

# National Evaluation of the Mini-Police: Exploring Children's Experiences, Adults' Views and Strategic Progress

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# Executive Summary

## Overall Headline Findings

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that:

- the mini-police contributes to a series of national policing priorities, most notably Child Centred Policing;
- children were very positive about their experiences and the impacts of these to their understanding of what police officers do, their desire to help others and the trust they have in the police;
- participation in the mini-police fosters trusting relationships between children and police officers, supporting the children to see the officer beyond the uniform, positioning the mini-police as different to other child engagement activities that tend to be isolated and sporadic;
- while the progress of mini-police sites has been impressive and due to the enthusiasm of key staff, the mini-police varies significantly between sites;
- selection processes of schools require refinement, especially in contexts where some schools will be supported locally to have a mini-police and others will not;
- strategies are needed to attract children who would most benefit from participation in the mini-police, especially in local places where the police and the community have a fractured relationship; and
- while the demand is high, with many schools keen to get on board with the mini-police, several strategic leads were concerned about expansion in relation to resource demands and the assurance of quality within designed programmes.

## Introduction

This report provides findings and results from a national evaluation of the mini-police in England and Wales. The mini-police is an innovative police engagement programme aimed at 8-11 year olds. Originally conceived in Durham, the aim was to provide a fun and interactive way 'to introduce children to a positive experience of policing and to get them involved in the local community'. Inspired by the Durham model, several forces have launched their own programmes, each with unique aims, programme designs and selection processes.

Whilst recognising such diversity, the aims of all mini-police initiatives resonate with government strategy that seeks to work with children and young people to reduce their risk of becoming offenders or victims; build positive relations between the police and young people; and nurture their feelings of social responsibility so that they become active citizens.

There are now some 5,517 children involved in the mini-police in 16 forces in England and Wales. Each context is different, with the programmes at different stages of development in terms of scale and experience. With plans for

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more sites to launch as well as local focus on sustainability and growth, this report provides a timely starting point for understanding what the mini-police is, how children experience it and what impacts such experiences have on them. In addition, the report considers how the mini-police can be developed and offers recommendations to inform practice as well as the strategic growth of the mini-police.

## Approach

A mixed method approach was taken to explore the mini-police in England and Wales. To understand the scheme from children's perspectives, a national online survey was administered through schools which was completed by 248 children that had been in the mini-police and 102 children that had not. Secondly, 8 child-friendly creative workshops were conducted which involved 56 children in the mini-police from 4 forces. To gauge adult perceptions of the mini-police, interviews were conducted with strategic leads across 10 forces and with practitioners and teachers in the 4 case study sites. There were 3 online surveys for practitioners who deliver the scheme, teachers and staff from the schools involved and parents of children who had participated in the scheme.

## Strategic Headline Findings

- The mini-police varied significantly nationally, being positioned differently within local policing environments, having differential levels of investment and resource, and being implemented using alternative models over dissimilar periods of time. This report documents how the local aims and objectives of mini-police programmes are subtly different, having implications for the design of programmes and delivery. There is a need to define a national vision for the mini-

police, supported by a value framework and strategy, to improve consistency between sites and increase the overall cohesiveness of the mini-police.

- Participation in the mini-police increases awareness of, and interest in, the cadets. In many sites, there is a gap in provision between the mini-police and senior cadets, which potentially compromises the positive effects achieved in the mini-police. Junior police cadet initiatives are already being considered or formed in some sites. There is a need to mature police-led uniformed youth programmes, designing pathways between mini-police, junior cadet and cadet initiatives.
- Selection processes of schools varied across sites. Most sites selected schools based on vulnerability factors such as crime, anti-social behaviour, deprivation, pupil premium or free school meals information, whilst some selected based on expressed interest. Establishing a guiding framework to assist in selecting schools should assist in the likelihood that the scheme is reaching those children that would most benefit in relation to the defined aims of the scheme.
- There is a need to embed processes that capture the activities and outcomes for children in the mini-police to develop a national evidence-base for the mini-police that focuses foremost on the value and social impact of participation on children. Several forces have initiated local evaluative practices, though these are not aligned between sites nor do many include measures relating to impact of mini-police participation and social value.

## Practice Headline Findings

- In a few sites, children had different perceptions to adults about what issues are important to them and what they find
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engaging. Encouraging a child-centred approach in which children participate in setting the direction will facilitate the 'child's voice' within strategic and operational development, increasing their feelings of empowerment and their ability and willingness to become active citizens.

- While the scheme is working well, in some sites there were issues in the understanding of schools of what the mini-police consists of and what the responsibilities of schools and the police are. Local documentation that outlines the 'offer' of the mini-police to schools as well as the commitments needed by the school to develop and sustain the mini-police should assist in the effective running of schemes and ensure that expectations are well managed.
- It was recognised that some children who it is perceived would benefit greatly from participation in the mini-police are not engaged or do not engage with the opportunity. The evidence shows the value of achieving a balance and diversity within cohorts, though strategies are needed to better attract specific children for whom participation in the mini-police could intervene early and positively change their perceptions of police. This would better position the mini-police as a programme within national policy guidelines and increase the relative size of impact to children.
- There is a need to create mechanisms to share good practice and resources between sites. At present, many sites were developing materials and approaches independently, duplicating efforts which represent wasted public resource. Strategic leads were keen to share resources and learning and some were currently in the process of doing so.

## Children's Perspectives and Impacts: Key Findings

- While most children (both mini-police and non mini-police) hold positive views of the police, participation in the mini-police appears to have an enhancing effect on children's perspectives. For example, 71% of mini police children strongly agree that the police do a good job compared to 58% of non-mini police children;
- Participation in the mini-police also increases children's knowledge of what the police do as well as having a positive impact on their perceived trust in the police, their desire to help others, ability to work in a team and their confidence;
- Evidence from the case studies demonstrates how being in the mini-police for many children profoundly impacted their self-identity, as in who they think they are and who they want to be, improving their confidence and esteem. The collective identity of the mini-police in schools often supported a diverse group of children to work together and achieve positive change within the school environment. What appeared to be the most valuable outcome within sites were the positive relationships officers had developed with children who previously had, or who live with family members that have, negative views of the police;
- Children in the mini-police were more aware of the police cadets than non-mini-police children (66% and 45% respectively) and were much less likely to rule out being a police cadet in the future (19% and 42% respectively) or a police officer (24% and 37% respectively).

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## Adults' Perspectives: Key Findings

- The mini-police has several perceived aims, the most prominent of which is to build positive relationships between children and the police, followed by increasing social responsibility and citizenship among children. The mini police is perceived to be achieving these aims, having a positive impact on children's understanding of what the police do, confidence and trust in the police.
  - Community engagement is an important part of the mini-police in most sites, with some creating relationships with different partners within the community and others participating in activities such as litter picking, speed awareness and safety information.
  - The mini-police is seen as accessing children at a critical age, noting the importance of early intervention, raising children's aspirations and sense of civic responsibility. Critically, the mini-police is timely, positioned before an important transition into secondary school and within children's life course (as in child to adolescent).
  - The buy-in of middle management in some sites was perceived as a weakness, as they did not always understand or appreciate the value and importance of the mini-police when facing other operational demands. Staff turnover also presented an operational challenge in terms of training and confidence.
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# Introduction

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This report provides the findings from a comprehensive national evaluation of the mini-police, documenting how children perceive it and are impacted by it, how it has been designed and developed in sites as well as outlining operational and strategic recommendations to improve the mini-police.

The mini-police is an innovative police engagement programme with children aged 8-11 years. It was originally conceived in Durham by Craig Johnson and has since been launched by several forces in England and Wales. Forces are at different stages of their formation, but collectively are at the edge of significant development and growth. This report is timely in that it will enable forces to reflect on key findings and results which will support evidence-based operational and strategic development. The support of the Home Office Transformation Fund to build research evidence has contributed significantly to speeding up progress in this area.

This report takes a significant step at creating an evidence base to inform the development of the mini-police to increase its value to children and young people. The potential value of the mini-police increases further when considering the capacity of the mini-police to support national priorities such as adverse childhood experiences, gangs, county lines, exploitation, road safety and online safety.

The creation of such an evidence base, however, would not have been possible without the support and dedication of police staff across forces with direct responsibilities in the mini-police as well as key staff working in schools to enable children to benefit from participation in the mini-police. It is crucial that such passion for the mini-police does not abate, particularly in forces, in a shifting strategic and economic landscape. Indeed, as this report documents, the

importance of the mini-police to participating children as well as the potential of the programme at contributing to strategic national objectives such as the National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People: Child Centred Policing is too valuable to be lost.

**Chapter 2** sets a context for the mini-police, positioning it in relation to existing policy and evidence from studies that have documented the value of uniformed youth engagement programmes.

**Chapter 3** provides national figures on the number of forces that have a mini-police programme and details on the numbers of mini-police officers in each site.

**Chapter 4** explores children's perspectives on the mini-police, providing results from a national survey and 4 case studies conducted across England and Wales.

**Chapter 5** details key themes that emerged from adult views on the mini-police, informed by testimony from police officers, PCSOs and teaching staff as well as force strategic leads.

**Chapter 6** draws together the key findings and makes recommendations to improve the development of the mini-police at this critical stage of growth.

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# Setting a Context for the Mini-Police

This chapter explores existing literature and evidence to provide a context for the mini-police.



# Setting a Context for the Mini-Police

## Locating the Mini-Police within National Policy

The mini-police is a police primary school engagement programme originally developed in Durham by Craig Johnson for children 8-11 years old (years 5 and 6). The objective of the Durham mini-police initiative was to provide a fun and interactive way 'to introduce children to a positive experience of policing and to get them involved in the local community' (Durham Agency Against Crime, DAAC). The wider aims include building trust with communities, promoting responsible citizenship and a sense of social responsibility, improving relationships between the police and young people and increasing skills such as self-confidence. The Durham model was critical at inspiring other sites to launch their own initiatives, though other sites did not create direct replicas of the Durham model and instead developed their own localised aims and structures for implementation.

Whilst recognising the diversity of mini-police programmes nationally, the aims of all mini-police initiatives resonate with government strategy that seeks to work with children and young people to reduce their risk of becoming offenders or victims; build positive relations between the police and young people; and nurture their feelings of social responsibility so that they become active citizens. For example, the Modern Crime Prevention Strategy (Home Office, 2016) aims to prevent crime by 'building positive character traits and increasing young people's abilities to make good decisions and achieve positive life outcomes'. To achieve this, positive interactions between the police and young people, such as police cadets, will foster positive characteristics and resilience in children and young people. The Serious Violence Strategy (Home Office, 2018) also promotes the importance of providing programmes that

help young people build their self confidence, character and ability to engage positively with society. A commitment is to "explore and build on models of partnerships that exist and work well in building positive relationships between schools and police in England" (Home Office, 2018:6). Indeed, research carried out by Wong *et al.* (2018:14) of the Thames Valley mini-police has already provided some evidence of this potential with them commenting that:

**"Whilst it is difficult to confidently ascertain or isolate any direct impact of the Mini-Police on participants' perceptions and trust in the police, our data suggests that Mini-Police students do command a broad understanding of police work and that their regular encounters with a police officer seem to be supporting their development as responsible young citizens".**

The National Strategy for the Policing of Children and Young People: Child Centred Policing (National Police Chief's Council, 2016:4) acknowledged the evidence that:

**"shows the lack of confidence many young people have in the ability of the Police service to protect them – and so they rarely ask for help. Policing policies, processes and interactions with C&YP can have a significant impact on their lives, both in the short and long term".**

Early intervention is a crucial component of strategies (Home Office, 2016; National Police Chief's Council, 2016), aiming to improve communication and engagement with children and young people. The Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone sets out a commitment to empower young people to shape the future of the country by helping them to develop the skills and habits of social responsibility during their childhood and youth

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(Cabinet Office, 2018). The importance of schools is critical, with “citizenship teaching in schools, both as a discrete curriculum subject and as part of a whole-school approach, has been shown to enhance and reinforce participation individually and at school level” (Cabinet Office, 2018:44).

In this context, the mini-police is strategically well placed to provide young people with access to positive and integrated activities from an early age, representing a potentially critical programme to deliver the ambitions of national policy. Mini-police programmes across England and Wales are currently expanding, with new sites starting to begin pilot and implementation of their own programmes. This report is timely, in that it provides an important first step to capturing the experiences of some of the established and emerging programmes. Considering the placing of the mini-police within national policy and strategy, it is crucial that some consistent standards are agreed, and that good practice is shared to avoid a siloed iterative development that may fragment national progress.

## Relationship between the Police and Young People

Research has shown that young people are more likely to have contact with the police and that this contact can often be adversarial and problematic. Young people are disproportionately subject to practices such as stop and search, curfews, dispersal orders and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). These contacts can often be negative with young people reporting that they do not feel that they are treated with respect, that procedures are not explained to them, that the Police have negative stereotypes of them and they are labelled as a ‘problem’ (Crawford, 2009; Norman, 2009; Cleghorn *et al.*, 2011). Contact has been

consistently demonstrated to be a significant determinant of attitudes towards the police, with those having contact often being more negative (Bradford *et al.*, 2009).

At the same time as difficult and negative contact that children and young people have with the police, children and young people are exposed to significant risks in their lives that the police are positioned to provide protection. The rise of County Lines organised crime, reliant on the exploitation of children and young people, is a prominent societal and policing concern. Although the extent is not known, the Children’s Crime Commissioner estimates that there are at least 46,000 children in England involved in gang activity, with around 4,000 teenagers in London alone being exploited through child criminal exploitation, or ‘county lines’ (Children’s Commissioners for England, 2017). Furthermore, the rise of online safety risks presents a threat to the healthy development of children and young people. In 2017/18, more than 3,000 Childline counselling sessions were about bullying online and online safety (Bentley *et al.*, 2018) and a Barnardo’s survey of children that had been supported by one of five participating sexual exploitation services in the UK, found that 42% of them had been groomed online (Fox and Kalkan, 2016).

The problematic relationship between young people and the police has been a highly politicised subject over the last 10 years, with the Howard League’s ‘U R BOSS’ campaign to promote young people’s interests in the CJS, with policing consistently at the heart of young people’s concerns (Fleming *et al.*, 2014). The “It’s all About Trust” report found that interactions were often negative leading to some young people not trusting or even fearing the Police (All Parliamentary Group, 2014). While there were some examples of positive initiative’s, these were

patchy and hindered by funding issues. One of the recommendations of the report was the extension of the VPC programme. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (2015) documented how children when discussing policing and youth justice described negative stereotypes such as the police being "rude" and "heavy handed", feeling hassled and feeling that comments by the police were intended to humiliate and intimidate them.

Research suggests a key tenant of public and police relations is the perception of procedural justice, with it is argued that public trust in policing is needed partly because this may result in public cooperation with justice, but more importantly because public trust in justice builds institutional legitimacy and thus public compliance with the law (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Bradford *et al.*, 2009; 2014; Gau and Brunson, 2010). Although research has largely focused on adults, recent research suggests that procedural justice is more important to young people (Hinds, 2007; Murphy, 2012). Therefore, the evidence suggests that improving relations and understanding between children and young people and the police is critical to increasing children and young people's likelihood of asking for help, compliance with the law and cooperation with the police.

It is also worth noting that the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) highlighted that, in general, overall positivity about the police and agreement with some of the perception statements decreased with age (CSEW, 2014). For example, 10-year olds were around twice as likely to have a positive opinion of their local police overall (75%) when compared with 15-year olds (38%). Thus, younger children may be more willing to engage in a police-led scheme, rather than at a later age when negative contact has meant that they have already developed a

mistrust of the police.

Overall, the mini-police, through its work in more deprived areas in some sites is strategically and advantageously positioned to make a positive impact in relation to procedural justice, public cooperation and public compliance with the law. Although the CSEW results indicate a decline in positivity towards the police as children get older, positive engagement in the mini-police has the potential to recalibrate what the police means to young people which may, in the long-term, translate into more positive perceptions as children grow older.

## Police Interventions with Young People

This section explores the ways in which police-youth schemes could improve relations between young people and the police, as well as impacting on the willingness of young people to help the community, improve behaviour, increase skills and confidence and enhance wellbeing of children and young people. The section also draws upon research of other youth organisations, mostly uniformed, that have a similar ethos or purpose such as military cadets and organisations such as scouts.

## Relationship Building

There are a range of studies that demonstrate positive benefits of police-based children and youth engagement in terms of rapport between young people and officers.

- Anderson *et al.* (2006) found that young people reported feeling significantly more respected by police officers and more comfortable in their presence following their engagement in a programme in Connecticut designed to promote positive youth development through meaningful and

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enjoyable community activities.

- Clayman and Skinns (2010) in a qualitative study exploring why 'young people do not 'snitch' concluded that in the interests of encouraging young people to actively cooperate with the police, more could be done to further develop trust in them through the relationships they have with PCSOs and school liaison officers.
- Pepper and Silvestri (2016) drawing on research with Volunteer Police Cadets argue that being a police cadet provides young people with a number of important opportunities to experience positive 'personal encounters' with the police, resulting in a greater feeling of belonging and an increased stake in conformity.

The benefits of police-based youth engagement are evidenced to be positive both for children and young people as well as police officers.

- Goodrich *et al.* (2014) evaluated a prevention programme designed to create positive interactions between Police and youth in a non-law enforcement environment, finding that participation improved Police officers' and youths' attitudes toward each other. Participants reported enjoying the programme and appreciating the opportunity to interact in an informal setting.
- Hyanghee *et al.* (2017) used a pre-post-design identified improved police officers' and youths' attitudes toward each other. For youth, the rate of change in attitudes was greatest for minority youth and for youth who had prior negative experience with the police. The study concluded that community-based programmes that involve police with youth can improve participants' attitude toward each other, which might impact future interactions.
- Walmsley's (2015) evaluation found that there

were statistically significant improvements in (1) attitudes towards the police at the end of the project compared to the start and (2) an increased willingness for young people to go to a PCSO for help after the project compared to the start.

Overall, there are a range of studies that show police engagement initiatives with children and young people have potential to significantly improve the relationship between young people and the police, especially for those young people who have had previous negative experiences with the police. Such benefits may translate to improved trust and cooperation, perceptions of legitimacy and likelihood of reporting crime.

## Increasing Community Involvement and Future Willingness to Volunteer

Studies of children and young people's engagement in uniformed youth groups illustrates potential to increase community involvement and future willingness to volunteer.

- The study of the impact of Scouting on the UK's young people, adults and communities report (PACEC, 2011) reported that 36% of former scouts volunteered regularly (at least two hours per week), compared to 26% of the general population as reported by 2008-09 Citizenship survey. Of the former scouts who did volunteer, 66% indicated that scouting positively influenced their decision to get involved.
- Kirkman *et al.*'s (2016) randomised control trial of youth social action initiatives found that young people who participated were more likely to express interest in specific volunteering activities available to them in the future than their counterparts.
- Tyler-Rubinstein's (2016) evaluation of the Uniformed Youth Social Action Fund

(UYSAF) identified that three quarters of those surveyed (c.1,000) reported that they considered the social action they experienced to be very worthwhile (75%), that they had a more positive impression of what young people contribute to their local communities as a result (77%) and that they felt prouder of their local area as a result (80%).

- Moon *et al.*'s (2010) social impact study of MOD-sponsored cadets found that 66% of cadets would intervene if they saw a child being rude to an adult and 73% would do something or tell someone if they saw some children spray painting graffiti on a local building (compared to 56% and 68% of young people surveyed in the BCS 2006/07 respectively).

Engagement with uniformed youth groups, therefore, can improve how children and young people behave within and perceive their community. Moreover, initiatives have potential to improve children and young people's sense of moral order and sense of responsibility for delinquency and transgressions in their local environment. Importantly, as outlined in the preceding section, improvements in terms of trust with the police and perceived legitimacy renders children and young people more likely to report such contraventions to the relevant authorities, as opposed to a silenced acceptance of disorder.

## Behavioural Improvements

Alongside improved attitudes and civic engagement, uniformed youth engagement programmes are evidenced to improve the behaviour and attitudes of children and young people who participate.

- Denny *et al.* (2018) reported that 85% of the Ministry of Defence cadets who participated

in a survey felt that their behaviour and attitude at school had improved due to their membership of the Cadet Forces. In addition, a majority of the Cadet Force Adult volunteers surveyed reported that being in the Cadet Forces helped some young people settle down at school. Quantitative analysis on cadets and a matched comparison group of students from the same school shows that being in the cadets had a positive impact on school attendance. School staff also reported that the Cadet Forces had a positive impact on inclusions for students with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

- Anderson *et al.*'s (2006) evaluation of police working with young people in non-enforcement roles found that younger children (10-12 years) were significantly more likely to improve their scores on self-regulatory efficacy (which refers to one's ability to resist negative peer pressures) following completion of the programme than older children (13-18 years). This is important to note as it adds weight to the argument for having a police scheme for younger children.

Other research highlights the importance of mentors on improving behaviour.

- Grossman and Garry (1997) in an evaluation of a federal Juvenile Mentoring Program suggested that the provision of positive adult mentors had increased school attendance, reduced alcohol and drug use and participation in anti-social behaviour. In addition, the quality of young people's relationships with their parents and peers was better for mentored young people.
- Gregory and Ripski (2008) argue that young people who found their teachers to be trustworthy and authoritative were more likely to be co-operative in activities, engage in lesson plans and curriculum, and less

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likely to engage in defiant behaviour. This model provides an insight into the utility of establishing trusting relationships between youth and the figures in authority.

Participation in uniformed youth engagement programmes are therefore illustrated to have potential to influence children and young people's behaviours in school as well as their attitudes towards attainment. This is important as increased attainment at school will support young people in their future careers as well as reducing their likelihood of entry into the Criminal Justice System.

## Improving Skills

Research evidence is available to demonstrate how children and young people develop new skills and improve existing skills through participation in uniformed youth organisations.

- The Impact of Scouting report (PACEC, 2011) documents how 88 % of scouts stated their experiences had helped them develop key skills including social, team working and leadership skills, with 92% indicating that being a scout had helped with relationship building.
- NCVO's survey of thousands of current and recent volunteers found that volunteering had created opportunities for new types of experiences and the acquisition of new skills (McGarvey *et al.*, 2019). It was reported that 71% of those that had volunteered in the last 12 months agreed that they had gained new experience through volunteering and this increased to 85% among 18-24 year olds.
- Moon *et al.* (2010) highlighted how cadets view membership in terms of future benefits such as CV enhancement as well as for personal development and skills acquisition.
- DeMarco *et al.* (2018) argue that young

people most 'at risk' due to family composition, school exclusion, or other lifestyle risk factors were the most vocal about the importance of these advantages within the cadet unit as those they would normally not have access to.

The perceived future benefits of skills gained or developed through uniformed youth organisation involvement are important to children and young people who participate, as well as for future employers. Critically, the facilitation of new experiences and meeting new and, at times, different people enables members to develop their 'soft' skills (such as communication) to complement the 'hard' skills (such as Duke of Edinburgh Qualifications) which are perceived as valuable to their development and positively representing their sense of self-identity/character to future employers.

