse and invasions of privacy.**

*"I believe that online safety is a big thing for me because I went through so much growing up and it's important to me because I don't want my sister to go through it."*

*"There was an issue of cyberbullying in my area. I wasn't involved, but there was a group chat in my school with some bullying going on."*

*"It's important not to go on social media all the time because there can be a lot of dangers on there."*

Young people felt that online crime progresses more quickly than police and professionals are able to keep up with. They said adults didn't recognise or understand the extent of the problems and dangers faced online.

*"There should be more boundaries to help with online bullying or exploitation. Protection around explicit images."*

*"I called the police, and they stopped following me. Real life they stopped but online they didn't."*

A further key issue discussed in the Big Conversation was the **rise and impact of misinformation and negative social media personalities** such as Andrew Tate. Lots of young people told us that they were banned from talking about these subjects at school. They felt this wasn't a suitable way to tackle the issue.

**This issue was raised mostly by young people aged 11 and 13. But also by others.**

**"People like Andrew Tate making boys think treating girls like that is fine. Lots of bad stuff in gaming chat rooms too."**

**"YouTube content filters are weird and inconsistent."**

**"Inappropriate content/messages or TikTok's exist. Bad influences, i.e celebrities doing bad things etc." ]**

Social media has a significant impact on mental health. We heard that unrealistic standards set on Snapchat and Instagram promoted poor self-image and made young people feel not good enough.

**"Bad impact on mental health - cyberbullying, showing cuts and eating disorders can be triggering for those with experience. Beauty standards. A lot of negative talk of attention seeking."**

**"Social media has a massive impact. Pretty models make people feel bad about themselves."**

**"Instagram creates overestimated beauty standards and only shows the highlights of people's lives."**

Young people rarely report online crime. Some said they would tell friends, family or report on the app itself. However, even fewer agreed they would report to school or to police. The main reasons for this were not believing any action would be taken and a fear of getting into trouble themselves.

**"Groomed from age 11-13. Police didn't really do much."**

**"If they have something on you, you won't tell."**

More education and awareness of how to keep safe and stay healthy online is needed. However, this education needs to be delivered by professionals with expert knowledge and an up-to-date understanding of the online world.

**"I think people don't think about how much they share on the internet and how easily accessible they are."**

**"I feel it's difficult to stay safe online. There's a lot of predators nowadays. Some people I know have been affected by this issue."**

**"I think there should be more awareness on what is acceptable and not online. Give education to all age groups and make what is illegal known by everybody."**

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Raise awareness of online reporting options and make them more easily accessible for young people.

Ensure that victims of online crime are signposted to appropriate support services.

Promote that online crime is taken seriously by NYP and that action will be taken in the same way as in-person crime.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Develop a campaign to encourage reporting of online crime. Focus on sharing cases with positive outcomes to reassure young people that action will be taken.

Work with educational organisations to make sure they are equipped to handle conversations and education around misinformation and negative online personalities.

Assist the Youth Commission in sharing information and reporting links online in easily accessible formats for young people.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Promote different reporting options for online crime within the Big Conversation.

Share more of young people's Big Conversation responses about online safety with NYP to provide insight on young people's experiences online.

Work with the PFCC to add information about online reporting and reporting links to the Youth Commission's webpage.



# PRIORITY 5: RELATIONSHIPS WITH POLICE & AUTHORITIES

The NYYC engaged with a total of **236 young people** about this topic across 11 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Act as Ambassadors to support police and young people in building new, positive relationships by emphasising the importance of respect and communication from both sides.
- Raise awareness of stop and search rights amongst young people and scrutinise North Yorkshire Police's use of 'Stop and Search' and 'Use of Force'.
- Represent the voice of young people to NYP and NYFRS and investigate the treatment of young people by authorities.
- Explore young people's experiences of diversion from crime and understand what barriers they face in successful prevention.

## WHAT WE FOUND

We asked how the relationship between police and young people could be improved and found that **a key factor was respect**. Some young people felt that, because of their age, they didn't receive respect from police, but also acknowledged that often, police are also disrespected by young people.