## Self-Confidence, Mental Wellbeing and Physical Health

Volunteering is linked with improved mental wellbeing and confidence, and there is evidence that participation in uniformed youth groups has similar benefits.

- Denny *et al.* (2018) found, despite young people who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM) having lower self-efficacy levels compared with the general population, no significant difference in self-efficacy levels between eFSM cadets and non-eFSM cadets were found. Although it is not possible to definitely say that this is only due to participation in cadets, it is very possible that cadets who were eFSM have improved self-efficacy because of the activities they undertake as members of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Cadet Forces.
- Moon *et al.* (2010) identified that members



of cadet forces demonstrated a high level of self-esteem with over 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with a series of statements designed to evaluate how individuals feel about themselves. The statements cover themes such as confidence, pride, satisfaction, personal power and achievement.

- Dibben *et al.* (2015) found that participation in guides and scouts was associated with better mental health and narrower mental health inequalities, at age 50. This suggests that youth programmes that support resilience and social mobility through developing the potential for continued progressive self-education, soft non-cognitive skills, self-reliance, collaboration and activities in natural environments may be

protective of mental health.

- Wang *et al.* (2015) in a two and half year study with scouts measured that self-ratings increased significantly for cheerfulness, helpfulness, kindness, obedience, trustworthiness and hopeful future expectations but did not increase significantly for a non-scout control group.

Overall, the improvements to mental health are extremely valuable, in a wider societal context of increased levels of poor mental wellbeing, especially among specific groups of children and young people. Participation in uniformed youth groups has the potential to improve children and young people's self-identity as well as increasing their resilience.

## Summary

**There is evidence to suggest that initiatives like the mini-police have strong potential for the aims of:**

- **improving Police and young people relations;**
- **increasing community involvement and feelings of civic responsibility;**
- **increasing confidence and wellbeing and enhancing skills acquisition.**

**Although the evidence presented here has largely focused on older age groups, there are some indications that targeting younger children, such as the children of mini-police age, may be beneficial to maximise opportunities for behaviour change and improving their perceptions of the police. It is important that as the mini-police grows, the content and structure of the schemes are evaluated as there may be key components of the scheme that are imperative to achieving these objectives and even whose omission may even be damaging to these objectives.**

**This report therefore provides a timely starting point for understanding what the mini-police is, how children experience it and what impacts such experiences have on their everyday lives. The next chapter provides an overview of the scale of the mini-police in England and Wales.**

# National Overview of the Mini-Police

This chapter provides an overview of the number of mini police schemes and children in England and Wales.

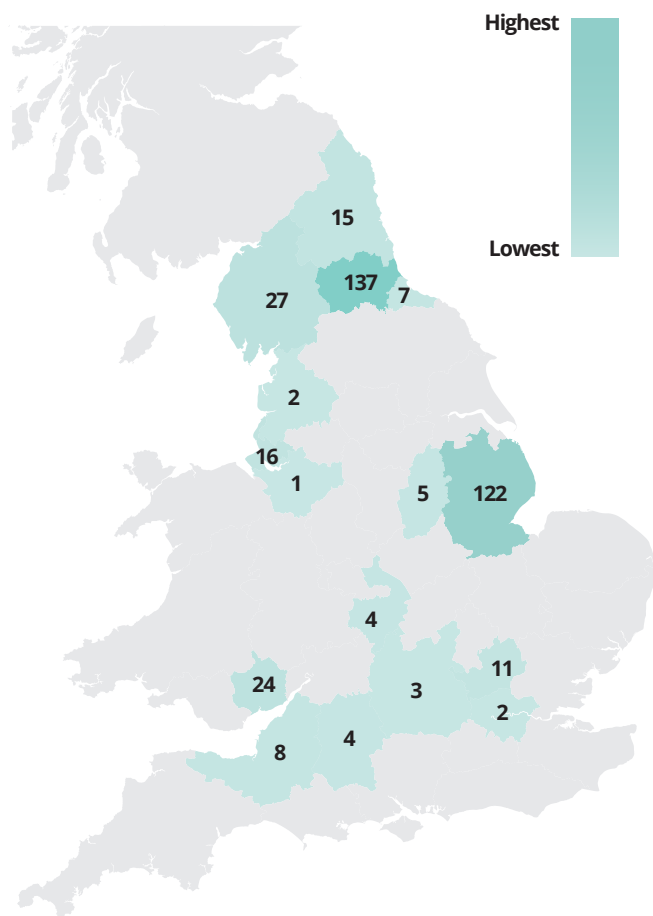


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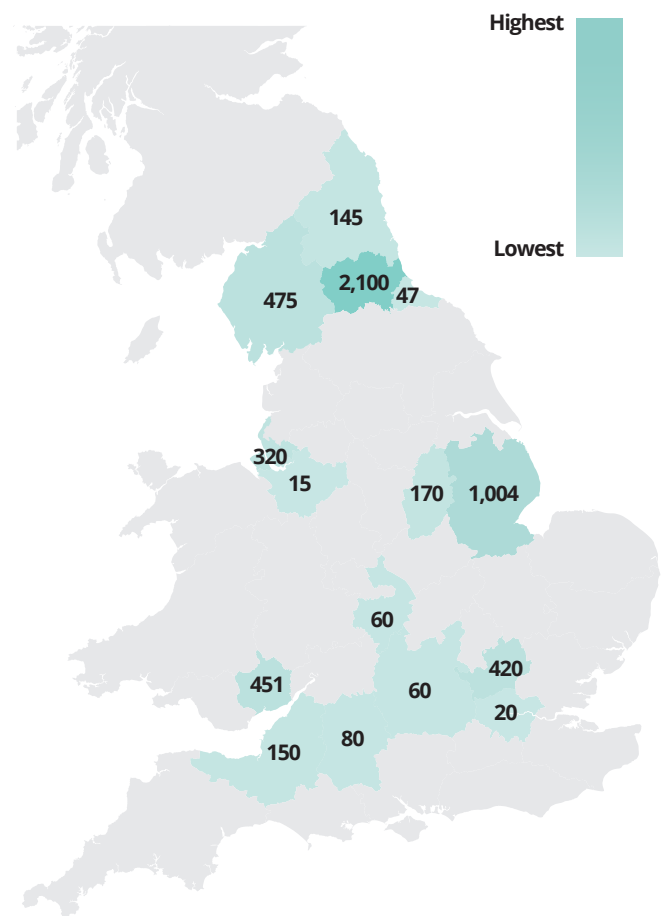
Since its conception, the mini-police has grown considerably over the past few years. There are now some 388 mini-police schools across 16 forces. Figure 3.1 illustrates that the growth of the mini-police has been uneven, with Durham and Lincolnshire having a much higher number of schools compared to other areas which ranged between 1 and 27 schools. It should be noted that a similar programme in Staffordshire has another 100 schools (involving 1,000 children).

Figure 3.2 shows the number of children who were mini-police officers in each area in the past twelve months. In total, there were 5,517 children who were mini-police officers in England and Wales. The average number of mini-police children per school is 17, though the size of cohorts in schools varied considerably. Seven sites indicated that they had one mini-police cycle a year, one indicated they had 3, one indicated they had 6 and one indicated they had 9. The remaining sites did not indicate how many cycles they had a year.

**Figure 3.1 Mini-Police Schools in each Site**



**Figure 3.2 Number of Mini-Police in each Site**

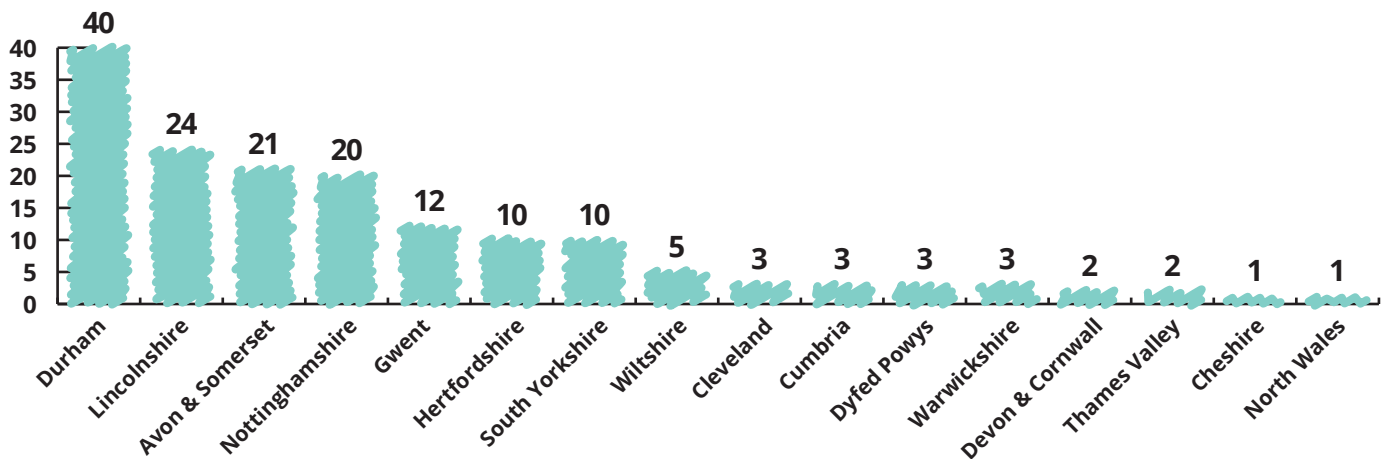


Sites were asked whether mini-police undertake social action as part of the scheme, 11 of the 16 sites indicated that they did. 11 sites indicated that they have safeguarding principles, 4 indicated that they did not, and one indicated unknown. It is worth noting that six sites held after school activity relating to the mini-police.

In terms of planned growth, an additional 160 mini-police units are indicated as planned in the coming year, 16 of which are in new force

areas (South Yorkshire, Dyfed Powys, Devon & Cornwall and North Wales) and the remaining are additional schools in forces that have already have the mini-police established. The evidence suggests that the mini-police has grown significantly in the past year, probably marking an increase somewhere in the region of 40%-45% in a single year, representing many children and a large programme footprint within each of the areas.

**Figure 3.3 Planned Growth of the Mini-Police**

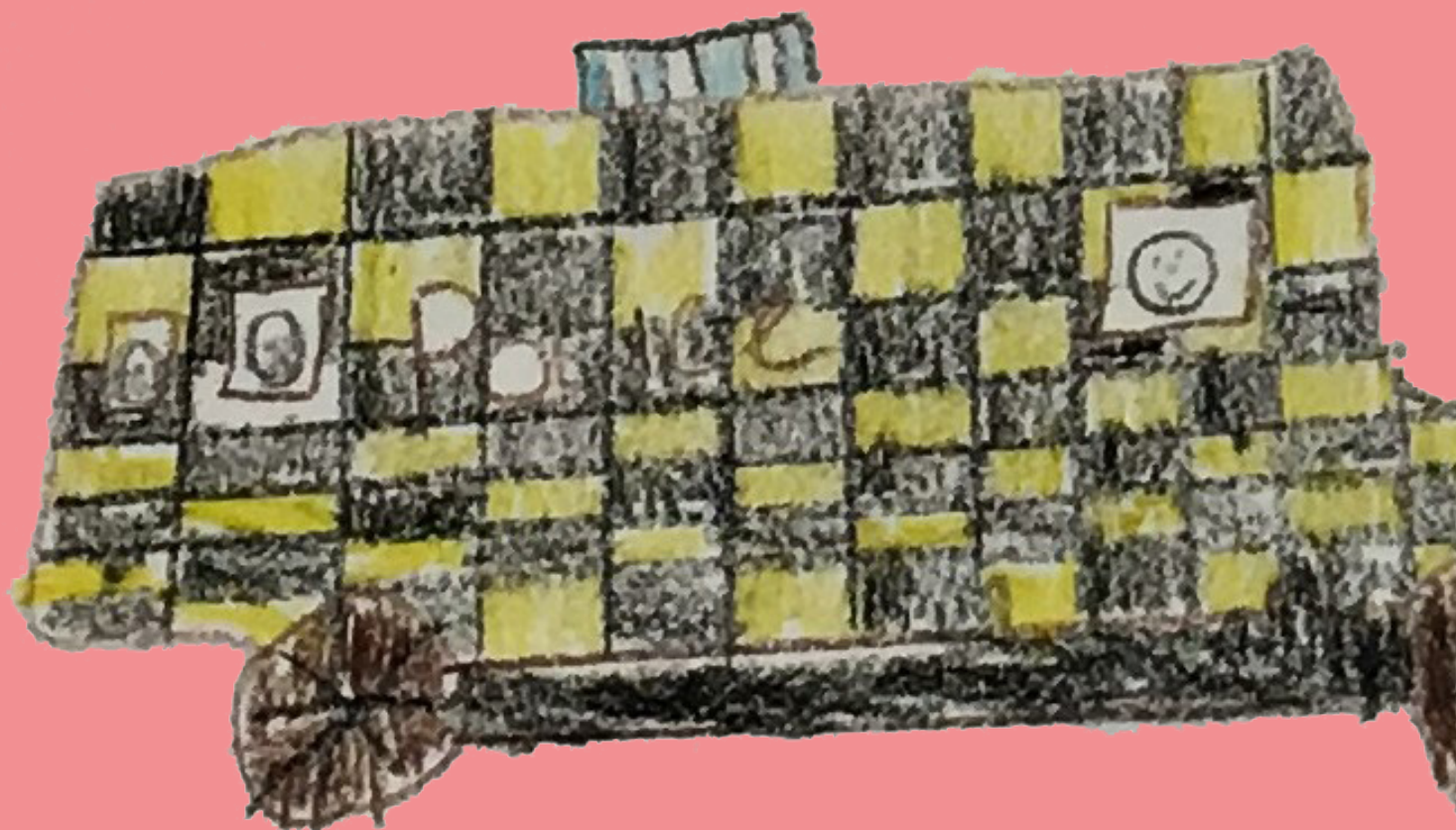


## Critical reflections on national picture

Over the past twelve months, the mini-police programme has grown and now involves some 5,517 children across England and Wales. The evidence demonstrates how this growth has been uneven, with Durham and Lincolnshire having a disproportionately high number of schools and children involved. The evidence also shows how the size of cohorts or units within schools is different as well as the programme length. The importance of this national evaluation is strengthened when considering the planned growth of the programme, as well as the potential impacts of it within areas with a large and expanding footprint.

# Children's Perspectives on the Mini-Police

This chapter has 2 parts. The first provides an overview of the results from the children's survey and the second provides findings from the in-depth case studies.



# National Survey Findings

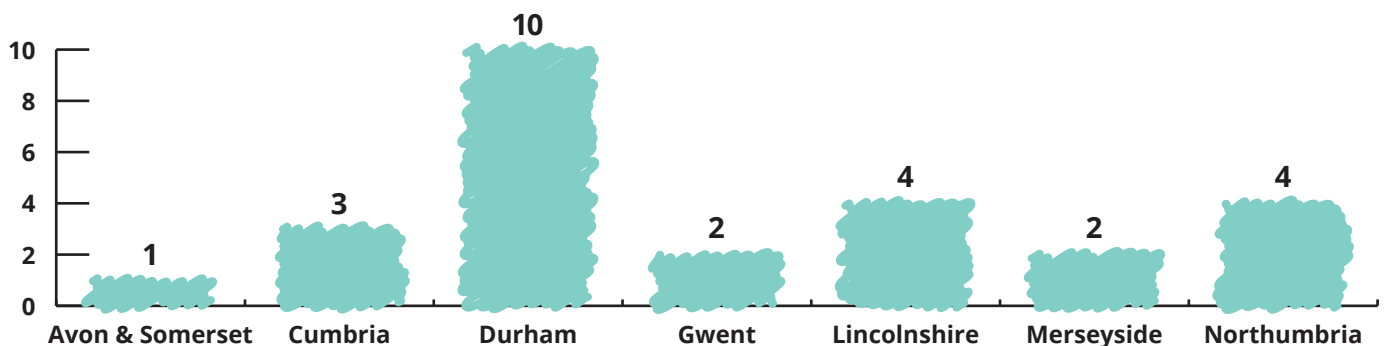
A national online survey was created to capture the views of children on the mini-police. The survey was distributed by force leads to schools and was launched in December 2018 and closed in February 2019, being live for 8 weeks. The aim of the survey was to be as inclusive as possible, recognising that some schools may not be able to participate due to its online nature.

The survey was designed to be completed by children who are or not directly involved in the mini-police, to enable a comparison of attitudes and explore whether the mini-police was influencing peers. The survey was designed around 4 core sections: perspectives on the mini-police; perspectives on policing; perspectives on safety; and continued and future connections with policing. The responses will now be explored following a brief overview of the sample.

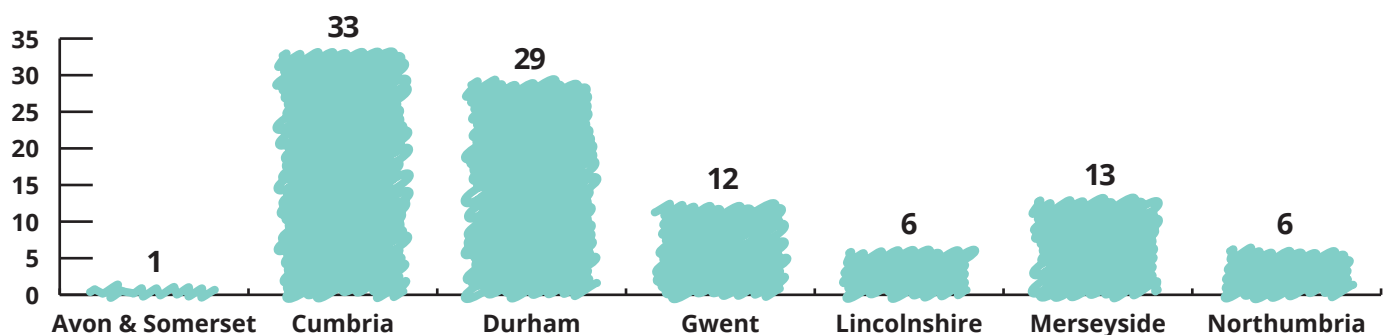
## Survey Sample

Overall, a total of 350 children participated in the online survey from 26 schools across England and Wales. Durham had most schools participate (n=10) with most of the other sites having between 2 and 4 schools participate in the project (see figure 4.1). In terms of numbers of children, however, around a third of the sample were located in Cumbria and Durham respectively. Children from Gwent and Merseyside made up about a quarter of the sample when combined. The other participating forces made up a little over a tenth of the sample when combined. This shows that the volume of children who participated in the project differed between schools (see figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.1 School Engagement by Force (Number)**



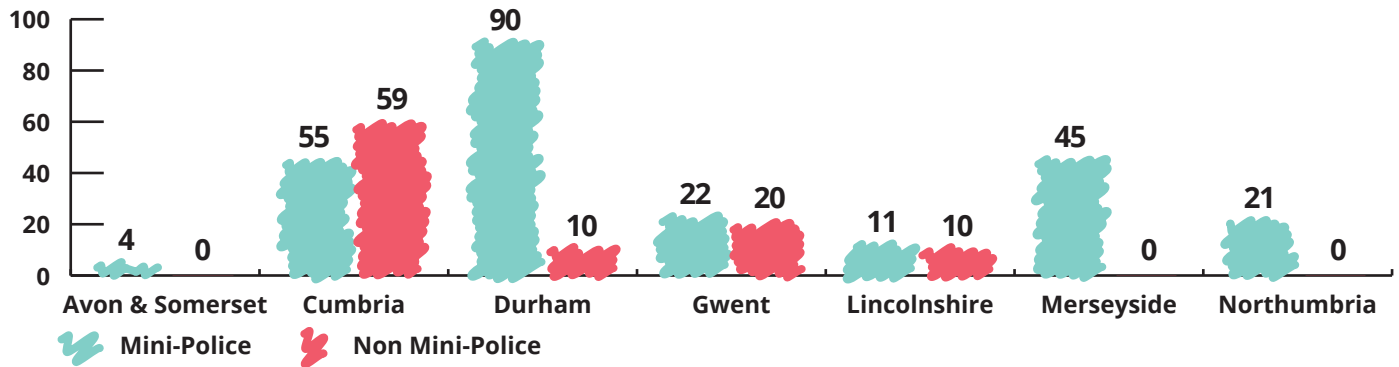
**Figure 4.2 Sample by Force Area (Percent)**



Of the 350, 248 children were directly involved in the mini-police. Whilst a third of children were located in Cumbria and Durham respectively, a higher proportion of children from Durham

participated in the mini-police whilst the sample in Cumbria comprise a higher proportion who were not directly involved in the mini-police (see figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3 Sample by Force Area and Mini-Police Participation (Number)**

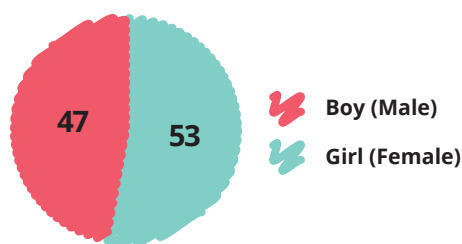


The breakdown of children in the sample reveals that there was a relatively even split between girls and boys. Most of the children who

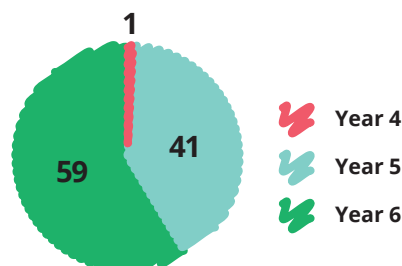
participated were in Year 6 in school and aged ten (see figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4 Children's Demographics**

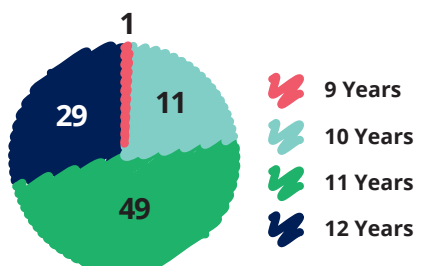
**Gender (%)**



**Year Group in School (%)**



**Age (%)**



Overall, the sample has some limitations but nevertheless the information obtained through the survey represents the largest dataset on children's views on the mini-police. A key weakness was the limited number of children from schools not involved directly in the mini-police or children who are peers of those who are. The following sections provide some comparisons between these groups, though the results should be treated with caution due to

these limitations.

**Perspectives on the Mini-Police**

This section provides an overview of children's attitudes towards the mini-police. In total, the survey was completed by 248 mini-police officers. The overall experience of being in the mini-police was reported very positively, with there being only 2 children who indicated that

# National Survey Findings

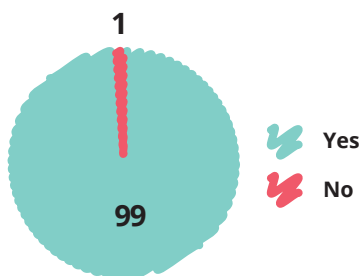
they did not enjoy being a part of the mini-police. Of the 248 mini-police officers, 190 (77%) children enjoyed all of mini-police, with a further 47 (19%) enjoying most of their experiences (see figure 4.5).

Important note: Considering the sample size,

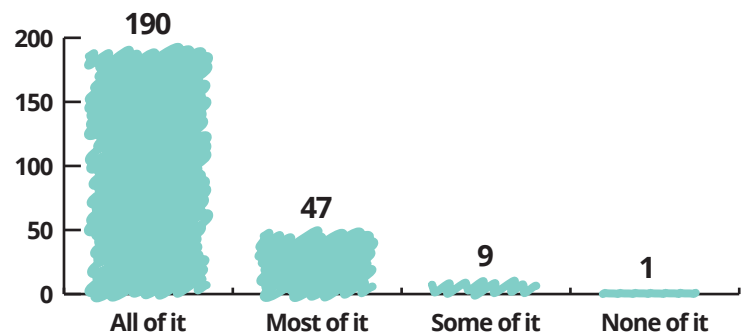
analytical techniques to assess significance were restricted however some associations were made. All associations presented here should be treated with caution and not treated as definitive, rather they should be interpreted as useful early indicators.

**Figure 4.5 Children’s Enjoyment of the Mini-Police**

**Did you enjoy being part of the mini-police?**



**How much of the mini-police did you enjoy?**



Children in the mini-police were asked what they enjoyed most about their experiences. The most common answer, representing a little over half of all comments (54%) related to activities they had completed during the mini-police. There were 5 other recognised themes, which were in order of prominence: making an impact to others (14%); connecting with policing (12%); learning (8%); the feelings of being a mini-police officer (7%) and creating connections with peers, other children and adults (6%).

**“I enjoy being able to do things that only come once in a lifetime.” (Lincolnshire)**

**“I enjoyed it because the teachers were friendly and liked to joke about. Also, I liked that we are now very aware of how to act during a situation that is serious enough to be dealt with by the police.” (Durham)**

**“I enjoyed wearing a smart uniform which made me look the part. I also loved interacting with the public, helping them with any current concerns and it was nice to talk with people I normally wouldn’t have such as the elderly. (Merseyside) I enjoy being able to do things that only come once in a lifetime.” (Lincolnshire)**

**“What I enjoyed most was I felt I was treated with respect and everyone in the assembly got equal parts. (Durham) I enjoy being able to do things that only come once in a lifetime.” (Lincolnshire)**

**“I really enjoyed meeting the police chief because it made me feel a real member of the mini police.” (Merseyside)**

Children were also asked about which bits they least enjoyed. There were less comments compared with comments on enjoyment, with most comments relating to specific activities they

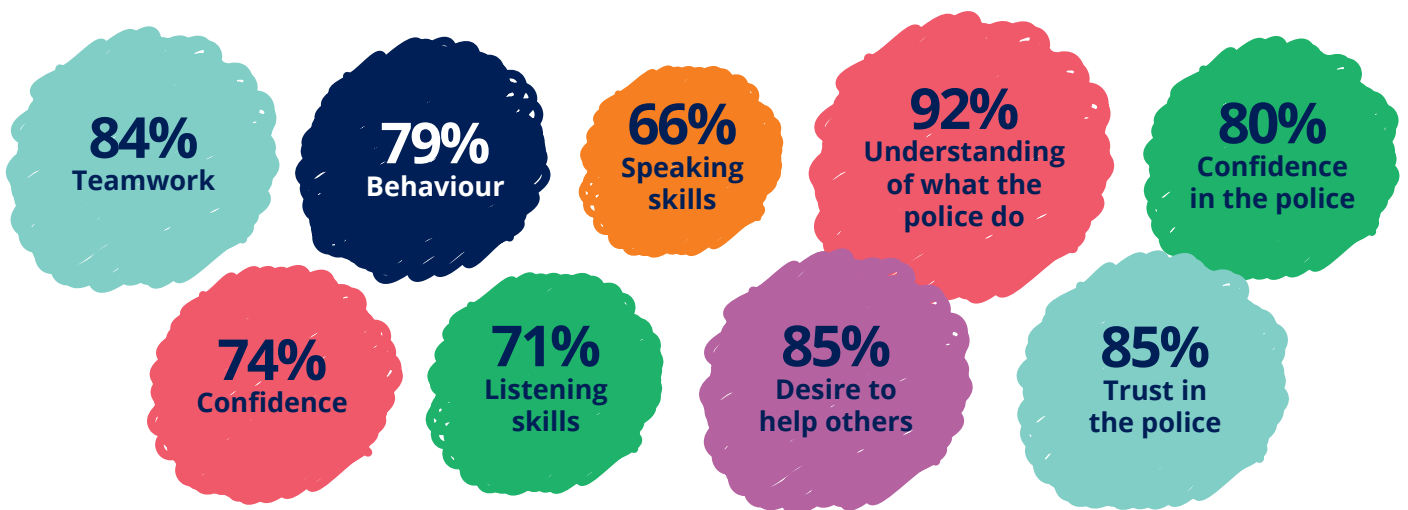


did not enjoy. A few recurring issues, though with a small number of children, included missing out on play times to complete mini-police duties, feeling bored during specific activities and feeling like there was not enough police contact.

- **"Missing out play times. That's the only think is the least favourite."** Durham
- **"I enjoyed all of it. But when we do lunch time club sometimes I want to go out and play."** Gwent
- **"Sitting on the chairs and listening to the police introduce themselves."** Merseyside
- **"I didn't enjoy it when we had to write things as it was very boring."** Durham
- **"Well we didn't do very much with the police and, I thought that we were going to do more."** Lincolnshire

Children in the mini-police were asked to assess what features being in the mini-police had impacted. The features that most children indicated had been impacted related to better understanding what the police do and their desire to help others (see figure 4.6). The trust they had in the police alongside their ability to work in a team also had c.85% levels of agreement. The least agreed with statements related to speaking and listening skills, though it must be noted that each had over two-thirds agreement among the mini-police officers suggesting a reasonably high impact across all features surveyed. There were no significant differences in the reported impacts when exploring differences based on gender, year group in school or age. These results demonstrate how being a part of the mini-police had a range of impacts on children's perspectives and values. Knowledge of who the police are and their ability to work in a team are further illustrated in the case study activities.

**Figure 4.6 Agreement that being in the mini-police had impacted the following features (Percent)**



Overall, the children were very positive about their experiences in the mini-police, with a large proportion enjoying all or most of their experiences. The results indicate the importance

of both positive, dynamic and impactful activities, that have a secondary effect of breaking barriers and misperceptions of who the police are and what they do.

# National Survey Findings

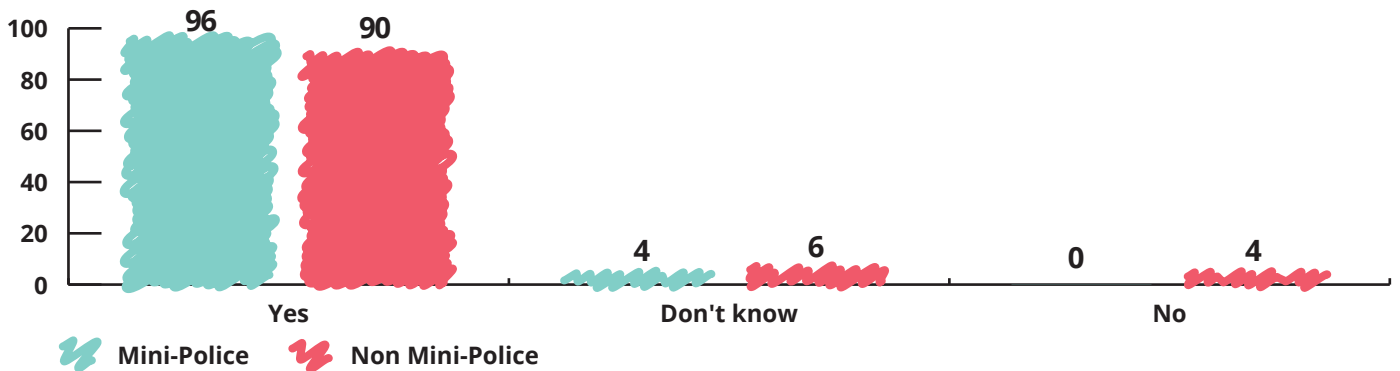
## Perspectives on Policing

This section provides an overview of the results relating to perspectives on policing.

Children were initially asked if the police do a

good job. The results show most children, either in the mini-police or not, believed that the police did a good job, however the results were slightly more positive for children in the mini-police (see figure 4.7).

**Figure 4.7 Do the police do a good job? (Percent)**



The word cloud (Figure 4.8) illustrates key words that children used to explain why they think the police do a good job. The key words were help, safe, protect, arrest, crime and community. Most of the comments on why the police do a

good job related to keeping people safe from harm and helping people either in need or in emergency situations. Some of the children outlined how the police played an important protective role in their community and to society.

**Figure 4.8 Word cloud of words children used to explain why they think the police do a good job**



**"I think that [the police do a good job] because they make me feel safe and when I see police I feel proud because I am a part of the Mini Police." (Merseyside)**

**"Look at it as if we didn't have any police everyone would go around stealing things and hurting people! Though sometimes I wish we could have cameras anywhere to catch people speeding or doing bad things in action." (Lincolnshire)**

There were, however, a small group of children who indicated the police did not do a good job.

**"I'm not sure because I have only met them in the mini police in the things they have held." (Merseyside)**

**"Because sometimes they do a good job but I've seen a few be over aggressive and bossy." (Merseyside)**

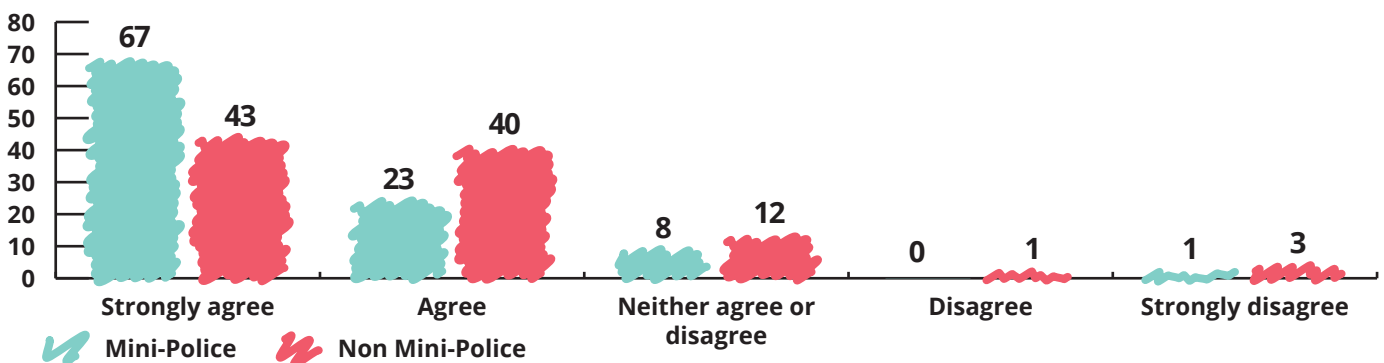
**"... I think the police don't do a good job because they are many people getting away with smoking, drinking and other stuff through the community." (Durham)**

Children were asked about their level of agreement to a series of statements designed

to assess their perspectives. Statements on perspectives in policing were related to three categories: 1. children and police dynamic; 2. police behaviours and performance; and 3. police knowledge. The following results compare children who were a part of the mini-police with those who were not.

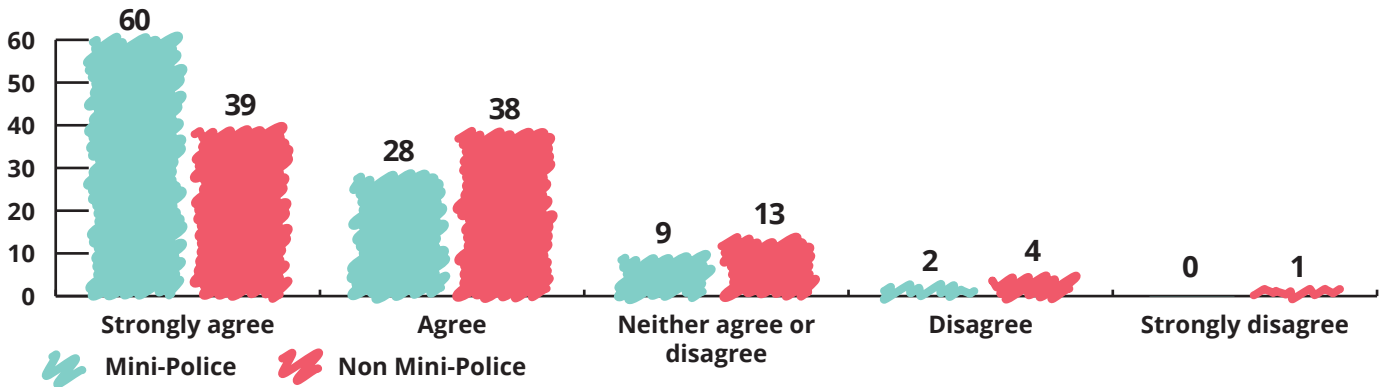
The overall analysis was extremely positive across most statements with only a handful of children disagreeing with statements. In relation to the dynamic between children and policing, children in the mini-police responded more favourably compared to children who were not a part of the mini-police. For instance, in relation to the statement that the police work well with young people, whilst nearly all children agreed, children in the mini-police more strongly agreed (see figure 4.9). A similar distribution of responses was found for the statement relating to the police listening to young people (see figure 4.10). All children in general agreed that they trust the police and that they are comfortable to say hello to a police officer. These results are promising in that, whilst most children hold positive views of the police, participation in the mini-police appears to have an enhancing effect on children's perspectives.

**Figure 4.9 I think that the police work well with young people (Percent)**



# National Survey Findings

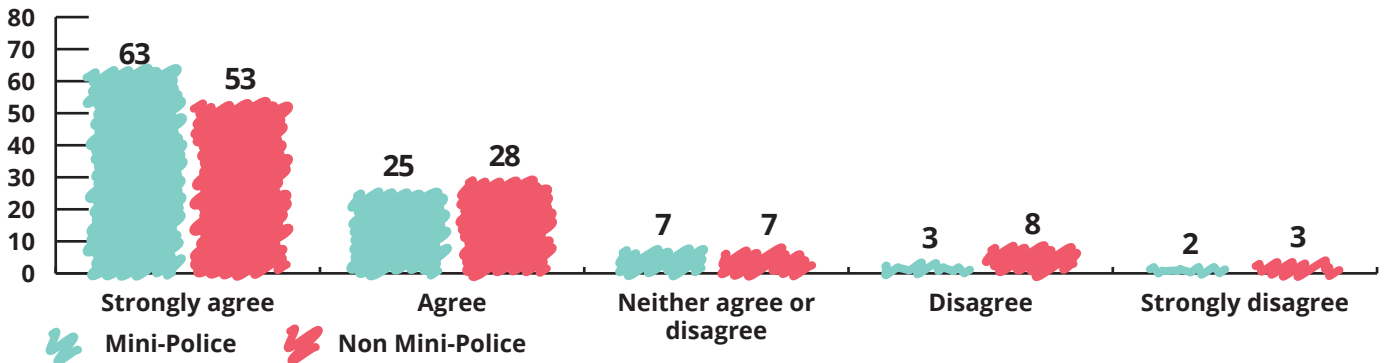
**Figure 4.10 I think that the police listen to young people (Percent)**



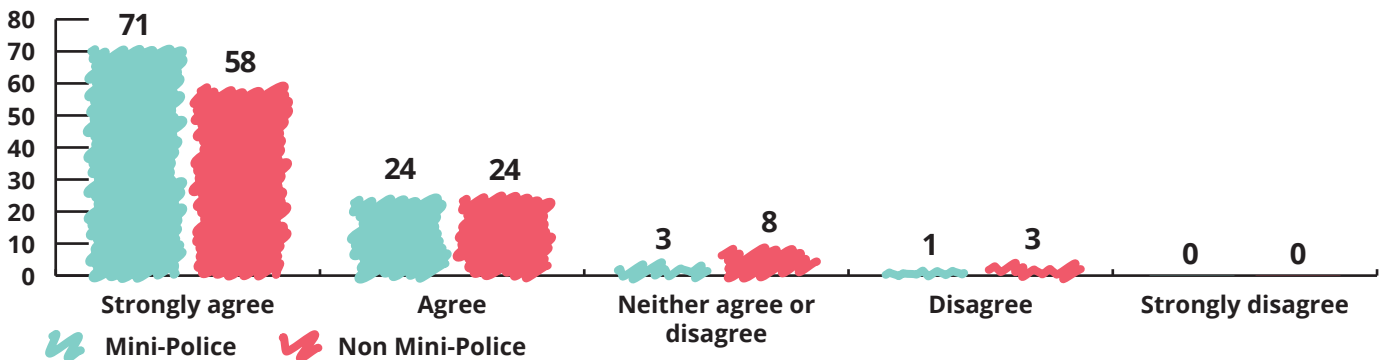
Children were also asked about their views towards how the police behave and their performance. The majority of children thought that the police treated people fairly no matter who they are (see figure 4.11) and that the police do a good job (see figure 4.12). Indeed, 95%

of children in the mini-police agreed that the police did a good job, compared with 82% who were not in the mini-police. As like their views on children and police dynamics, participation in the mini-police appears to have a positive effect, though not as strongly.

**Figure 4.11 I think the police treat people fairly no matter who they are (Percent)**



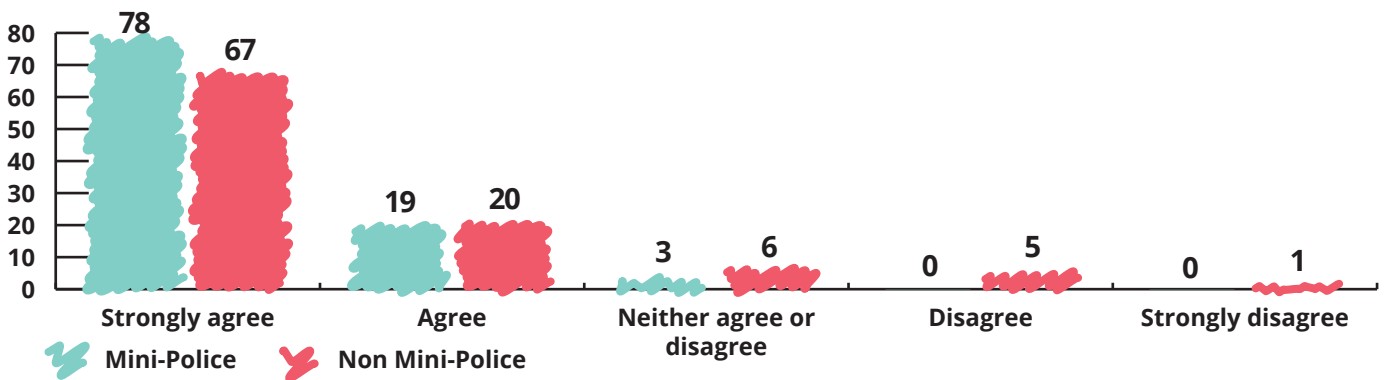
**Figure 4.12 I think the police do a good job (Percent)**



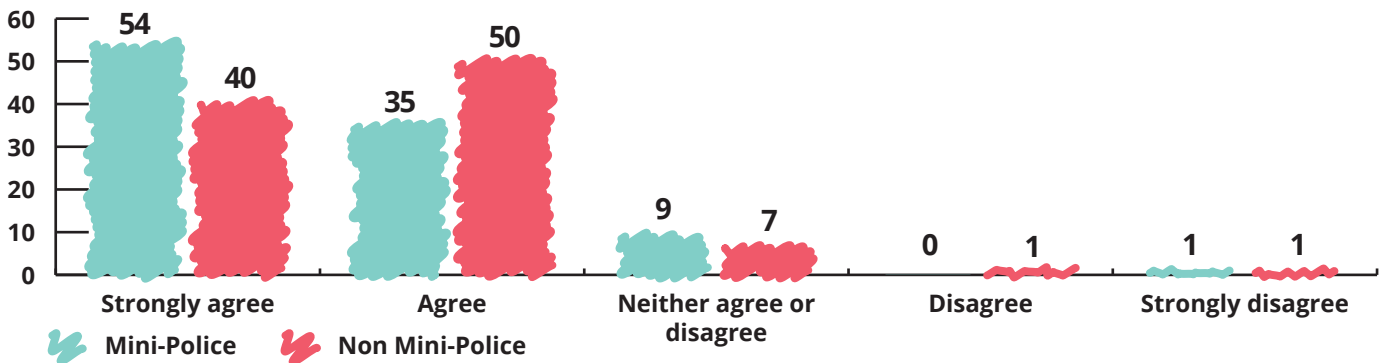
In relation to police knowledge, most children knew how to contact the police if they needed to, with a higher proportion of agreement among children in the mini-police (see figure 4.13). The difference in knowledge about their understanding of the different things the police did between children in the mini-police or not was more noticeable, even though a similar proportion of overall agreement (see figure 4.14).

Children in the mini-police were more likely to strongly agree they understood the different things the police did compared to children who did not participate in the mini-police, suggesting that exposure to officers and engagement in mini-police activities supported children to distinguish between policing roles and activities, beyond a generic persona.

**Figure 4.13 I know how to contact the police if I need them (Percent)**



**Figure 4.14 I have a good understanding of all the different things that the police do (Percent)**

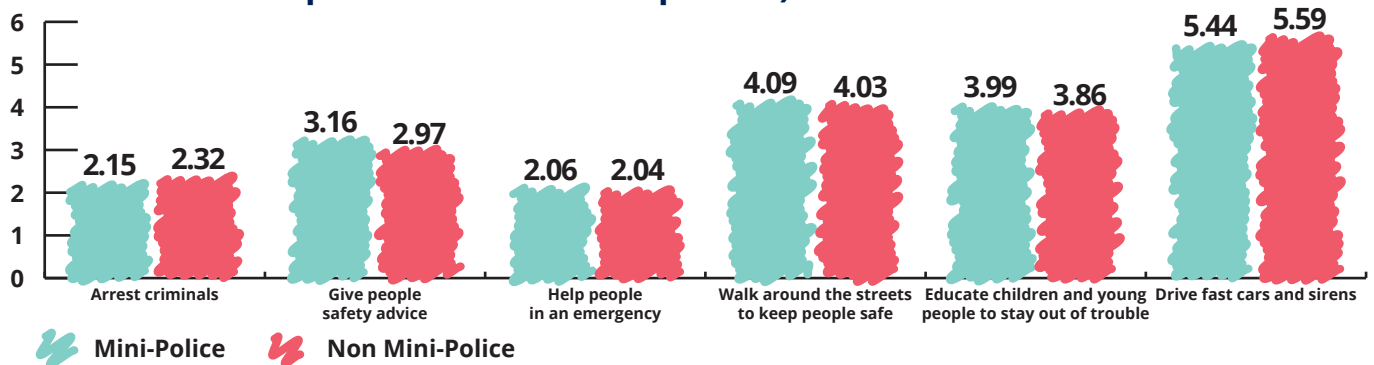


Children were asked to rank which things the police did that they thought were most important. The results show that there was little difference between children in the mini-police compared with children not in the mini-police.