*"I think that police should realise that just because we are younger, we should still be spoken to with the same respect as an adult and not to be spoken down on. We should also realise that the police are there to protect us and keep us safe, so they deserve respect."*

*"The police and people in my area don't have a good relationship. It's due to the lack of respect on both sides."*

*"The communication needs to be better and the respect towards them needs to be better. Kids think they are not getting enough respect."*

*"Police don't have much respect towards us/other citizens. Also, they need to understand people's situations so they know how to help."*

Alongside respect, young people also expressed that when reaching out to police, they didn't always feel listened to or taken seriously. **They highlighted it's important for police to be considerate and show empathy.**

*"Reports being ignored even though I called twice."*

*"I think that the police should be more understanding of what is going on in people's personal life."*

*"Be more understanding and sympathetic to people when they are reporting something because it takes guts and bravery to tell someone and can be very triggering."*

Young people wanted greater visibility from police both in person and online. Many told us they hadn't had a positive interaction with police but thought a greater presence in schools and the community was a good idea. This would build trust and respect and allow police to be seen as 'normal people'.

*"There isn't hardly any police present so they can't make relationships with the community so how are they supposed to be trusted and why would people want to tell them the truth."*

*"I think police need to come and talk in more schools to other students so that they can build more trust and feel confident to say anything to them."*

Because many young people don't interact with the police regularly, they gather their views from the media and online. This led to negative opinions because of national headlines including Sarah Everard and Bianca Williams. **Some young people reported fearing racism and sexism from police because of high-profile cases.**

*"Documentaries showing brutal interrogation. Police brutality on social media. Always more negative than positive. Never see the good."*

*"I like some police but not all of them because some police hurt people but some help others. I saw a video of police paralysing someone because they were arresting him and pulled something in his neck."*

*"I've had no in-person interactions with the police, not really formed an opinion. Just seen stuff on social media which is mainly negative."*

For young people who have had direct experience with police, many still reported feeling stereotyped because of their clothing, such as wearing tracksuits, age and friend group. They felt they were stopped or questioned in situations where adults wouldn't be.

**This key finding was consistent across the county, but most highlighted by young people not in mainstream education.**

*"It does feel like police target certain groups to stop because a group of adults won't get stopped but a group of teens in the park might even if they aren't doing anything wrong."*

*"I think mostly I get stopped because of how I look and being with a big group. Once they know your name, I think they don't leave you alone."*

*"In my opinion I don't really like some of them because they can be judgemental and quite nasty to me because of what I wear or who my family is."*

*"You get judged for the clothes you wear 'chav clothes'. Must be causing trouble if you are wearing trackies. Boys are limited to what they can wear."*

Similar to last year's Youth Commission findings, many young people still didn't know their stop and search rights. There is also lots of misinformation around the topic, leading to greater tensions and fear when stopped.

*"In my opinion I think the stop and search is good however it can get too aggressive and racist towards people of another culture."*

*"I don't know much about stop and search in Scarborough."*

*"There are TikTok's from people that have experience of police telling you what they're allowed to do and what you can say."*

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Develop a greater positive presence and visibility in communities including in schools and online. Use this as a way to build trust and relationships with young people.

Work more closely with community groups to ensure police have an understanding of different communities and to reduce potential stereotyping.

Find ways to ensure that positive stories and good police practice is shared with young people.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Support the Youth Commission's campaign to educate young people on their stop and search rights.

Support NYP to work with local community groups to reduce potential bias and stereotyping.

Improve communication with the community. Make sure the public, and young people are aware of positive stories and projects.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Encourage young people to think critically about their opinions on the police.

Develop a campaign to raise awareness of stop and search rights and gather young people's experiences of being stopped.

Continue to act as young people's representatives to the PFCC, Police and Fire to make sure our voices are heard and share positive collaborations online.



# PRIORITY 6: DRUGS, GANGS AND COUNTY LINES

The NYYC engaged with a total of **470 young people** about this topic across 7 workshops and engagement events.

## PRIORITY AIMS:

- Highlight and promote the voice of young people with lived experience of drug abuse, gangs, or county lines and open the conversation for young people to seek support.
- Promote harm reduction approaches on the topic of drug use amongst young people, and work with partner organisations to improve education on the impacts of drug use.
- Raise awareness of the impact and early warning signs of county lines and gang exploitation amongst young people.
- Explore young people's opinions and experiences of vaping and understand what actions young people would like to see taken by authorities.

## WHAT WE FOUND

**We found that drugs are far too easily accessible to most young people.** Those who had no previous experience with drugs could still source them if they wanted. Social media, particularly Snapchat was named as a key way to both access and sell drugs.