Figure 4.15 illustrates these results, showing the mean result for each statement, showing that helping people in an emergency and arresting people were seen as most important.

# National Survey Findings

**Figure 4.15 Which of the following things that the police do are most important? (Mean score with 1= Most important to 6 = Least important)**



Overall, the results show that whilst most children in the survey held positive perspectives on policing, participation in the mini-police appears to have an enhancing effect on such attitudes. This effect was most noticeable for how children assessed the dynamic between themselves and the police, as well as it improving children’s knowledge of the breadth of roles and functions completed by police officers.

children not in the mini-police felt safer when at school and when travelling to and from school (see figure 4.16). No conclusions from this can be drawn although it is worth noting that children in the mini-police may gain a richer understanding of risk in different spaces, especially public spaces in relation to road and water safety. This difference was not statistically significant but needs further exploration.

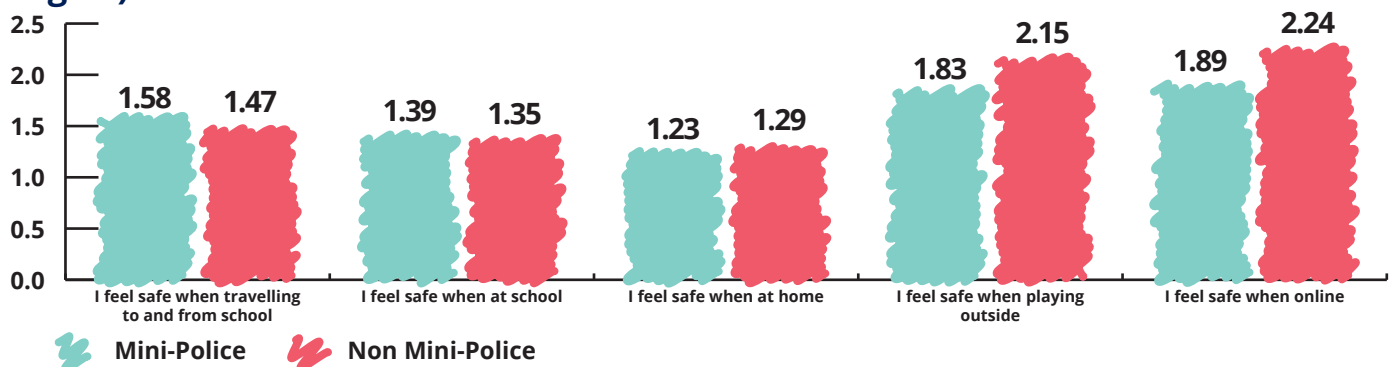
## Perspectives on Safety

This section provides an overview of results relating to perspectives on safety. Children were asked to rate how safe they feel in different spaces and the results are presented here.

The safest space for all children was when they were in their home. When comparing the results for children in the mini-police to children who were not, though the differences were small,

In contrast, children in the mini-police felt safer when playing outside and when online. The relative difference between these scores was larger compared with the differences previously outlined. The activities in the mini-police typically involve a session(s) on online safety, which might contribute to the differences identified in children’s perspectives. These differences are important to verify with a larger sample as active participation may play an important role in children’s sense of safety.

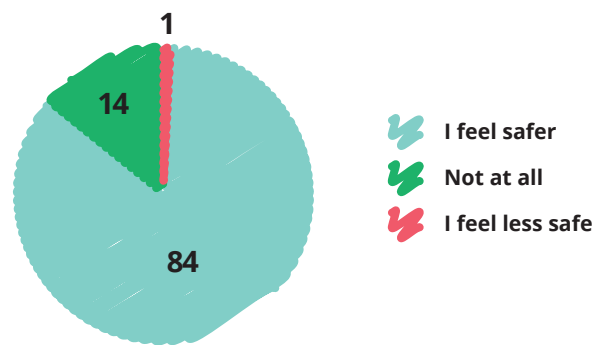
**Figure 4.16 Perspectives on Safety (Mean score with 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree)**



Children in the mini-police were asked to assess whether their involvement in the mini-police had impacted how safe they feel. The results are very promising, showing that 84% of children indicated that they felt safer (see figure 4.17). However, considering the results presented above, the impacts to safety are unclear, possibly

making children feel safer in some ways but also feel less safe in others. Indeed, whilst children may not have been exposed to any additional risks through participation in the mini-police, they may now be more aware of different risks they were previously unaware of.

**Figure 4.17 How much do you think being a part of the mini-police has impacted how safe you feel? (Percent)**



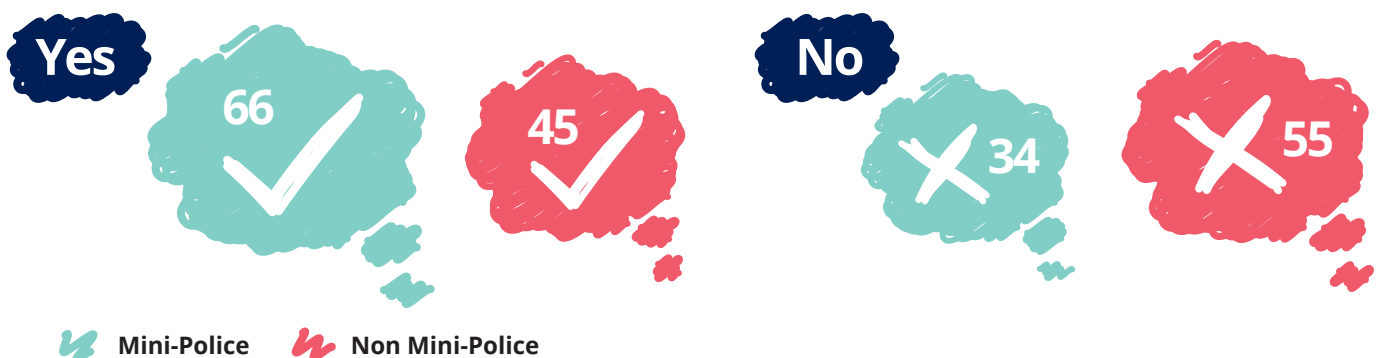
### Continued and Future Policing Interest

The final few questions on the survey assessed children's knowledge of and interest in the volunteer police cadets and their aspirations for joining the police in the future.

In relation to awareness of police cadets, a significant difference was identified between children in the mini-police and those who are not. Two-thirds of children in the mini-police were aware of the police cadets compared to

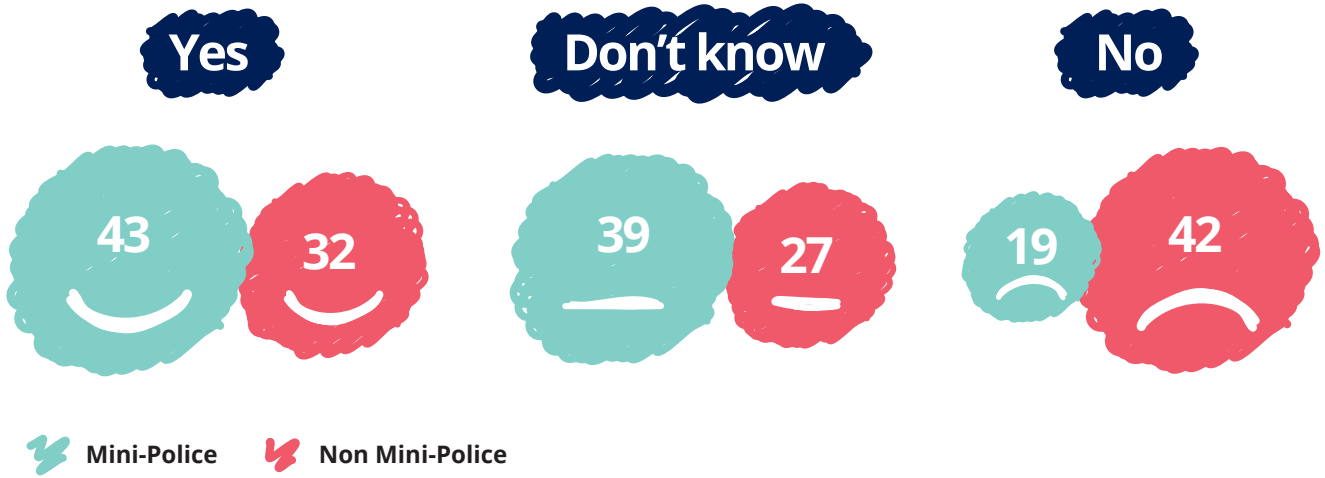
45% of children who were not (see figure 4.18). Children in the mini-police were also more likely to indicate they were interested in joining the police cadets in the future (see figure 4.19). These results suggest that involvement in police-based uniformed youth groups is more likely for children who have been a part of the mini-police, though given that the police cadets is aimed at young people 13-18 years, it is unclear whether such interest will be sustained following participation in the mini-police.

**Figure 4.18 Awareness of Police Cadets (Percent)**



# National Survey Findings

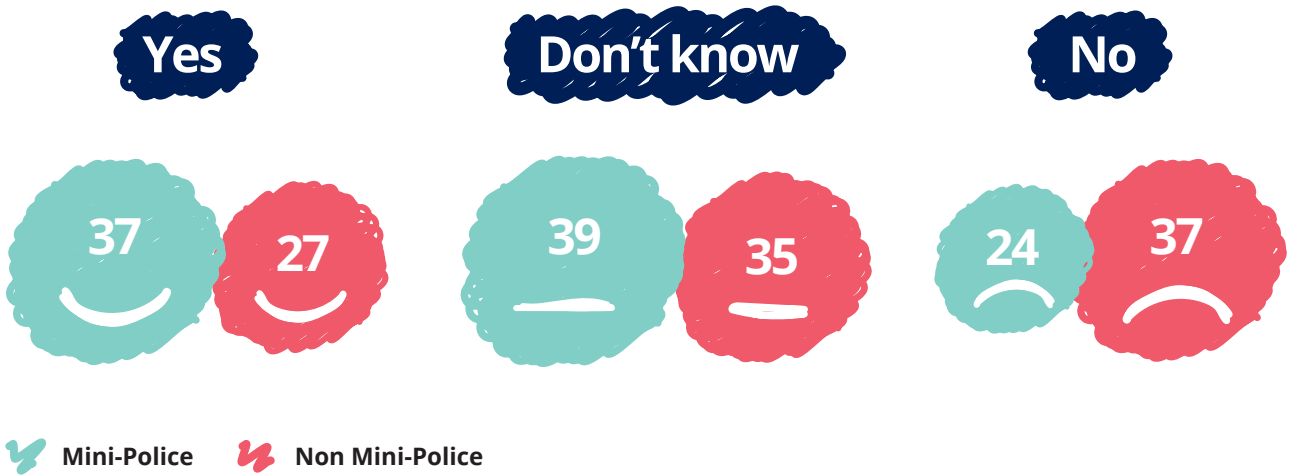
Figure 4.19 Interest in joining the Police Cadets in the future (Percent)



Children in the mini-police were also more likely to express interest at becoming a police officer in the future (See figure 4.20). This suggests that the mini-police programme was increasing

children's aspirations and long-term future plans at becoming a police officer.

Figure 4.20 Interest in becoming a police officer in the future (Percent)





# Critical Reflections on the National Survey Results

- The results of the children's survey provide a helpful starting point at providing a national evidence base and some positive indicators of what children think of the mini-police. Children in the mini-police are very positive about their experiences and the results demonstrate a wide range of impacts.
- In particular, participation in the mini-police has a valuable effect at improving children's knowledge of what the police do, their desire to help others and the level of trust they have in the police.
- Children's perspectives on policing are also suggested to be enhanced through participation in the mini-police, though more evidence is required to test if such differences reach statistical significance. The mini-police has more of an enhancing effect on the dynamic between children/young people and the police, with less impact on children's views on how the police behave and the performance of the police.
- Importantly, children in the mini-police indicated greater awareness of the range of roles and functions police officers fulfil, suggesting a greater depth of relationship than children who are not in the mini-police.
- Perspectives on safety warrant further exploration, as participation in the mini-police may make children feel less safe in some ways and safer in others. Participation in the mini-police appears to have a positive effect on feelings of safety outside as well as online, though the associations between feelings of safety and experiences in the mini-police require further consideration.
- The results show how children in the mini-police were more likely to be aware of, and interested in, volunteer police cadets. Alongside this, children in the mini-police were also more likely to want to become a police officer in the future. It can therefore be argued that participation in the mini-police may act as a catalyst for uninformed police youth programmes, as well as raise aspirations to want to serve in the police. Importantly, such effects may be critical to children who live in challenging circumstances with individuals in their social networks who may hold negative views of policing or have had negative contacts with the police.

# Case Study Findings

Four case studies were completed across England and Wales to gain an in-depth insight into children's perspectives. A total of 8 child-friendly creative workshops were completed in collaboration with the following forces: Cumbria; Durham; Gwent and Lincolnshire. Between 6 and 10 children participated in each group and a total of 56 children took part overall.

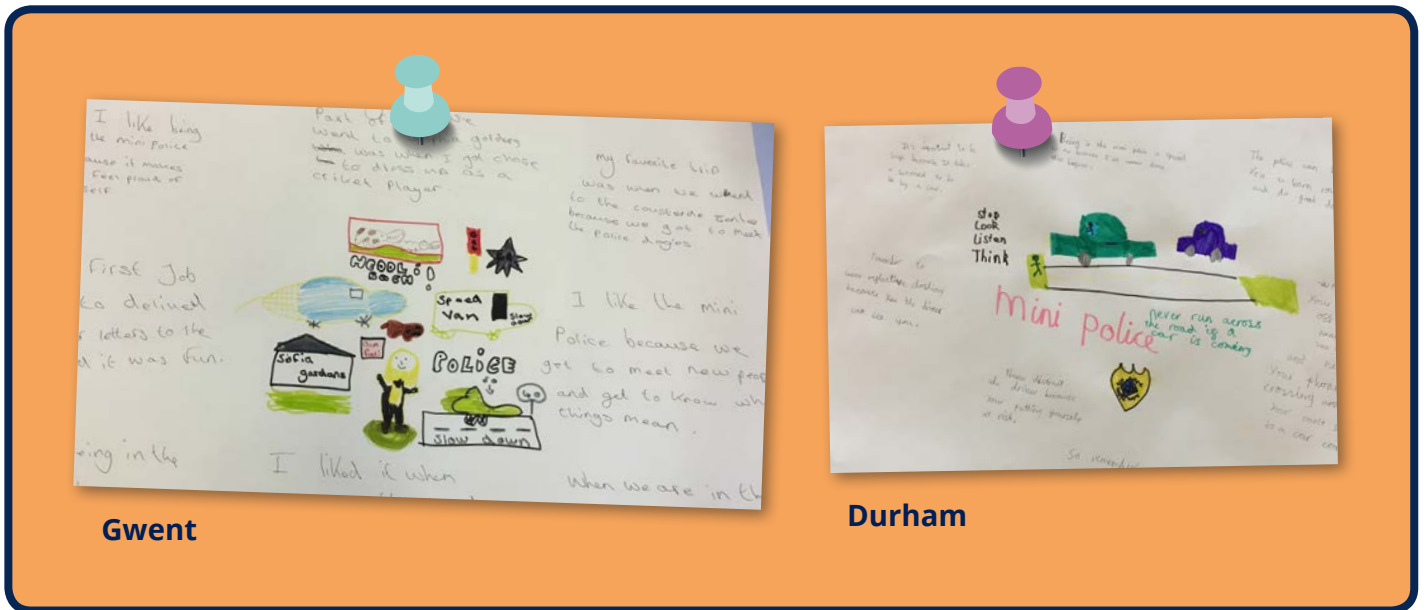


In the workshops, children were asked to draw an image or collection of images about the police or mini-police and then write around the image a series of comments about the police or mini-police. Researchers actively attempted not to influence what the children shared and rather allowed them to write their own views. Researchers informed the participating children they were free to write both positive and negative comments.

If children struggled, they were provided starting points for sentences (such as "I enjoyed the mini-police because...", "I didn't like it when we..." etc.). Following the creation of their image, children were invited to share with the group what they had drawn and to read out some of their statements. The children were then led in a discussion by the researcher on emergent themes, topics or issues identified in the exercise. All written and spoken data were transcribed and thematically analysed. The images were not analysed, however selected images are embedded throughout this report.



A couple of images are provided to illustrate what the children created.



Before providing an overview of the key themes identified in the analysis, it is important to note that the children who participated in the creative workshops were all very positive about their experience in the mini-police.

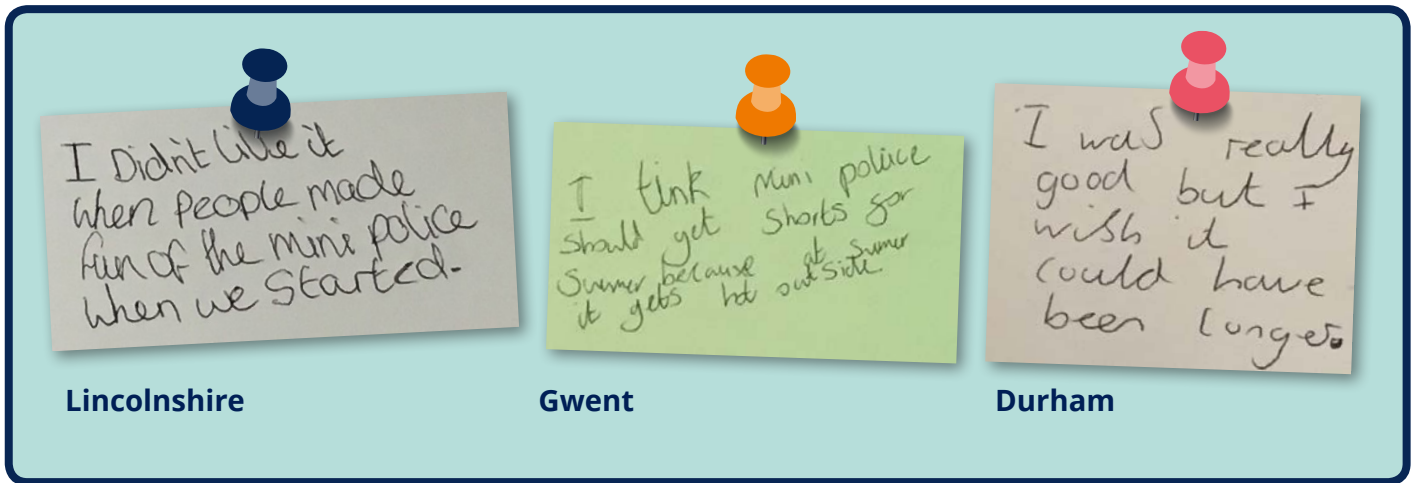
There were numerous comments that children provided which documented their love of being in the mini-police and the importance of this experience to them



It should be recognised, however, that children provided some negative comments based on their experiences. This demonstrates how a critical and safe space for children to share their views was achieved within the research. Whilst there were not many negative comments, they

show how children take their role in the mini-police seriously. A couple of comments related to either the length of the programme or how often they were able to construct an identity as a mini-police officer.

# Case Study Findings

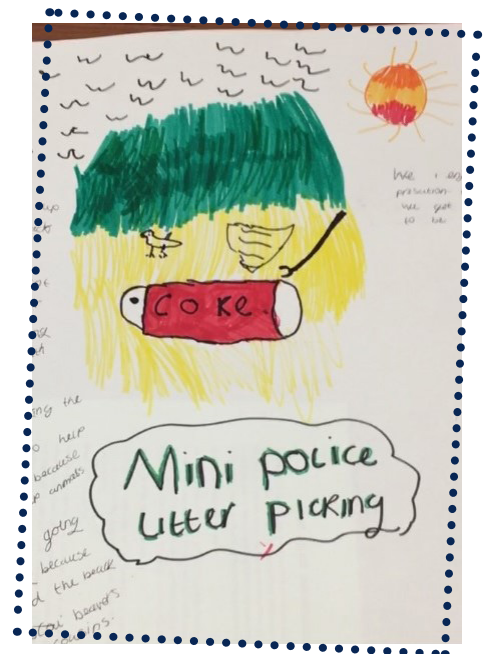


In the analysis, three dominant themes emerged: 1. Having fun and doing new things; 2. Learning, helping, feeling; and 3. Connecting with policing.

## Theme 1. Having Fun and Doing New Things

The most prominent theme identified in the analysis related to children having fun and doing new things. Approximately 42% of the comments related to this theme in the exercise.

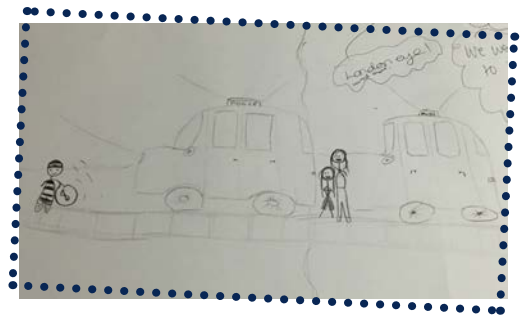
Many of the comments that children provided related to different activities that they had participated out of school where they had fun. The activities included both visits to new and exciting places, such as a trip to London for children from Lincolnshire, and trips to local and familiar places, such as the beach for children from Cumbria. The experience of going to new places was discussed with great enthusiasm by the children. Being in the mini-police afforded children a range of experiences to participate in community events in important roles, which was extremely valuable and enjoyable. Critically, when out in the community, children were able to construct their identity as a mini-police officer.



Cumbria

**"When we joined the mini-police, we had to be good in school and outside of school and not get into any trouble." (Lincolnshire)**

There were several events that children described which involved visits to policing spaces, such as police headquarters or custody units. These types of events were particularly prominent in children’s accounts related to insights into a previously unknown world. Visiting police officers at their place of work was an appealing prospect that the children looked forward to.



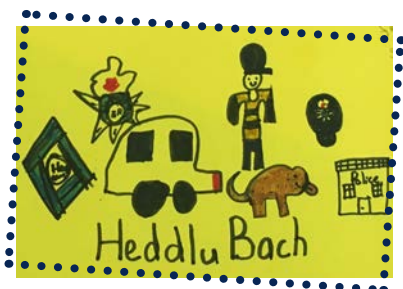
Lincolnshire

**Gwent**

**Lincolnshire**

**Cumbria**

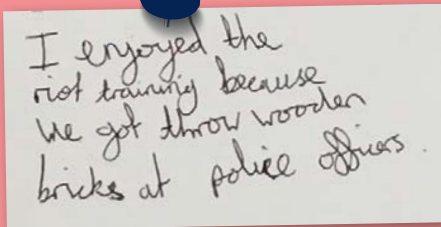
**“I like being in the mini-police because we go on loads of trips and we learn about police education too that might lead us to something in the future.” (Gwent)**



Lincolnshire

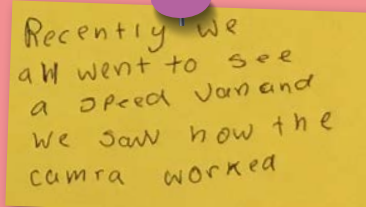
Children described with excitement activities that involved interactions with police officers during visits. For instance, meeting police dogs was a recurrent positive factor across the sites, though one or two children found the dogs scary. Children in Cumbria described participating in police ‘riot training’, which many found a fun and exciting activity. Such activities were memorable to the children and highpoints within their mini-police experiences.

# Case Study Findings



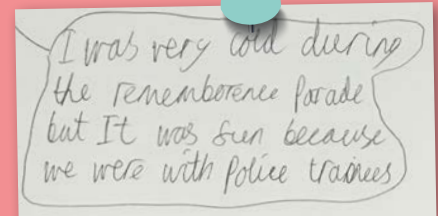
I enjoyed the riot training because we got throw wooden bricks at police officers.

Cumbria



Recently we all went to see a speed van and we saw how the camera worked

Gwent



I was very cold during the remembrance parade but it was fun because we were with police trainees

Lincolnshire

## ■ “You get to do fun activities and that... like it isn’t just work and stuff.” (Cumbria)

Overall, the first theme documents how children reported being in the mini-police positively because it comprised a range of fun activities. Membership in the mini-police involved visits and activities to places that they may otherwise not have been. Importantly, the children spoke most excitedly when activities involved encounters with police officers, police dogs or were completed in policing spaces. Having fun and doing new things represents an important part of the mini-police that should not be dismissed, as it represents a critical component of the main attraction to being in the mini-police.



Durham

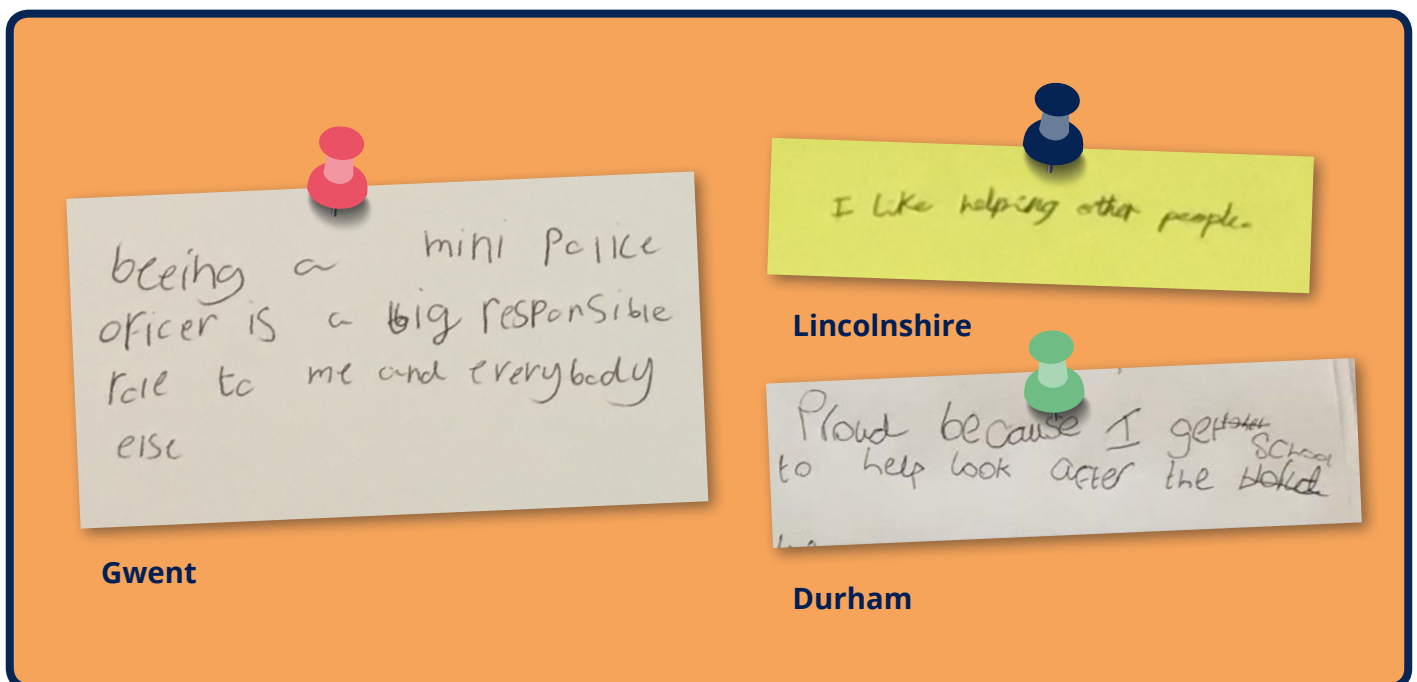
## Theme 2. Learning, Helping, Feeling

The second most prominent theme identified in the analysis related to children learning about the mini-police, applying that learning to helping others and then experiencing the emotions of helping others. Approximately 33% of the comments related to this theme in the exercise.

The process of becoming a mini-police officer across sites involved different recruitment and appointment processes, but fundamentally included children agreeing with and committing to a set of values and principles of who a mini-police officer is. These included being kind, helping others and acting as role models (both in and out of school).



Lincolnshire



Gwent

Lincolnshire

Durham

**“When I’m at home I used to never help make anything but now when I am at home I help dad make the tea... Like just seeing how brave the people in the police are and seeing how much it can help to do one little thing in the house.” (Durham).**

# Case Study Findings

The children assumed the identity of being a mini-police officer which led to a range of positive internal emotions. Several children described how taking part in the mini-police had impacted their confidence in themselves, enabling new social networks to form within school. Being a mini-police officer involved taking responsibility and upholding a set of values – such as kindness, helping others and safety. By helping others, the children expressed how this made them feel happy and important.



Durham

I like the mini police because it makes me feel more safe when I walk home.

Durham

Being in the Mini police has helped build my confidence.

Cumbria

Being in the Mini Police makes me feel confident

Durham

I like being in the mini Police because it helps me be more confident in myself -

Gwent

**"It's helped me with my confidence and to speak out when something is wrong." (Gwent)**



Being a part of a team was an important part of the experience of being in the mini-police. For some children, they described themselves as being very shy and reserved within group activities prior to participation in the mini-police. For these children, the activities had facilitated increased social contact within peer groups as well as to visitors to the school. Creating connections with others appears to be central to improving self-confidence as well as being a meaningful part of the children's experiences.



Cumbria

I like it when I am sad  
my minipolice friends cheer me up.

Lincolnshire

Mini Police is a amazing scheme because we learn how to work as a team.

Gwent

Spending time with friends because we loved working together as a team.

Durham

**"If we find people around school not behaving or doing something that they should, we have to tell a teacher. We can't make a consequence for them but we have to tell a teacher." (Cumbria)**

# Case Study Findings

Lots of children described how they had learned new safety information, including road safety, water safety and county lines. This type of information was related to increased sense of safety in public space, as well as enabling the children to share this information with friends and family, which strengthened their identity as a mini-police officer. Providing safety information to others was an important aspect of who they see police officers to be and a central part of their identity as a mini-police officer.



Durham

I like road safety -  
- it has taught me  
how to help my brother  
how to do it safely.

Durham

I enjoyed going to  
other schools to teach  
Water safety because it  
was really cool.

Cumbria

I really enjoyed  
doing the scam  
because we helped  
people.

Lincolnshire

I Love Being in the mini Police  
Because of all the fun stuff we do

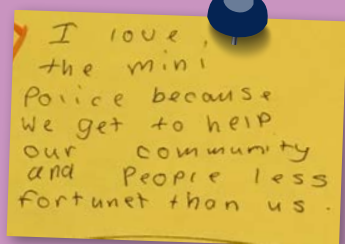
Gwent

**"I can protect my brother from things and before I couldn't really do much games with him... and now we can play police and can team him all sorts of things like the phonetic alphabet... and it's created a bond between us." (Durham)**

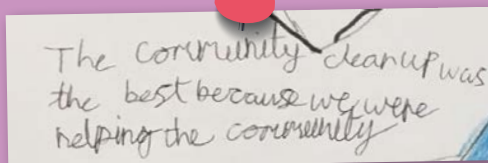


Gwent

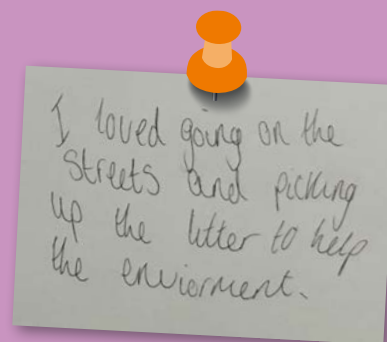
A final and important aspect within this theme was feeling connected to and helping the local community. Children were particularly motivated to improve safety within their local environment, through litter picking, supporting local speed awareness campaigns or online safety. Making an impact on the community enabled children to feel proud of their role in the mini-police and their place within the community. Activities that supported the community were positively reported and children described their hopes to have a greater impact in the future. Key here is that the impacts of being a mini-police officer extended beyond school spaces and into community life, showing that the relative reach of the mini-police was not confined to educational spaces.



Gwent



Cumbria



Lincolnshire

**"I feel more safe on my own... like just me and myself... when there's no one else around me." (Durham)**



Gwent

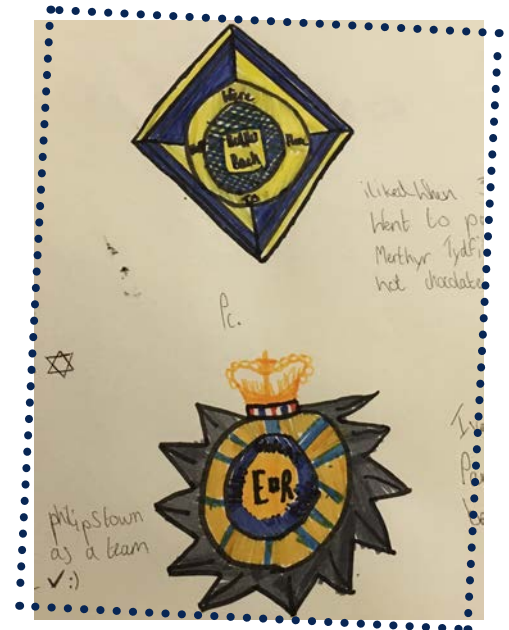
Overall, the second theme demonstrates how the experience of being in the mini-police for lots of children is having important impacts to the children, especially in terms of confidence, and is enabling the children to make a positive contribution and impact to their community. The value of the mini-police to less confident and socially excluded children is of importance, with the mini-police empowering children within school. It is critical, considering theme 1, that activities are created that both are enjoyable and fun but also inspire children to make a positive difference in school and within the community.

# Case Study Findings

## Theme 3. Connecting with Policing

The third and final theme identified in the analysis related to children meaningfully connecting, and building a trusting relationship, with the police. Approximately 19% of the comments related to this theme in the exercise.

The police officers were perceived by the children as interesting and important, coming from a 'world' that they had limited knowledge of. The process of being in the mini-police enabled the children to have increased exposure to police officers and police community support officers supporting misconceptions about the police to be addressed. The children became more aware of what the police aim to do and the improvements to knowledge for some children made them 'less scared' of the police.



Gwent

I enjoy being in the Mini Police because I like meeting all the Police and like them saying there different roles.

Gwent

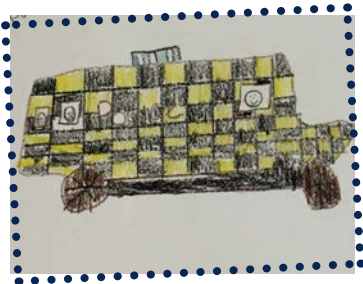
Being in the mini police has made me less afraid of the police.

Cumbria

I like being in the mini police because we can learn about the police


Durham

**"I used to be scared when I would walk past the police because they look big but now when I walk past I am not scared anymore." (Cumbria)**




Cumbria

The connections that children have made with the officers that deliver the mini-police programmes in schools were strong and the children spoke fondly of the officers. This connection felt for some children as a form of belonging within the policing family and some children described how they now would feel more comfortable to approach and speak to police officers in public spaces. Critically, the children were more mindful of what the police do and the stresses they face, with the children respecting officers and holding them in esteem.




I'm more comfortable around the police because I feel like I am one.

Cumbria



I like wearing my uniform because it makes me feel like a real police.

Lincolnshire



I enjoy the Mini Police because the Police officers we ~~collaborate~~ Collaborate with are nice.

Gwent

**“Like I used to think police were all bad people, but they have a good side... because I always used to watch tv with my parents and think they were bad but now I've got to know them a lot better I know they have got most a good side not a bad” (Gwent)**

The uniforms children were provided and wear when they are 'on-duty' were essential to their policing identity, which in their minds transformed them from being students to officers. The uniforms acted as symbols of a legitimised identity which reflected the values of respect, care and safety. The creation of artefacts through the activities they participated in, such as posters and information leaflets, were valuable to the children especially when supporting the promotion of safety information or documenting their experiences.



Durham

# Case Study Findings

I feel special when I wear the uniform.

Lincolnshire

I would like to make badges.  
- so ~~so~~ people can tell we are Mini Police.

Durham

**"You get a closer bond with the police and like you get more used to the police... like you don't think they are all bad but they are good." (Cumbria)**

Images are provided that demonstrate a range of symbols and artefacts found around the school environment, including posters created by children in the school car park, information boards in school and signage outside a school.

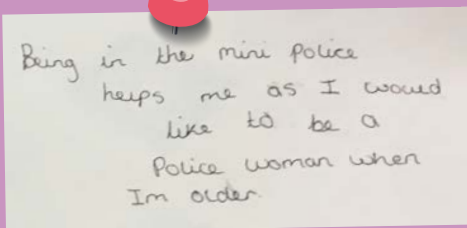


**“The mini-police has changed me because in class in year 4 I always used to talk but now I focus better with my work.” (Lincolnshire)**

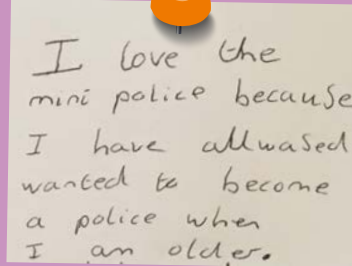


**Cumbria**

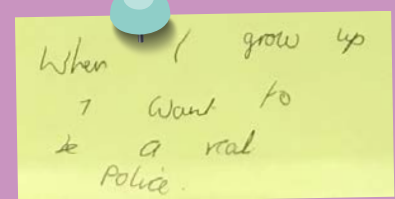
The experience of being in the mini-police for several children had shaped their aspirations to become a police officer in the future. For instance, in Durham, the children learned the phonetic alphabet which they positioned as important to becoming a police officer in the future. Children arguably prior to involvement in the mini-police saw police officers as a homogeneous group, but through participation in the mini-police were exposed to the heterogeneity of roles and functions police fulfil.



**Cumbria**



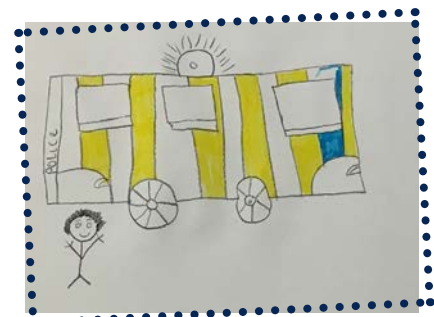
**Durham**



**Lincolnshire**

**“Before I just knew little things about the police like they drove cars and stuff, but now I’m telling my mum and dad all the time like the alphabet and like what they do...” (Durham)**

Overall, the prominence of theme 3 within data shows the value of the dynamic between the police and children as part of the mini-police programme. Across the sites, children wanted to develop relationships with officers and assume a place of being on their ‘team’. Being in the mini-police improved children’s knowledge of what policing involves and, more importantly, that police officers are people who they can connect with.



**Cumbria**

# Case Study Findings

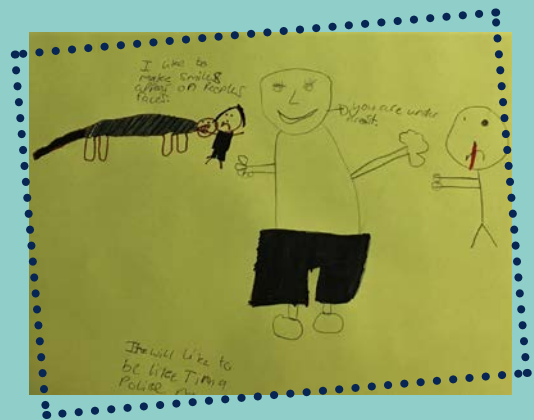
## Critical Reflections on Fieldwork

- The evidence presented above illustrates how the mini-police for many children profoundly impacts on their self-identity, improving their confidence and sense of safety. Moreover, the collective identity of the mini-police in school, involving active and negotiated constructions, had supported a diverse group of children to work together and support positive change within the school environment. In this sense, the mini-police differed from other education-based programmes and inputs in school by fostering and enhancing children's sense of pride and involvement in the community.
- Though to different degrees across the sites, children experienced belonging within the wider policing family, with their experiences in the mini-police removing barriers between themselves and officers. This was especially important for children who previously had, or other family members had, negative perceptions of and encounters with the police. Police officers were held in esteem by the children, coming from and working in environments that they were interested in. Children were fascinated by the roles, functions and experiences of officers and valued the relationships they had built with key staff that delivered the mini-police.
- Children across the sites were empowered to different degrees in the mini-police, which influences what the mini-police is as a concept within the schools. There were distinctions between sites in terms of the mini-police being framed by the children as a representation of who they are and also in children being involved in setting objectives or deciding topics to be explored by the mini-police. In some sites, the mini-police had a transforming effect for children, impacting core values and perceptions related to policing, community and pride, whilst in others, the mini-police was something that happened, with children having limited agency to define what the mini-police is, and being less anchored in their self-identity.





- These differences were shaped by the unique design, implementation and aims of the mini-police programme in each site, resulting in an observable difference with how children behaved in school as reflected in their identity as a mini-police officer. For instance, in one site, the children formally presented themselves as 'officers' in the mini-police, with the mini-police being constructed as a core part of their identity.
- In another, however, the mini-police was framed as being a series of learning activities and the children identified themselves less explicitly as mini-police officers beyond their participation in learning activities.
- Overall, the children were very positive about their experiences and valued their role and sense of belonging in the mini-police. What appeared to be most valuable within sites was the positive impact participation in the mini-police had achieved with children who previously held negative views of the police. This is not to say that important safety information and education on topics such as road safety, county lines, water safety etc. were not important, but rather that the unique feature of the mini-police was more about forming trusting relationships with the police, reframing the perceptions of who police officers are and what they do, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.



# Adults' Perspectives on the Mini-Police

This chapter outlines the perspectives of the adults involved in the mini-police.



# Adults' Perspectives on the Mini-Police

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The perspectives of adults were collected from a variety of sources, including:

- **Telephone interviews with strategic leads** were conducted with strategic leads for the mini-police from ten different Forces. There was variation across the Forces in the implementation and structure of the mini-police and the size of the schemes.
- **Interviews with practitioners and teachers in case study sites** were completed in four sites.

Three online surveys with:

- **Practitioners who deliver and support the scheme** – 48 practitioners completed the survey from 5 different police forces. 63% (30) of which were Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's), 27% (13) were police officers and remaining 10% (5) were neither.
- **Teachers and staff from schools involved in the mini-police** – 35 teachers from 31 different schools in 7 Force areas completed the survey.
- **Parents of children who had participated in the scheme** - 40 parents completed the survey from 14 different schools.

Although it is noted that the surveys have relatively small samples and only reflect views from some of the areas and schools, they provide a good first indication of how the scheme is perceived in terms of what it is aiming to achieve and where it is currently stands in achieving those aims.

The findings are thematically organised into the following sections: Aims and Objectives; Selection of Children; Programme Design and Delivery; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Treats; and Sharing of Information and National Strategy.

# Aims and Objectives

This section focuses on the perceived aims and objectives of the mini-police. The overall results for practitioners was positive, with around 70% agreement that the mini-police is achieving its aims and objectives. The practitioner's survey participants were asked whether they agree that the mini-police scheme is achieving its aims and priorities, while 19% (9) strongly agreed and 54% (26) agreed, 23% (11) neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 4% (2) disagreed. Although it is not clear why nearly a quarter neither agreed nor disagreed, it may be a result of it being 'early days' or potentially that people find it difficult to quantify whether the aims have been met. However, what the purpose of the mini-police as a programme was discussed differently within and between sites, related to slight differences in perceived aims and objectives. The identified aims in the analysis were:

- Changing attitudes and building positive relationships between children and the police;
- Increasing social responsibility and citizenship among children;
- Developing the skills and confidence of children;
- Forging links and relationships between the police and the community;
- A mechanism of managing and improving children's behaviour; and
- Disseminating safety messages.

The section now explores these differences.

## **Changing attitudes and building positive relationships between children and the police**

The primary aim cited in most sites related to changing attitudes and building positive relationships between children and the police.

This was the key aim for most of strategic leads, especially for children who may have had negative experiences or live in areas where relationships with the police may be poor:

**"It's about breaking down barriers with the mini-police and their family, it's also about some positive links with the police because for some of our children the only time they see the police is when the front door is being put in, or their dad's getting arrested or their mum's getting arrested or their sibling is getting arrested, so we want a positive image for the children..."**

In the surveys of practitioners and teachers, building positive relationships between the police and children and increasing children's understanding of what the police do was the most commonly mentioned aim of the mini-police, with nearly 6 in 10 practitioners and teachers stating it as an aim. Comments included:

**"To introduce children to the police and their role and to increase the interaction and relationship with the police"**

**"Encouraging young children to engage and trust police as a positive aspect."**

To support the creation of a new and strengthened relationship between children and the police, the mini-police programme was also viewed as increasing children's understanding of what the police are there for and how varied their role is. One strategic lead who is an officer had asked a group of young children in a primary school class what they think his job is.

**“The majority of them said ‘You lock up bad up people, I’ve seen you on my estate arresting people, I see you driving round catching motorists, not one of them said that you are there to help us, you are there to look after us, protect and reassure us so even at that young age...the perception of young people was quite a negative perception”**

Many emphasised the importance of engagement with children, in order, to help them understand that the police are there to help.