*"My experience is that drugs are very readily available. I think in college everyone sort of just knows who they'd go to if they wanted something. Bit like an open secret."*

*"Everyone knows someone on snapchat to get stuff from. Even if you don't actually know them, they are your age."*

Older groups of young people received 'drug' and 'exploitation' interventions, but younger groups often did not. Many said that **county lines education should start before secondary school to beat gang recruitment ages.** Additionally, education needs to include more awareness of signs of exploitation to look out for.

### We heard about this issue from both school and college students in York.

*"Young kids can easily be exploited by gangs and drug organisations. Many won't really know about it until it's too late."*

*"I've not been actually involved but I think it was close. Older students starting to ask if I wanted something and if I'd of taken it, I think it might of turned into more. I didn't because I don't do drugs but I also didn't know about county lines so it was close."*

*"Come into schools and teach students more about it and explain the reasons why not to get involved. Not just 'don't do it'."*



Almost all **young people were unaware of Section 45**, or that exploited young people could be seen as victims by police. When told about it, they said it was a good idea but were worried that police would still treat them as criminals.

*"I don't think in reality it protects kids from prosecution. It's not enough."*

*"I think 'Section 45 defence' is a good, safe idea to help young people feel supported."*

*"Knowing about the defence where you'll be protected would help people who feel trapped in it to get out or tell someone they trust to help them."*

Because of this, young people wanted more support and reporting options through alternative routes, such as school and college. Ways to report concerns for friends anonymously were favoured to overcome the stigma of speaking out.

*"Find an easier way for young people to speak up. I don't think many would go to police or anything by choice, but if there was an easier less intimidating way."*

*"I think that it needs to be discussed more to help people have a chance to get out. Provide an easier way for young people to seek help. It's a bit brushed under the rug currently and we don't feel we can speak openly about topics like this without trouble or judgement."*

Money and the cost-of-living crisis were named frequently by young people as key causes for involvement in county lines.

*"The money would be tempting, especially at the moment when people don't have any."*

*"I agree that money is the main reason why someone would do county lines because of the cost-of-living crisis and pressure to make money even if you're still in school or young."*

*"Money- cost of living hits people hard, they do what they have to survive."*

*"If you don't have a supportive family or if you have to provide for yourself and your siblings."*

Young people told us that vaping was a significant problem. They reported that **all ages had access to and used vapes** and there was a strong peer pressure to take part. Additionally, it was found that lots of shops were willingly selling vapes to underage young people.

**This issue was highlighted by younger aged participants in many areas, including, York, Scarborough and Skipton.**

*"Stop advertising vaping to kids with sweet flavours and colours. Even year 7s do it, that's way too young."*

*"So many kids are addicted to vaping. I think it needs to be addressed more."*

*"Stop people wanting to vape before they try it. It's really hard to quit. I would know."*

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE POLICE:

Work to reassure young people, particularly those at risk of county lines, that police will look to support, not charge exploited young people.

Include investigations into online drug sales (such as on Snapchat) in county lines operations.

Work with partner groups to crack down on businesses that purposely advertise and sell vapes to underage young people.

### FOR THE PFCC AND PARTNERS:

Raise greater awareness about county lines and signs of exploitation for younger age groups to pre-empt typical gang recruitment ages.

Work with educational organisations to ensure young people are able to safely report exploitation concerns. Include promoting anonymous online reporting.

Work with healthcare partners to develop an anti-vaping campaign for parents and young people. Focus on support rather than punishment.

### FOR THE YOUTH COMMISSION:

Continue to raise awareness of the 'signs of exploitation' within Big Conversation workshops.

Support NYP efforts to reassure young people that exploited young people will be seen as victims.

Promote alternative reporting methods and support services both in workshops and on social media.

Support the PFCC and partners in an anti-vaping campaign and provide young people's perspective on how to best promote it.



## CONCLUSION:

We are extremely grateful to all the members of the North Yorkshire Youth Commission, local partners, NYP leads and the OFPCC who have been involved in making this piece of work a success.

The insights and recommendations contained in this report, together with the extensive joint work that has been done between the NYYC, the NYPFCC, NYP, NYFRS and many other partner organisations represent a very significant contribution to the work of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and North Yorkshire Police.