**“The more time we spend with young people in a professional capacity in a school or in a public situation or engagement opportunity the more they are likely to see what we are about and we are not just looking to just get people in trouble, we are not looking to hurt people...but actually no they are there to help...you can talk to them they are not going to be the bad people and actually if you do make bad choices you still don’t have to behave in a certain way because... they will treat you with respect”**

This point was also emphasised by responses from practitioners of the benefits of the scheme for children comments included:

**“They get to understand what the Police do, they get to see that we are there to help.”**

**“Insight in to policing and seeing that officers are friendly and approachable. They may come from a home where their parents are very anti police!”**

One strategic lead gave an impactful example of how the mini-police could benefit children, who had had traumatic experiences with the police:

**“One of the children was a refugee and never had any interaction with the police only the fact that his parents were dragged out onto the street and shot by the police. He wouldn’t integrate with us to start off with and he held my hand all the way through it and by the end of this year he came for the first birthday party the other day and he was a different person and was quite happy to talk to us and knew our names and things”**

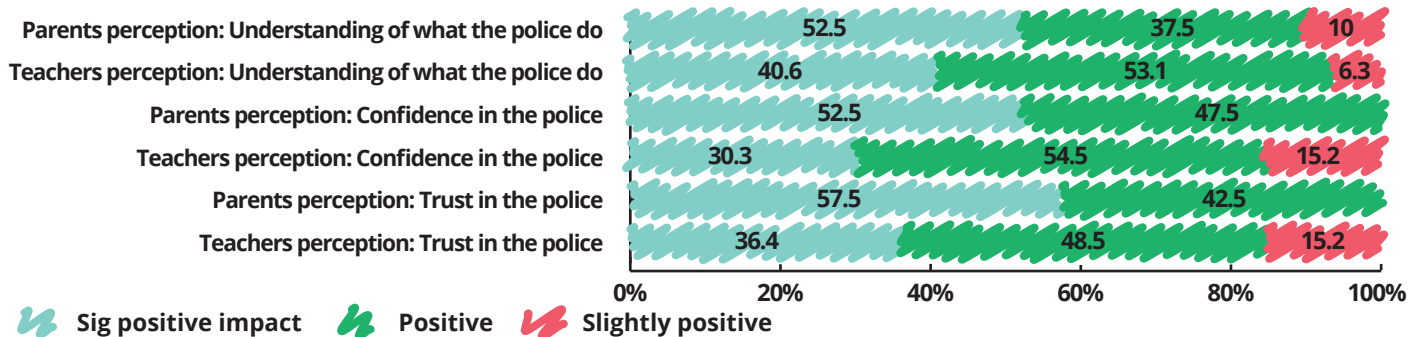
All participants to the teacher and parent surveys agreed the mini-police is having a positive impact (rather than no or a negative impact) on children’s understanding of what the police do, confidence and trust in the police (see figure 5.1). For increasing children’s understanding of what the police do, about 5 in 10 parents and 4 in 10 teachers indicated that participation in the mini-police for children was having a significantly positive impact. For confidence, 5 in 10 parents and 3 in 10 teachers suggested it was having a significantly positive impact and for trust 6 in 10 parents and about 4 in 10 teachers, indicated it was having a significantly positive impact. Comments from parents about their children included:

**“He has learned a lot about what the police force does and how they are a big part of our community and he realises the importance of civilian and police unity to combat crime in the area”.**

**“A valuable learning experience. Greater understanding of the role of police. Inclusion in community events”**

# Aims and Objectives

**Figure 5.1 Teacher and parent perceptions of the impact of the mini-police on on children’s understanding of, and confidence and trust in the police**



Responses from the interviews and surveys suggest that the aim of improving relations and understanding between children and the police is the primary, but not the sole aim, of the programme. In addition, they provide qualitative and quantitative evidence that they also perceive that programme is achieving this aim.

## Increasing social responsibility and citizenship among children

The second most articulated aim of the mini-police was to increase social responsibility and citizenship among children. Increasing children’s feelings of pride in, and responsibility for, their own communities as well as developing their feelings of social responsibility and citizenship was a stated key aim by many strategic leads.

**“The overall aim of the mini-police is to create better citizens.”**

**“Academic improvement wasn’t actually an aim for the police, it probably was for the teachers... it’s more about how do they develop into good citizens and good members of the community.”**

Improving citizenship engagement in the community was the second most commonly stated aim by practitioners and teachers, with 33% (16) and 49% (21) citing it respectively.

**“The purpose of mini-police is to engage in the community with the younger people and give them the responsibility to make a change and have a say in how they can make their community better and attempt to resolve the community issues.”**

**“To help children to make a difference in their community.”**

Although participants were not asked to rate the extent to which the mini-police scheme has met this aim, some made qualitative comments to suggests that it was having an impact on children’s sense of community responsibility, parents’ comments included:

**“Learnt how to be more responsible and how to care for the community.”**

**“It helped him become more responsible and involved in preventing and reporting inappropriate actions by observing certain rules.”**

Practitioners and teacher’s comments included:

**“Gives them a sense of belonging, responsibility and the chance to have an active part in their school and community.”**

**“Making children aware of their responsibilities as members of society and the impact their behaviour has on others”**

Enhancing children’s feelings of social responsibility was seen as a primary aim of the scheme, perhaps second only to building relationships between police and children. From the adult consultation, there is some evidence that this aim is being achieved via the qualitative data but not to the same extent as the aim of improving relationships between children and young people. Although indications are positive further research should ensure that the achievement of this aim is comprehensively explored.

**Developing the skills and confidence of children**

Also highlighted as an aim was building children’s self-confidence and positive life skills such as resilience, communication, team working and empathy. This aim was particularly emphasised by teachers and school staff (23%), but also by police practitioners (17%).

**“Raise children’s aspirations and self-esteem along with learning how to respect their own community”**

**“Develop self-confidence within the mini-police pupils.”**

Despite this aim being less commonly mentioned than fostering positive relationships and increasing a sense of social responsibility, the evidence to suggest that the scheme was achieving this goal was strong. Comments from parents, when asked what their child got out of the scheme included:

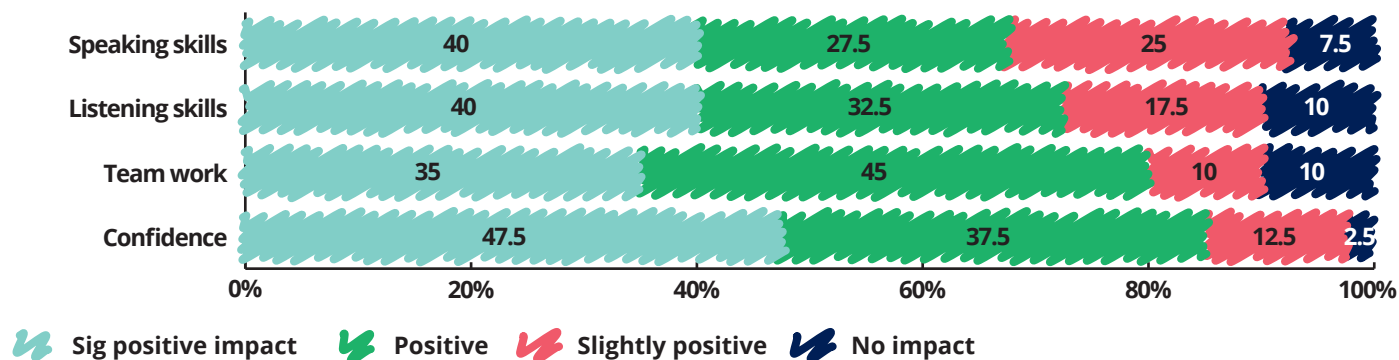
**“A sense of pride in himself... self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement...”**

**“His confidence has grown massively. He is extremely proud of himself and loves the importance being associated with the police (in a good way)”**

**“My child has gained a lot of confidence, is also a more aware of different dangers”**

Figure 5.2 shows how parents rated the impact of the mini-police on their child. Only 3% of parents felt the scheme had no impact on their confidence, nearly half suggested that participation in the mini-police had a significantly positive impact on the confidence and skills of children. About 9 in 10 indicated that they felt it had had a positive impact on their child’s team work skills, listening or speaking skills and about 4 in 10 suggesting that the positive impact was significant.

**Figure 5.2 Parent’s perceptions of the impact of mini-police on confidence and skills**



# Aims and Objectives

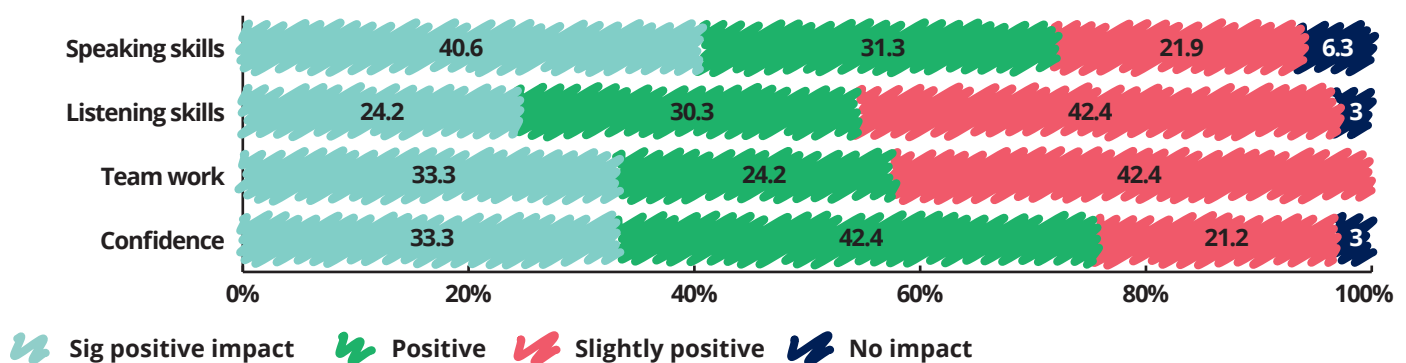
Teachers were also asked to rate the impact of the scheme on confidence and skills (see figure 5.3). As with parents, 97% felt being in the mini-police has had a positive impact on the confidence of children, with a third suggesting a significantly positive impact.

**“The work with the police officers has been very beneficial in increasing the confidence of the children and how they engage with people in authority. The variety of the activities is amazing.”**

**“Children who are less confident in some situations of responsibility benefited by being part of a team.”**

**“I think it is great for quieter children as they get their chance to have a voice.”**

**Figure 5.3 Teachers perceptions of the impact of mini-police on confidence and skills**



As with the teacher and practitioner surveys although confidence and skills were mentioned by strategic leads, for example one commented “For me this is very much centred around, you know similar to the cadet’s scheme, building character and resilience amongst young children”, it was less commonly mentioned than fostering positive relations and increasing a sense of social responsibility. However, when asked about examples of success, it was common for the strategic leads to give examples relating to children’s increased confidence.

**“We have lots of emails, particularly emails of thanks from the staff who point out how much the children have enjoyed it and how much their confidence has grown. One particular child was very, very quiet and the teacher was a little bit worried about them, by the time they had finished with mini-police they were first there for interviews, they were quite happy to go on camera and their self-esteem had gone up a little bit”**

The evidence that the scheme improves confidence of children appears quite strong. Whether this should be a core aim of a police scheme may be a question of debate, as there are other ways in which children’s confidence can be improved that does not require police resources. However, it could be argued that building children’s confidence and other skills is likely to enhance pro-social behaviour and



reduce anti-social behaviour, therefore being a complementary aim. However, consideration may need to be given to the extent to which children are selected on this basis as to children that may benefit more from a police scheme such as those that have had negative experiences of the police.

### **Forging links and relationships between the police and the community**

Although, perhaps secondary to the aims of directly impacting the children themselves, another identified aim of the mini-police was to forge links and relationships between the police and the wider community. There were 15% (7) of practitioners and 14% (6) of teachers cited it as an aim.

**“I believe that it provides a link into primary schools where we are able to engage with children at a young age using their peers to promote positive messages and the benefits of being a good citizen. This would then hopefully be passed on to parents/guardians promoting a positive image for the police within the community and the projects that are being promoted.”**

To some extent engaging with the children was considered as a useful way to bridge the gap with the community, comments from strategic leads included:

**“At the time of Brexit, [name of site] was among the highest proportions in the country to say ‘out’... 40% of the community here are EU nationals, and they didn’t get a vote. There was like a cloud over the town. By coincidence, our 2 pilot schools launched about 2 months after the vote, and obviously we took on Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian mini-police officers. It opened doors to us. Like the Polish embassy, Latvian embassy, Lithuanian embassy, they all got involved and opened up communication channels.”**

**“In terms of community, it’s another avenue where we find that we get engaged. If police knock on people’s doors and ask what’s going on in the area they get told ‘go away’, whereas if young people go and say ‘we’re at the school around the corner and we know there’s problems in this area, what do you want the police to do?’ We get a lot more back. They’re almost bridging a gap between communities who won’t approach the police and the police who can’t approach the community...”**

Some strategic leads discussed how the mini-police receives a positive response from the public when they are out in the community and when they appear on social media. None had experienced any negative coverage. Also, the mini-police were invited to a lot of events, and they were certainly seen by some as a useful and positive way to engage the community.

**“Opportunities for public engagement are almost limitless. And the more you get known, the more opportunities there are where people are saying ‘can we use them for this, can we use them for that?’”**

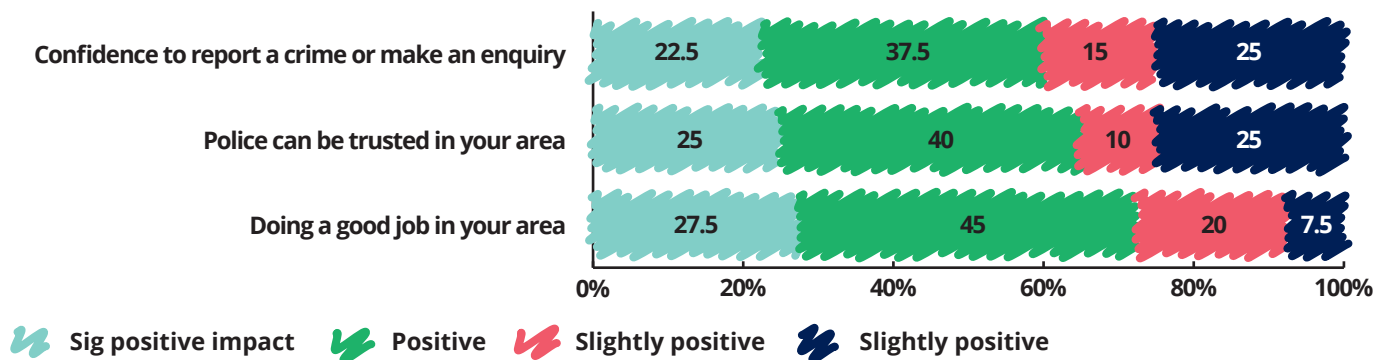
Evidence from the parent survey suggests that the mini-police has had a positive impact of parent’s perceptions of the police and likelihood of engaging with them (see figure 5.4). Most parents (92%) indicated that their child’s participation in the mini-police has positively

# Aims and Objectives

impacted the view of the extent to which the police do a good job in their area, 75% stated that it had positively impacted their view that

police can be trusted in their area and their confidence in reporting a crime or making an enquiry.

**Figure 5.4 Impact on parent's perceptions of the police and likelihood of engaging with them**



When asked specifically about the impact on the families of the mini-police, one of the strategic leads commented:

**"We have certainly had a family that would not speak to us, not look at us you know actually speak to us, we have certainly had improved engagement should we say and actually it has opened some lines of communication in which previously were probably unavailable to us which then makes the job easier for my response colleagues to go in. When they see we are doing good things and we are involving their kids...actually when we have god and knocked their door in for a warrant or their next-door neighbours actually is not immediately you are up to something terrible its actually of actually something in it rather than immediate you are horrible"**

Parents were asked if there is anything they had learnt through their child's participation in the mini-police. About a third of parents gave a response and the most frequent answers included crime prevention information and what to do in certain situations, understanding the varied roles of police officers, work that goes

on behind the scenes and their commitment to community engagement activities.

**"I have met some of the officers and they are lovely. The time they have spent with the children so far just shows how much patience police officers have in educating our youngsters to work with the police and not against them."**

**"I've learnt that there is a lot more that goes on behind the scenes in catching criminals"**

**"More informed about the involvement in the community e.g. building relationships, being visible"**

**"The police are such needed part of the community and they play many different roles"**

**"To act promptly when someone needs (help) or we are witnessing facts that are contrary to the law."**

The most commonly suggested improvements to the mini-police programme by parents was to

increase parent involvement and keep parents informed (and in a timely manner):

■ **“Involve parents too, I want to come ;)”**

■ **“My only issue was that a few of the activities were very last minute so my son couldn’t attend because I didn’t have time to arrange time off. So that isn’t helpful for working parents, however I understand the constraints on organising events when actual police work may get in the way.”**

■ **“A letter sent home for parents to find out what the children have been involved in etc would be a good idea.”**

As an aim, building links between the police and the community was important but perhaps secondary to aims impacting on the children directly. However, the mini-police was seen as having a variety of benefits in terms of the wider community including making positive links with members of the community via the children, transmitting safety messages and being a positive public relations tool in terms of increasing visibility, trust and confidence. Experiences of the strategic leads of increased connection with some communities and the reported increased confidence of parents provides some encouraging evidence that it is having some community impact. Continued community impact could be measured through the monitoring of social media, requests for information from schools and parents and the extent to which they are invited to events. It is worth noting that some parents requested more and/or timely information about what the mini-police are doing. Schools and police practitioners may wish to review the extent to which parents are communicated with about the programme.

## **A mechanism of managing and improving children’s behaviour**

An aim of the mini-police for some was to improve/manage children’s behaviour, which might be depicted as an early intervention aspect of the programme, which was considered by some strategic leads but not all. This purpose was less explicitly discussed in relation to the aims but rather framed in relation to positive outcomes.

■ **“I’m getting feedback from teachers... where previously if you’d got a naughty kid in the class, people would think it was a laugh and they’d all start being naughty. Now, the teachers are saying the young kids are challenging one another and saying ‘pack that in, because I want to be a mini-police officer next year.’... So it’s changing behaviour.”**

■ **(A strategic lead talking about a child on one-to-one because of challenging behaviour) “By the end of the year he was no longer on that one-on-one, no longer needing that support, I would like to say that was solely down to the mini-police although I would suspect that there were other factors, but it was a really good incentive for him and certainly a couple of my units have taken a very strong line and they have not had to go down it but they have been really clear that if the children get in trouble at school, they won’t be able to be mini-police because they have to be role models”**

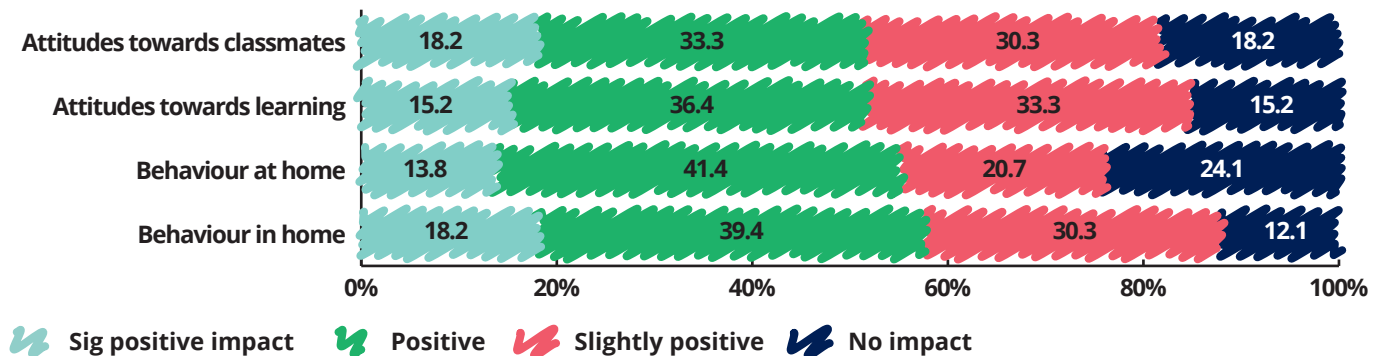
Figure 5.5 shows the impact teachers felt the mini-police had on attitudes and behaviour of the children. The majority (88%) felt that it had positively impacted their behaviour in school, 85% felt it had positively impacted their attitudes to learning, 82% felt it had positively impacted their attitudes towards their classmates and 76%

# Aims and Objectives

felt it had positively impacted their behaviour at home. One of the respondents to the teacher's survey commented:

**"We had a young boy who was struggling with behavioural issues and the programme has totally transformed him. He is now one of the best role models on our school."**

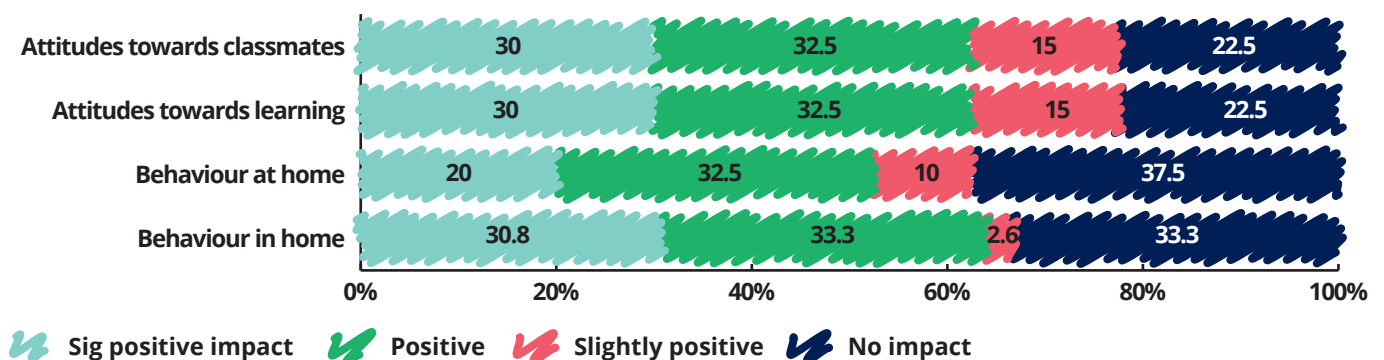
**Figure 5.5 Teacher's perceptions of the impact of the mini-police on attitudes and behaviour**



Many parents (78%) also felt that the mini-police had positively impacted their child's attitude to learning and to their classmates, 67% felt it had positively impacted their behaviour at school and 63% felt it had positively impacted their

behaviour at home (see figure 5.6). Several the parents that selected no impact selected this as they stated that their children's behaviours and attitudes were not in need of improvement before the mini-police.

**Figure 5.6 Parent's perceptions of the impact of the mini-police on attitudes and behaviour**



The anecdotal evidence and survey measures suggest that the scheme can impact positively on children's behaviour. Further research is required into the what aspects of the scheme achieve that, for example, is it because it provides an incentive for good behaviour or does it increase children's pride in themselves and their community and their feelings of

social responsibility or combination of factors? Understanding this will help maximise the mechanism by which positive behaviour change is achieved but also answer another important question is the behaviour change likely to be long-term. A key question for future evaluations of the scheme is the extent to which it produces positive behaviour change long-term.