Through their 'Big Conversation' peer research with over 1700 young people in 2023/2024, the Youth Commission has managed to reach and engage with a hugely diverse cross-section of the youth population across North Yorkshire. They have made particular efforts to hear from those whose views are often overlooked. This peer-to-peer process is of enormous value, both as a piece of research and as an engagement exercise.

Our hope is that the North Yorkshire Youth Commission will be further developed as a channel for engaging young people in the work of both the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner and North Yorkshire Police. As shown through the project, the NYYC can help bridge the gap between young people and policing, through ongoing engagement with the youth population. They can provide youth-centred advice on a range of policing and crime matters affecting young people. They also have an important role to play in the development and evaluation of the recommendations they have set out in this report. Over the next phase of the project, the NYYC will work closely with the NYPFCC, NYP, NYFRS and partners to implement and address the recommendations in this report.

## TESTIMONIALS:

*"Young people today face new and unique challenges when it comes to crime and criminal justice. In order for North Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide the exemplary service that the public have come to expect, they must be able to understand the needs of everyone across our region if we are to ensure that people can be safe and feel safe."*

*"This Youth Commission has spent almost a decade helping the police understand the perspective of young people, offering advice and direct experience to help both services in their interactions with young and vulnerable people in our community. I am delighted with how my office and I have been able to proactively support and invest in the Youth Commission in their work, and the upcoming transition to the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority presents new opportunities to expand the engagement of young people with both the emergency services and public servants more widely."*

**Zoë Metcalfe, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

*"Being in the North Yorkshire Youth Commission offers an empowering platform for our young voices to advocate for change and address issues affecting our communities. It's an amazing experience where we collaborate, learn, and drive positive impact through our collective efforts. I have enjoyed being in the North Yorkshire Youth Commission."*

**Amber Dunn, NYYC Member**

*"My transition from Member to Project Assistant has been incredibly rewarding. Throughout the past year, I've supported the members to achieve change, by encouraging conversations with professionals and through delivering workshops to a wide range of young people. I'm incredibly thankful for the opportunity to develop professionally and personally after 4 years of volunteering with the NYYC, whilst continuing my passion of being a voice for young people."*

**Tyler Anthony, Project Assistant, Leaders Unlocked**

*"Firstly, I would like to thank the North Yorkshire Youth Commission for inviting me to the Big Conversation Conference. It was both interesting and thought provoking, listening to the thoughts and experiences of so many young people. I would also like to thank you for your continued engagement and advice with the delivery of our early intervention and prevention packages, especially those for young people. With this support and through listening to the voices of young people, it ensures we are providing services that are current, relevant and meaningful. I hope our partnership will continue to grow as we look to create the change for young people that we are all wanting to see."*

**Tom Hirst, Director of Capabilities, Community Risk and Resilience, NYFRS**

*"NYYC has represented our Youth Independent Advisory Group for several years and the relationship has been invaluable to NYP. They are always open to, and welcoming of, consultation and have worked with NYP on many different policies, procedures and projects.*

*The feedback we receive from the Youth IAG is always varying and insightful. They do not hesitate over providing critical feedback and challenging NYP where appropriate and we have taken away many valuable learning points throughout our consultations with them, such as guidance on best ways to access, engage and communicate with the youth community."*

**NYP IAG Team**

*"The Taser Training and Development Unit spoke to the Youth Commission to provide an overview of what Taser is, how it's used and took open questions from the group.*

*These questions provided an excellent insight into the concerns our communities feel about tasers and hopefully allayed some concerns. This meaningful dialogue was extremely positive allowing us to consider approaches to training to reflect the views of all our communities.*

*We believe in transparency in regards to Taser use and through listening to your voices have modified our Taser use review process to ensure the highest level of scrutiny if a Taser is used on someone aged under 18. We will seek to understand how, and why the incident happened and we will seek to debrief relevant partner agencies where possible to try to reduce the chances of use on under 18's in the future."*

**NYP Taser Training & Development Team**

*"Our Corporate Communications Lead attended a session of the Youth Commission in May 2023 and invited along representatives of Police.uk. They are based in London and manage the national Instagram account that engages with young people on policing issues and topics. Some round table sessions gathered the view of the Commission members about social media and how they get their information about policing. It was a really informative session and the representatives of police.uk were delighted to engage with Commission members outside of the Southeast of England – where they had been limited to working during Covid time.*

**NYP Corporate Communications Team**

## **CONTACT US**

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