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## Disseminating safety messages

For most of the strategic leads, the dissemination of safety messages was not emphasised particularly as the key aim but was in all cases an important part of the programme. For example, one strategic lead commented:

**“It’s a way of sharing our messages... it’s what the kids take home with them. So, the conversations that go on around the dinner table, what they share is getting those important messages out there.”**

However, for one of the regions it was the key aim of the mini-police, the strategic lead commented:

**“Our intention was to liaise with our local schools and community, but more so, to get the message of fraud awareness and safety out to a younger age group. That’s more our role... we thought that it was our duty to be doing something to help protect our citizens as they become more vulnerable in the coming years.”**

A pre and post questionnaire suggested that this aim was achieved as the results showed a ‘vast improvement in their understanding of fraud as a crime, what is cybercrime and things like that.’ Sharing safety message was mentioned as a key aim by 15% of practitioners and 14% of teachers as an aim of the project, for example one commented:

**“Educating young people in relevant subjects that will help them and their families now and in the future. Also understanding signs of criminal activity including county lines.”**

Participants to the surveys and strategic leads were not asked specifically about the extent to which they felt this aim was met. However, in the parent’s survey 15% (6) mentioned safety

information as a key thing that their child had got out of it comments included:

**“She learnt a lot about safety and what to do in fire situations”**

**“Safety Awareness (Bonfire Night). Community Awareness - what to look out for - dangers Stranger-Danger”**

# Aims and Objectives

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## Critical Reflections on the Aims and Objectives of the Mini-Police

Although there are common themes and a certain level of cohesiveness in the aims stated by strategic leads, there is clearly differences in emphasis on those aims. One of the mini-police sites selected had a very tight aim, based on education whereas the others tended to be broader being more focused on police and young people relations and fostering social responsibility. The clarity and relative importance of each of the aims obviously has significant implications for all aspects of the scheme, which will be discussed further in the selection, programme design and delivery and national strategy sections.

Alongside the outlined differences in the aims and objectives, it is critical to reflect on for whose benefit the mini-police programme is delivered. For instance, articulations of value and benefit of the mini-police was positioned differently in sites between forces and children, which links with which of the different aims and objectives are more or less explicit in sites. For instance, the aims to build connections between the police and the community positions children as a conduit, which reduces the importance of the mini-police being child-led or child-focused, which is ideologically different to other aims.

There are certainly many anecdotal examples of how the scheme is positively impacting on the children involved and the wider community. The view that the scheme has improved the children's trust in and understanding of the police, their feelings of responsibility and their confidence is consistent across police practitioners, schools and parents, which is laudable given the early stage of mini-police development in many sites. Several sites have made, or are starting to think about, initial efforts to evaluate its impact, however, they are struggling with how this can be measured for example in relation to the extent that children may be diverted away from a negative path. This research and the evaluation work in forces, focuses on the immediate impact of the scheme as it is in its infancy. Research going forward will need to provide some indication of whether the initial positive benefits are longer lasting.

# The Selection Process

This section explores the selection process. The selection of schools and children to participate in the mini-police is critical vis-à-vis perceptions of the mini-police as well as its capacity to influence positive change. Considering the economic situations of many forces, the justification of both schools and children is critical to the long-term viability of continued investment and support for the programme. This section is organised into 2 sections: selection of schools and selection of children.

## Selection of Schools

The selection of schools for most sites was based on an objective rationale. In 7 of 10 mini-police sites, schools were selected on vulnerability factors such as based on crime, anti-social behaviour, deprivation, people premium or free school meals information.

**“We sat down and looked at where we wanted the schools to be and deliberately chose schools where we had quite poor engagement with the community, quite high levels of social deprivation, high levels of crime, and we chose schools where there was a high proportion of pupil premium children attending, whether that was through disability or disadvantaged background, or just because of the catchment area of the school.”**

**“We targeted pupil premium because they are our harder-to-reach areas, the schools with the most amount of need. And hand-in-hand with that, they are usually the schools that are the most isolated, rurally, or in terms of areas of deprivation.”**

For the three other sites, the approach was different and not based upon a less structured rationale, based on local discretion and opportunity. For instance, one site currently only has a couple of schools engaged in the

mini-police, which had been selected on an opportunistic basis in that they were easily accessible. One strategic lead commented that they left the selection of schools to their local policing teams as they had knowledge of those schools that might need the mini-police most. In the final case, schools were selected based on schools and PSCOs enthusiasm to participate.

**“One of our areas they said they wanted three units, actually it is a really difficult area and basically the school didn’t particularly volunteer, the PCSO didn’t particularly volunteer and it was like this a difficult school to get into, this is a difficult area, I think we should have a mini-police there and they went straight on in there and they have really struggled and that’s a real detriment. Whereas in the (newly recruited schools) that I have just done, basically I put out a few blogs and talked about what we are doing and actually basically said I want volunteers”**

Some of the strategic leads suggested that there is plenty of demand from other schools not currently engaged in their local mini-police programme and it can be difficult to justify why some schools get it and other schools do not:

**“I am really conscious of that now because some of the schools in (area) have become very active on social media, on twitter and we are getting contact all the time asking can we be part of this and it was never our intention to roll it out across as many schools as we could, we wanted to have some sort of criteria and prioritise which schools we would want but we do have to nail that criteria down a little bit now because there are going to be a lot of schools that will be disappointed that we are not going to work with them and I want to be able to provide a strong rationale for that”**

Key here is that the selection process for schools

# The Selection Process

differed between sites demonstrating how mini-police programmes are not aligned in terms of the selection process when looking across sites. In most sites, selecting schools with children most in need was a priority, though taking into account the current context of the mini-police nationally, in terms of being on the precipice for expansion in many sites, it is critical such investment can be objectively justified.

## Selection of Children

Once the schools had been selected, the second stage is the selection of the mini-police children. In all cases, the sites worked with year 5 and/or year 6 children. Some exclusively worked with year 5 as schools had expressed that year 6 children are too busy with things like SATs and a lot of work around transitioning to secondary school. Though in others, the mini-police was an exclusively year 6 programme.

**“Year 6 we decided not to go to because of SAT and stuff, and they weren’t interested in that, and they get quite a lot of preparation for going to secondary school”**

All sites began the selection process with an introductory session delivered to the children, where the police introduce themselves, what the mini-police is and what responsibilities children would have. The application process differed in schools but largely involved children outlining the reasons why they wanted to be a mini-police officer.

The selection of the children to be involved in the mini-police differed between sites. In many sites, selection involved an interview being completed by representatives from the police and schools, with a decision being made between the PCSO/ officer and the school, or it would be left up to the school to select the children. There was a

view by some that the schools are best placed to select the children, having a flexible approach to selection, taking into account their knowledge of previous engagements the child may have had as well as what this opportunity might represent to them now and in the future.

**“I know they’ve used a variety of methods to [select the children]. Some have done it based on attendance, so where attendance is poor they’ll use it as a carrot to improve attendance. Some schools have done it based on who they think would benefit the most. Some schools have done it based on homework, so getting the kids to write a job application or a CV and then have little interviews or they’ve had to write a letter”.**

**“I was happier to go with the school, because the school knows who they needed to be engaged with because actually they might say well actually he’s a “naughty” kid but actually he had x, y and z plus a, b and c support measures in place so he doesn’t need anything else to support or help him whereas actually this child is really good and really tries but just doesn’t speak so gets over looked all the time so let’s put them in”**

However, whilst schools took the lead in many sites in the selection process, it was made clear by the police that it would be expected that children from vulnerable backgrounds would be prioritised. For instance, one site had a policy of a strict minimum-criteria of 50% for vulnerable children. The importance of making the application process for children accessible was stressed by some leads as being paramount, acknowledging that some children in most need may not put themselves forward.



**“And then they go away over the summer with the application form, in the life of, and again that doesn’t have to be down to academic writing a story, we have used pictures boards, anything because we want to be fully inclusive”**

**“We do want those that are most vulnerable and we do want the school to be encouraging those with low self-esteem, low confidence who may have multiple ACE’s in their lives to really be a part of this and that’s part of the brief I have given to headteachers about the selection of children is to try and get those kids to apply and whatever the application process is please don’t make that too complicated that those kids are going to miss out...so please don’t exclude kids because their parents won’t give permission for whatever reason or are unable to get the forms back into school so I do expect the schools to be quite proactive in that area of getting those 15 kids to apply that might not apply”**

In one site, children are selected by their peers in a democratic process, though it is noted there is a proviso the teachers are responsible to ensure that each cohort is demographically representative:

**“We tell them ‘if you want to be a mini-police officer, you need to write a speech and deliver it to the school, and you’ll be democratically elected.’ So, years 4, 5, and 6 all vote for the best speech, the best presentation, and elect who they want as their mini-police officers”.**

Such a process encourages a child-centred approach, in that children are involved in the selection of mini-police officers, though such an approach inherently allows less opportunity to influence the selection process in order to target, engage with and influence children most in need. Whilst there are some provisions made

for children who are socially isolated within the school environment, or who have fractured relationships with peers, in the election process, it was noted that ‘confident’ children may be privileged through the chosen process which was noted as suiting the desired aims and objectives of the programme:

**“The way our lessons are written, the second half of each lesson is in the community. So, we do need the confident speakers.”**

Examples were provided of children lacking in confidence coming forward and being elected into the mini-police. However, the recruitment of such children into the programme is arguably a chance occurrence rather than an outcome of a designed process. It should be noted that the design and structure of the mini-police in the site engages also with the wider classes in terms of key messages and content, with the mini-police acting as a reinforcing presence to key deliverables. Further investigation is needed to explore how such a selection process operates in practice across a larger sample.

It was noted that in some sites, all children who expressed an interest in the mini-police were selected, as it was felt that participating was too beneficial an opportunity to miss. However, all children were still required to complete a formal application process.

**“Because it is a highly deprived school that chances were that if we did the application, although they all did a kind of application, but if we had done the application form and then sat them through a mini interview it would have been the parents that would have said they did not want them to do it because it’s a crime area and the school wanted them to do it to try and change that mindset which is why we did it to all of them”**

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Overall, the different selection processes evident across England and Wales presents a key challenge at making sense of the mini-police at a national level. The evidence in this report does

not measure differences statistically between sites in terms of outcomes and value, and further research is critical to maximise the value and cost-effectiveness of the programme.

## Critical Reflections on the Selection Process

The way in which schools and children are selected is fundamental in the extent to which the scheme will be successful in achieving its aims. For example, practices such as selecting schools that volunteer may mean given the limitations of resourcing that schools/children most in need of the scheme are not being offered it. Moreover, such an approach may de-legitimise the value of the mini-police in terms of influencing change in schools and communities that have the most fractured relationships with policing. It is, therefore, important that the wider and objective justifications for selecting schools are considered when schools are selected, although it is recognised that this must be balanced against the need to have schools which are willing to participate.

The findings also illustrate important differences in the selection processes, which themselves shape the potential value and impact of the mini-police on children. Within schools, children that arguably would most benefit from participation in the mini-police may not be selected because they are not putting themselves forward or they are not being selected. Although the extent to which this is the case is not clear, it is critical that the vulnerable children in schools are empowered appropriately to create an equitable process. It is important that sites reflect on who they are attempting to involve in their programme and why as well as what the desired effect is. It is imperative that sites critically reflect on whether their processes are aligned with these aims and principles.

It certainly appears to be the case that the scheme is in demand and there is no shortage of schools that would like to get involved. Therefore, it is important that forces have a clear criteria and rationale as to why some schools can participate and others cannot.

This section provides an overview of findings in relation to the design and delivery of the mini-police. It is organised into the following topics: structure; delivery and content; children's voice, community engagement and input.

## Structure

The structure of the mini-police varied significantly between sites, with some being a 7-week intensive course, others being based over the three terms of the school calendar year and some lasting for 2 years. As there is no evidence to measure the impact of schemes comparing different lengths of programme, it is not possible to define what is the 'best' time-period and would very much depend on the primary aims of the scheme. For example, one of the mini-police strategic leads commented:

**"And I saw that [name of site] now seem to do it as a very short period of time where they do mini-police for a little bit and then they leave the school. I see us much more involved in the long term, it is much more of a long-term engagement strategy with the school."**

One site was still in the phase in which they were trying to establish a plan and structure of the scheme and were keen to talk to learn from other sites, asking 'are there any Forces that are doing this particularly well and have a strong structure that we could learn from?'. They commented:

**"We need to develop a more structured plan going forward for each of the schools before we roll it out beyond the (number) that we've got and you know this morning I have had a conversation with two headteachers that want to be part of that so just a very small task and finish group that are going to be established to try and put some structure around it so there is some consistency for any new scheme that's going to come on board and there's a plan"**

One site had a two-year programme, involving a series of inputs across children in year 5 and 6. In total, there are 12 planned inputs ranging from national to local priorities, with the planned intention to build trusting relationships between the children and officers. Whilst the programme is well-planned, it is not clear that engagement over 2 years achieves the best outcomes or whether value diminishes over time.

**"We have become a familiar face... the local cop will become someone they trust. We have broken down barriers"**

What is clear in each of the sites was a comfort in the structure of their mini-police programme, and there was no desire the change. Whilst some evaluative activities have been completed internally by forces, the direction of each local force was not evidence-based, but rather in many cases defined in relation to available resource. As the evidence-base for the mini-police develops, providing the outcomes from and an objective rationale for programme structures, resistance to change is likely to be a factor in sites when results may not be as favourable as alternative models.

## Delivery and Content

As with the structure of the mini-police programmes in sites, the delivery and content

# Design and Delivery

varied, though there were many commonalities. In most of the sites, the mini-police was facilitated by the Neighbourhood Policing Teams, and more often than not by PCSOs. Training generally seems to consist of briefings, with those involved being briefed on the aims of the scheme and what it involves as well as being taken through the lesson plans where appropriate. Lesson plans can then be accessed on the internet in some cases or on the intranet.

One site, has moved to a very different approach where they have youth cadet workers who, on a 2-year apprenticeship, complete a comprehensive training package that includes an approved youth worker qualification, presentation skills, teaching qualification and CEOP training. There are strengths and weaknesses to this approach. For instance, a strength of the model is that youth cadet workers are able to act as positive role models for children, introducing them to future opportunities to join the police cadets. It might also be argued that there may be positive benefits to young people delivering the mini-police, creating a different dynamic to that of an adult. A weakness to the approach is that some young people may have limited experience of facilitating group work with children (illustrated in the quote below), nor do they have direct experience of the 'policing world' that children were documented as being particularly interested in Chapter 3. This approach warrants further exploration, and may be refined as part of a wider linking process between cadets and mini-police.

**“Very young volunteers with little or no background in behaviour management for schools”**

In another site, some of the officers that facilitate the scheme are school liaison officers that have

a teaching qualification while others are from the Local Policing Team who do not have formal training but have access to a website which contains comprehensive resources. Most of the sites had developed their own lesson plans, some in conjunction with schools and in line with the curriculum:

**“The lesson plans have been written by ourselves with head teachers, so they’ve been written around the school curriculum. We know that they work because it was actually head teachers that consulted on them”.**

Lesson plans were also based on local priorities and/or on emerging issues such as county lines and online safety. These types of issues clearly link with policing priorities and raising awareness of key risks faced by children in the local environment.

**“We chose three themes that met the strategic aims of the force, which was around domestic violence and healthy relationships, water awareness because we worked in conjunction with the RNLI, and online safety and cyber bullying because that was something we thought was an emerging demand and also something that children need the most amount of input in.”**

Generally, sites were confident in the lessons plans that they had, having worked on them collaboratively with schools or other experts.

**“The lesson plans were checked by subject matter experts, so Barnardo’s viewed the domestic violence and healthy relationships lesson, the RNLI wrote the [water awareness] lesson and then it was tweaked to fit our force, and the cybercrime lesson was looked at by C-Ops to check that it was compliant with the messages that are nationally delivered”.**

Good practice in sites appeared to be collaborative content planning between police officers and school staff, supporting shared objectives for each partner. What was limited was information sharing between sites, increasing the likelihood of duplication and resource wastage.

## Children's Voice

The extent to which children were involved in the decision-making process of what is covered in the mini-police seems to vary. A couple of strategic leads noted that often what children consider to be important issues or fun things to do might be different to what adults would have expected. This is interesting to note as a key component of the scheme is that children have a voice.

**"A lot of them talked about homelessness being a real concern for them, which was very peculiar, we as in myself nor could the school lead get it because actually it's not an area that you would see openly homeless people because it's just not a really nice area so we were all a bit oh that's surprising but it was something that they were all concerned about it so later they did a project on homelessness"**

**"And if you say to them what have you liked best then, and you would expect that it would be the tour of firearms or whatever and they'll say its litter-picking. They love litter picking and you think but that was something simple, but they'll go yeah but it was really good to be out in the community and people to ask us what we were doing. So, the things that we think would be really good aren't necessarily the things that they think are really good"**

Such comments highlight the importance of giving children an opportunity to voice what is

important to them and what they would like to do. Whilst it is recognised that there are limits to such activities, such parameters could be explained to children within a controlled consultative activity. As in many sites, schools following police inputs are empowered to drive the progress of the mini-police, though it is important that children are included within planning to increase ownership and the child-centeredness of the programme.

## Community Engagement

Community engagement was an important part of the mini-police in most sites. In one site, for instance, the mini-police was paired up with a residential home in the area and there was consistent contact between the two. This was a long-term commitment so that when new children came through the scheme they would also be paired with the same residential home. Other sites had done activities such as litter picking, putting safety information leaflets on cars or speed checking activities. These were very impactful for the children as well as members of the community.

**"The lorry driver said 'do you know what, if you'd given me a ticket I'd have just hated you. But [being interviewed by the mini-police has actually made me stop and think and it will actually slow me down."**

**"They get to pick an issue that they would like to address...it was the parents parking outside the school and we asked the mini-police to write letters and then we kind of had a mini-competition and we chose the letters...and they would stand outside of school and put them on people cars and they did this one afternoon...but then they said the weeks after that people weren't parking on the zig zags outside school"**

One of the sites has started progress towards

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the Duke of Cornwall Home Award with the mini-police which aims to educate and train young people to assist before, during and after a crisis. The award is for 5-10-year olds.

Engagement with the community and making an impact was a positive and central feature within children's hopes of participation in the mini-police, as outlined in Chapter 4. Good practice in the sites appears to be a multi-dimensional programme, involving inputs in school and out of school, especially where children are able to tackle real community issues and make a difference to their local environment. To achieve this in some sites, it will involve an evolution of their current design and delivery structures to transcend classroom-based sessions.

## Input

There was an issue of varied input in some sites, based on either demands on the local policing team or due to the enthusiasm of those involved. Whilst some sites have expanded their mini-police programmes significantly, increasing the footprint of the mini-police within their locale, processes to ensure rigour and quality within programmes are not as well established.

**"It varies, some areas are in there virtually every week, some go when they can possibly go so it's just an occasional visit, but they are always just on the other end of the phone and their staff are aware of who their point of contact is"**

**"It varies, it varies as always you get great PCSOs and you will always get those that aren't so keen, have been told to do it probably"**

In terms of consistency and quality, some strategic leads talked about their being a minimum expectation or standard, though such minimum standards vary between sit

**"As long as get all those things and some units are doing more and some are doing less but we have a minimum standard of what's happening"**

**"I monitor the activity from the school and from the PCSOs perspective because they have to complete at least one local policing initiative every term"**

**"We're now moving to a QA [quality assurance] point, whereby the staff who set it up and delivered the training will sit at the back of the class watching delivery and making sure it is being delivered consistently and in accordance with our lesson plans".**

How well different teams within policing are engaged with by mini-police leads is likely to have a significant impact on the enthusiasm and energy different teams support the mini-police programme. In most sites, the relative size of the programme was small, enabling a degree of control in influencing who from policing is involved. In sites that have grown significantly, the quality assurance between schools is a concern, as the individual personalities and motivations of officers will shape the encounters with children. As the mini-police is a collaborative programme with schools, and indeed children, sites should consider methods to facilitate shared quality assurance processes.

# Critical Reflections on Design and Delivery

Although based on and inspired by the original mini-police scheme, as with the aims, the structure, length and content of schemes vary significantly. For example, they vary in length from 7 weeks to 2 years. The original mini-police site has recently changed its structure, another site was still in the early stages of developing a structure whereas the remaining eight had developed their structure and now appear to be comfortable with it as it stands with no immediate plans to change. As with the selection process, the structure, content and frequency of input of the scheme is likely to impact on the likelihood of the scheme achieving its aims. At this stage there is little evidence to suggest how the different models may impact differently on the effectiveness of the scheme in addressing its aims, but this would certainly be a beneficial avenue of investigation in the future.

It is important to meaningfully engage with local leads to support the refinement of mini-police programmes locally and aid the development national coordination and alignment. Critically, mini-police leads at this early stage of development should be open to new ideas and evidenced good practice. The national VPC hub in this regard will be crucial, acting as the fabric between sites to disseminate good practice and learning between and within established and emerging sites.

The progress of mini-police sites has been impressive and due to the enthusiasm and commitment of key staff in sites. With most sites having a typically between 10 and 20 schools involved in the programme, it is important to establish robust quality assurance processes to ensure that 1. New schools are appropriately equipped with information and resource to successfully launch the mini-police and 2. Existing schools are sustained in terms of their existing mini-police programme. It would be prudent to involve schools and children in reviewing processes to achieve a collaborative development of the programme locally, rather than a police-centric evolution.

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Within the strategic lead interviews, participants were asked to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to the mini-police. This section highlights the key themes.

## Strengths

- **The aims and objectives of the scheme**

When talking about strengths leads referred to the importance and impact of the scheme in relation to its key aims and objectives. It was suggested the mini-police is distinct from and enhances existing police engagements in primary schools. Moreover, the mini-police was positively reported in terms of impact with those children who are at risk of future negative behaviour.

**“The massive impact it has on the community and those young people. Particularly on turning them away from possibly going down a road previously that they’ve seen from family members.”**

- **Accessing children at a critical age**

Accessing children at a critical age where there may be more chance of having an influence before other influences take over was a strength expressed by some of the leads. It was noted that early intervention was an important aspect of the mini-police, acting as an important factor in raising children’s aspirations and enhancing children’s sense of civic responsibility. Critically, participation in the mini-police is timely, positioned before an important transition into secondary school and their life course (as in child to adolescent).

**“It’s a way of engaging with the young people. Although we have a successful cadet programme, we recognise that probably at 13 years old is a little late for those that are already going down the wrong path... So mini-police was a way to do that.”**

**“At this age they are very easy to get on board and they are like sponges and have a thirst for knowledge and I think as you get older it’s really hard to get them involved in something because personal and social lives take over as they get into senior schools so it’s important to give them an insight before we lose that”**

- **Providing more of a structure and commitment to school engagement**

Some of the strategic leads commented that the mini-police does not go above and beyond what the local policing teams should be doing already but it does provide more structure and commitment to school engagement. The responsibility of delivering the mini-police well held by facilitators was an important motivating factor for officers.

**“Yeah definitely? I mean we’ve always had a relationship with the schools, but it was more of a drop in when there is a problem sort of thing while there is now going into the primary schools well there’s an absolute minimum of twice every full term to deliver lessons”**

**“Absolutely, I can say whole heartedly. Having a slightly more formal set up agreement with what you are doing with a particular year group kind of forces you to go there even if you have the best intention in the world of going I am going to go every week if you haven’t got something to stick to is always very easy for those types of things to slip”**



- **Achieving a positive experience in schools**

The mini-police was understood as achieving a positive experience in schools. Insights from the teacher’s survey corroborate this, showing that schools had largely had a positive experience of the scheme so far. Nearly three-quarters (73%) strongly agreed and the remaining 27% agreed that it was a good idea to have the

mini-police in their school; 70% strongly agreed that they would recommend the programme to other schools, 24% agreed and 6% agreed. Figure 5.7 shows how their experience of the scheme matched up to their expectations. The experience was either consistent with what they had expected (44%) or better than they had expected (50%).

**Figure 5.7 The extent to which the experience of the mini-police matched up to teacher’s initial expectations of the scheme**



All the schools surveyed indicated that they agreed that the police had been good at supporting their mini-police programme, 63% (20) strongly agreed, 22% (7) agreed and 16% (5) slightly agreed.

- **Providing children with opportunities that they might not have ordinarily experienced**

The mini-police was seen as providing a unique opportunity to children, especially those who through circumstance may have otherwise not had certain experiences. It was recognised that some home situations for children limited their lifeworld and activities in the mini-police did not add to the pressure on parents in difficult situations.

**“You always going to have some children that have every brownie or boy scout badge going but you have also got those that never get the opportunity to go to anything and it gives them the opportunity to learn different things and see things in in a different perspective whilst still in the school environment therefore they are there and it’s not that extra will my parents take me”**

- **Strong senior police leadership buy in**

Generally strategic leads report that the mini-police had strong support from their Senior Leadership Teams and Police and Crime Commissioners, some of who had attended some mini-police schools and supported activities. This was valuable as it created advantageous conditions in sites to garner support from across teams in policing. It was noted however, changes among senior leaders in

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

forces may unsettle this support in the future.

**“The Chief, ACC and the Dep, it’s very well thought of and supported. The ACC moves meetings and cancels things so (they) can come to mini-police events... (they are) very, very good”.**

## Weaknesses

- **Middle management buy-in**

In a couple of cases, strategic leads felt more needed to be done to ensure the buy in of middle management within forces who are trying to balance operational demands and did not always understand or appreciate the importance of the mini-police. It was noted that there were some in forces who did and did not engage with the mini-police, which creates an unequal terrain locally, where some schools will not receive an equitable amount of support and input from officers. It is important in such cases, minimal expectations are made explicit and met so as not to damage the relationship between some schools and the police.

**“I think probably one of the things we struggle with is kind of the middle management buy in, we quite easily get our senior officers, our chief officer team really easy. I think you can get the PC’s, PCSOs involved with a bit of encouragement and a bit of information about what we are trying to achieve, I think that is really important, but it tends to be the middle management that are obviously trying to balance resources with operational need and they just see it as something else that sometimes is a big barrier to us”**

**“The PCs and the PCSOs might get it but I think there is a bit of work for me to do with the Inspectors...you know we have got some Inspectors who are already engaged with it, it’s not going to be a massive piece of work for us it’s just giving them a gentle push to say look you have got these schools in your area that are part of this scheme please be proactive with them, you know, please consider utilising them where possible on local problem solving initiatives...”**

- **Skills and confidence of those carrying out the scheme to work with children**

In some sites it was noted that those carrying out the scheme had been selected on the basis that they would be good at working with children or had volunteered. Some leads found that some PCSOs or officers were apprehensive to facilitate the mini-police either because they are not confident to engage with children or they do not feel that it is part of their role.

**“I was only told last week... when [I asked] why aren’t we engaging more with schools, he said you know some of your cops just don’t know how to do it some of them don’t know how to interact with young people and I’ve had this fed back to me on some of the training we have had around ACEs believe it or not some cops have said it’s not our job to be engaging with young people which I find absolutely astonishing but I am sure there are cops that are just not comfortable in that environment with young people and children”**

**“They (PCSOs) are terrified of them (children), I don’t know why, I have had people before say please don’t make me go to that school I would rather go to a pub fight on my own with no radio than sit in a class of 8 year olds, there is a real lack of confidence to go in, they are confident that they can go deal with a confrontational scenario but not confident that they can go deal with a load of inquisitive little kids who ask annoyingly difficult questions, when they shouldn’t”**

- **Staff turnover**

The problem of high turnover of PCSOs either leaving the force or becoming officers was experienced in some forces, which meant that they had an issue with training new people and bringing them up to speed with the mini-police programme. One of the leads mentioned that they were trying to address the high turnover of PCSOs through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) days that the Neighbourhood Policing Teams are having. Another commented that if due to financial constraints staff were lost this would have a very negative affect on the scheme.

**“Although it’s 2 lessons per term per school, so 6 in a year, when you multiply that by (number) of schools, that’s suddenly a phenomenal amount of resource to put in. So, under shrinking police budgets that is a risk. If we start losing staff that will have a massive negative impact on us if we start pulling out of schools.”**

- **Consistency and quality at a national level**

It was expressed that a weakness of the mini-police are the inconsistencies nationally across schemes, this point is discussed in more depth in the Information Sharing and National Strategy Section. This has implications for the marketing

and brand of the mini-police, as a mosaic of delivery and practice challenge the footing of the mini-police on a national scale.

**“Nationally as with everything with all police forces, I feel the key weakness is you will not commonality amongst different forces because they are all using it for different aims”**

## Opportunities

- **Developing a continued connection between the young people and police after the mini-police**

The mostly commonly suggested opportunity that forces identified was that they had started to develop or were in the process of thinking about developing their junior cadets programme in order to bridge the gap between mini-police and cadets.

**“We are currently developing a junior cadets, which would catch between the ages of 12 and 14... we’re currently in the process of finding funding and running a scheme.”**

One lead described junior cadets as being their next challenge, believing that part of that challenge was getting voluntary leaders, so they are looking into being able to give time back to be cadet leaders if they work for the Force (an ESP model). They also hope to engage with cadets that have become young cadet leaders (those aged 18-21) to assist with the junior cadet scheme as part of their development.

For some this opportunity had already been addressed, with junior cadets having already been introduced. This force had also introduced school officers into secondary schools.

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

**“We move up to junior cadets, once it comes up to June or July time and year 6 have done their SATs and things have calmed down slightly we have another day were they get their graduation certificate from the mini-police and at that point they get introduced to their schools officers that are going to be in their senior schools...so we have that continuity of being able to know who their contact is, we then link up all our mini-police are joined up with our junior cadets...the idea is we don't lose them”**

Another force that was looking to develop their cadet scheme were also keen to develop a scheme that is more appealing to vulnerable young people for whom the present cadets scheme isn't attractive to.

**“We want to find a way of developing the current scheme into something that might be more attractive for secondary school children you know when you have got that peer pressure when you move into secondary school and lose that nurture from a primary school and that is what we are seeing with ACE's work is soon as those kids go from that primary school where there is lot of love and nurturing care into a secondary school environment where there are different pressures...then we see kids start to fall off”**

Overall, the key opportunity related to an identified gap within the youth engagement offer of policing and it was strongly felt that the positive change to children in the mini-police may diminish over time when they complete their primary education and transition into secondary education.

- **Look at opportunities to leave a legacy in the school after the scheme has finished**

One lead talked about how there might be the opportunity for the mini-police to continue in

some way, in terms of the mini-police taking on responsibilities after the programme has finished. This may be more relevant for programmes that are shorter in length.

**“Whether to leave a legacy behind a number of them remain in school being peer mentors, some schools have a buddy bench for children who are maybe having trouble with friends there is a bench that they can go sit on...but whether how we can use mini-police in schools when the programme has stopped”**

- **Sharing materials and good practice between forces**

Some leads discussed reaching a position where they could share their products with other forces, with the national VPC hub being well positioned to create links and connections between sites.

**“Our intention at the moment, because [name of site] is quite small and we only have a few schools in the area, is to keep hold of that local engagement and delivery, but then create a package around the fraud and cyber safety that when can then pass on to other forces.”**

There was some evidence of sharing knowledge and there is an opportunity to have a central hub for materials such as lesson plans etc. Evaluation of specific lesson plans and sessions is needed to ensure that materials are robust and sound.

**“We're giving all the forces that have been to see us all of our mini-police contracts that were set up with the schools around expectation. The only thing we haven't shared yet is our lesson plans. We will do. We just want to keep those for a year and make sure they're working the way we think they're working.”**

## Threats

- **Rolling the mini-police out too quickly or too broadly**

Many of the leads were concerned about rolling the scheme out more widely or too quickly. For some this was a capacity issue and the danger of putting too much pressure on Neighbourhood Policing Teams or on partners.

**“Our programme has to stay small, we can’t put too many demands on the local policing teams because ultimately the Inspector will turn around and say sorry that’s not my priority...that’s the tension there really”**

**“The problem that I feel is the bigger that we get the less that our partners will be able to get involved because every week we will be saying can we have RNLI over again and because your taking abstractions like we have under water search unit going into one of the schools today and I have got them signed up for the next six weeks it would just be a continuous cycle and that’s my worry I would rather do it really well in the first 23 schools and see how that goes before we try and take on too many and not being able to commit. What I don’t want is the expectation of what we are going to deliver and then due to resources we can’t deliver that”**

Others felt that it was important to roll it out cautiously to maintain control. At present in many sites, having a small number of schools was seen as an strengthening factor, enabling a higher number and better quality of inputs by policing. The key threat here of expansion is a dilution of what the mini-police ‘offer’ is. While the mini-police has expanded in some sites to many schools, it is too early to assess the success of this and whether quality of the programme

has been impacted.

**“We want to do it in a measured way where we can always retain control and be quite aware of what’s going on in each school as opposed to just rolling it out because the school wants it. There has to be a reason why we’re there and it has to be targeted”**

**“If you want to do something well, you should keep it small and so you don’t lose control of it and we have found by keeping such a tight rein on it we can keep that standardisation...keep a tight rein on delivery, the tracking who has had what and when they have had it...I think if you were to expand it...I wouldn’t like to think that we would be able to keep such a tight hold of it so whilst we are expanding its not at quite the same gross rate of when we launched it...”**

- **School buy in and ownership**

Some strategic leads were struggling with how to empower schools to better engage with the mini-police as some schools had gripped it whereas others had not. It was indicated that this was largely down to strong leadership within some schools.

**“I think in the schools that it has worked there has been very strong leadership from the headteacher who have reached up to their Neighbourhood Policing Teams. Where I have seen it work... the headteacher has reached up to the Inspector and almost forced his arm to be involved and be proactive. You have got the whole of that team now the PCSOs, the PCs, the Sergeant who are actively engaged with that school and that hasn’t happened in all areas”**

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

In another site, the structure of the mini-police had recently changed with schools being expected to deliver more of the content of the scheme. One strategic lead described how some schools had complained about this. This is confirmed by a comment from one of the schools that completed the mini-police survey which expressed a weakness as:

**In another site, the structure of the mini-police had recently changed with schools being expected to deliver more of the content of the scheme. One strategic lead described how some schools had complained about this. This is confirmed by a comment from one of the schools that completed the mini-police survey which expressed a weakness as:**

A key threat for the mini-police programme within sites as the balance of input shifts due to an expansion of the number of schools involved. Expansion of any initiative presents a threat and sufficient planning is critical. The capacity of sites to expand is unequal, considering the relative investments and structures in situ, as such expansion should be carefully planned.

While at present the issue of engagement and buy in from schools does not appear to be a major issue for most sites, if the scheme grows significantly this could become a bigger issue as schools may be asked to play a more proactive role in the running and delivery of the programme.

- **Funding**

Sites had received funding from either their Chief Constable priority fund, their PCC or from the VPC or a combination of these avenues. One strategic lead highlighted that the funding that they received from these sources was vital as it can be difficult to raise money for the scheme via

alternative routes.

**“We received a lot of funding from the VPC, and of course we can do it so much easier and so much quicker because we have had that funding and without that we just wouldn’t be able to do it because our force would simply not have the funds to do that and it is the uniform cost. The only other way we did start to look at it was whether we could get sponsorship, now the problems we encountered from that...because you are not a charity is very hard to get the funding so such as your Brownie and your Guide Group would go to your local councils for funding, they would go to Tesco or Coop Community funding [but] because mini-police isn’t a charity you don’t get that input and the harder the schools you go into the less money there is in the school to do things”**

In some areas there was no cost to schools whereas in other sites schools were asked to fund all or some of the uniforms. Generally, sites did not feel that they had financial blockers to running the mini-police as there is a minimal cost, taking into account the relative size of some programmes. However, a couple of sites mentioned that transport costs were an issue.

**“We’ve ask the schools to buy the uniforms, that’s the only commitment we ask from them. And I was told it’ll never happen because there’s no way schools have got the money. As soon as they’ve seen the product, we haven’t had a single quibble from any of them. In fact, I’ve got a waiting list of schools that want to join.”**

**“Each time we recruit another 9 schools, we try to get 50% of schools to fund themselves and 50% through funding that the police have obtained.”**

**“Transport is an issue. That’s something that we constantly have to battle with: finding the resource to take 10 children plus 2 teachers plus 2 cops is difficult.”**

**“When we take them to events it costs an absolute fortune for us we have to hire mini buses because the schools don’t have them, we have to hire coaches and its costing us £1000s or £1000s of pounds”**

Resources were mentioned as a possible threat if the scheme was to expand, for example, one mentioned it in relation to provision of uniforms. Another site that had expanded significantly said that they had simplified the uniform to ensure it remained financially viable. Resourcing the mini-police is perhaps one of the most important challenges to resolve in forces.

- **Reliant on key individuals or a seconded team**

A threat mentioned by a couple of sites was that the scheme was being run by an individual or individuals or by a seconded team. Therefore, if the individual left or the seconded team was disbanded this would be a threat to the mini-police scheme. It should be noted that this impact will mostly be relevant in sites with smaller programmes, however such an effect should not be dismissed if key leaders and advocates for the mini-police in senior leadership positions in forces change roles.

**“There is no job profile, there is no role for that person the only reason it happened and the only reason we have got these extra units in the Force is because I am going I think we need to do this and I am really excited about it and actually I have gone to the right people, and I have gone to the ACC and the CYP leads to do this but if I didn’t turn up for work the workstream would disappear”**

## Critical Reflections on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strategic leads largely referenced the aims and objectives of the mini-police as its key strengths. However, leads also highlighted the importance of it targeting children at an early age providing an optimum opportunity to influence their perceptions of the police and to direct them away from possible negative behaviour. Additionally, it was felt that it provides a more formal structure and commitment to engagement with schools and provides learning experiences to children that they might not ordinarily experience in school or at home.

The strategic interviews suggest that, so far, the mini-police schemes are fuelled on the enthusiasm for the concept of certain individuals in each respective force. The mini-police is supported by senior leaders, it is driven by the strategic leads and it is run on the ground by people that believe in it and want to be involved in it. It is not yet embedded into the structure of the forces, as it is partly reliant on passionate individuals who are on board with the early intervention agenda and child-centred policing. This presents some challenges particularly if the scheme were to expand. There is a need to ensure that the long-term benefits of early intervention and building of relationships between children and the police are promoted, especially to middle management and to those on the ground who may be running schemes in the future. In addition, those that are on the ground need to be confident in working with children and young people, and more generally engaging with the community.

Schemes varied in the extent to which there was onus on the school to administer the scheme. In most of the sites the number of schools is quite small in comparison to the total number of schools in the respective county and, therefore, experiences of engagement with schools has been quite positive. It is important that the offer to schools is clearly defined, as are expectations on both sides and there are clear points of contact. Some areas were finding that some schools were struggling to, or resistant to (having experienced an earlier model), pick up the scheme and run with it. It is crucial not to define such instances as failures but rather learning opportunities to identify what is different in such schools to inform the selection processes.

It was clear that many schools are keen to get on board with the scheme, with strategic leads receiving many enquiries from them. However, quite a few strategic leads felt that any dramatic expansion of the scheme was not an option as it would put too much pressure on local policing teams and/or partner agencies. They were also concerned



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that expansion would mean that it would become difficult to monitor the quality and consistency of the schemes across schools. It is clearly an important issue because lack of sustainability could potentially cause more harm than good to police-school relations and to neighbourhood policing. Many leads were considering their next opportunity being developing junior cadets in order to bridge the gap between the cadets and the mini-police and ensure that the relationship between the police and children was not interrupted.

Funding for the scheme tended to have come from either the Force, PCC or VPC or a combination. It was noted that it was difficult to get funding from other sources because the mini-police scheme is not a charity. Although funding was generally not considered a major issue currently it was considered as a potential threat to the mini-police in the future. Some forces were struggling with transport costs however.

# Sharing of Information and a National Strategy

This section explores the sharing of information and attitudes towards the development of a national strategy. Some leads discussed having some communication with other sites, particularly having communicated with Durham and Lincolnshire which had been useful. A couple mentioned that they felt that sites were overly protective of their work. It is recognised, however, some sites want to ensure that specific lesson plans are robust and sound before sharing.

**“My gripe...was the fact why we not sharing all these (lesson plans)? Why are we re-writing the wheel if you like...I think it should be sharing opportunity and why shouldn't we share best practice?”**

When asked if they had access and used the national portal, a few commented that they had very recently got access. One lead mentioned that it would be nice to have a national conference that is more formal where best practice could be shared. Strategic leads were positive about the idea of a national strategy feeling it was important that there was some uniformity to what is being offered and a minimum standard as well as being clear about the aims and objectives of the scheme.

**“Because it is important that we have set out what we are going to do around the mini-police and nationally for it to be known what our aims and objectives are. What are we doing it for really because I think that is some of the problem really and because some of the Forces aren't on board as well sometimes that can be seen as a negative thing really because why are they holding back or is it not quite ready to go live almost so it would be nice to see it as a National thing that everybody has to”**

The leads emphasised that it is important that the future national strategy of the mini-police is

flexible to account for local variations, though the opportunity for guiding principles and direction was identified as being needed.

**“I think the VPC National Framework for Cadets lends itself to every Force to then adapt a cadet scheme themselves. I think if you did with the same with the mini-police it would work however as you will find with the volunteer police cadets scheme most forces, I like the tag line of a National Framework but local implementation, because it has to be local implementation because yes most forces have similar priorities but every force do not have the same delivery team the same personalities, the same drive, the same enthusiasm, the same structure, the same resources so I think if the framework was broad enough for every Force to tick that box to say there following the framework”**

**“I would like us to have some national direction on what is mini-police, nothing rigid but you know like cadets we know what the principles are for cadets, you know like 25% from vulnerable backgrounds, I think it would be good if we could have a degree of consistency while appreciating there will be a need for local variation”**

There was only one strategic lead that was entirely resistant to a national strategy or national involvement.

**“I don't want anyone nationally telling us what we should be doing with mini-police or where it should be going because it very much depends on the force, the resources and the areas that you are covering...I worry that when things become national and they bring in guidelines and its suddenly you can't do this and you have go to do that it's not going to work for everyone”**

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# Critical Reflections on the Sharing of Information and a National Strategy

Strategic leads were largely positive about the concept of a national strategy for mini-police. At present the choice and emphasis on aims has largely been locally defined although influenced by the original aims of the Durham scheme. Providing clarity of aims at a national level, may allow for a clearer direction for the following:

- The selection of children for the scheme – some current selection criteria may not be currently maximising the impact of the scheme on the key aims.
- The structure and length of the scheme – the way in which the scheme is organised in length and frequency of visits is likely to have consequences for each aim.
- Ownership of the mini-police scheme – the extent to which the onus is on the police or schools to own and manage the scheme.
- How the success of the scheme is evaluated – There needs to be a clarity of aims so that there is a clear understanding of how success can be measured.

Clearly, the structure and selection of schools cannot only be governed by the aims of the scheme but will also be dependent on the resources each force has available as well as their current Service Delivery Model. This is largely why strategic leads were keen to highlight that a national strategy must allow for flexibility in how the mini-police is locally implemented and run. Strategic leads were keen to share information, most had had some contact with a couple of other forces and some had recently obtained access to the portal.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provides key conclusions and recommendations based upon the evidence presented throughout this report.



# Conclusions

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The results and findings presented in this report demonstrate the value of the mini-police to a series of national policing policies. Children involved in the mini-police were very positive about their experiences and the impact of these to their understanding of what police officers do, their desire to help others and the trust that they have in the police. Through their participation in the mini-police, children's aspirations to serve in the police were raised, the effects of which for children living in difficult environments could be of significant importance. Participation in the mini-police, furthermore, had positive effects on feelings of safety outside the home and online. Children were fascinated by the roles, functions and experiences of officers and valued the relationships they had built with key staff that delivered the mini-police. Participation in the mini-police has fostered trusting relationships between children and police officers, supporting children to see the officer beyond the uniform.

Being a part of the mini-police for many children profoundly impacted their self-identity, as in who they think they are and who they want to be, improving their confidence and esteem. Moreover, the collective identity of the mini-police in schools, involving active and negotiated constructions, often supported a diverse group of children to work together and achieve positive change within the school environment. What appeared to be the most valuable outcome within sites were the positive relationships officers had developed with children who previously had, or who live with family members that have, negative views of the police. This is not to say that important safety information and education on topics such as road safety, county lines, water safety etc. were not important, but rather that the unique feature of the mini-police was more about forming trusting relationships with the police, reframing the perceptions of who police officers are and what they do, and

fostering a sense of pride in the community. In this sense, the mini-police differed from other education-based programmes and inputs in school delivered by the police.

The progress of mini-police sites has been impressive and due to the enthusiasm and commitment of key staff in sites. The mini-police programmes varied significantly nationally, being positioned differently within local policing environments, having differential levels of investment and resource, and being implemented using alternative models over dissimilar periods of time. This report documents how the aims and objectives of mini-police programmes locally are subtly different, having implications for the design of programmes and delivery. The selection processes for schools to have a mini-police programme needs refinement. Practices such as selecting schools that volunteer may de-legitimise the value of the mini-police programme in terms of influencing change in schools and communities that have the most fractured relationships with policing. The selection of children differed across sites and strategies are needed to attract children who would most benefit from participation in the mini-police.

The evidence suggests that the demand for the mini-police programme is high, with many schools keen to get on board with the scheme, with strategic leads receiving many enquiries. However, several strategic leads felt that any dramatic expansion of the scheme was not an option as it would put too much pressure on local policing teams and/or partner agencies. Many leads were considering their next opportunity being developing junior cadets in order to bridge the gap between the cadets and the mini-police and ensure that the relationship between the police and children was not interrupted.

# Recommendations

Recommendations (R) are organised into 2 categories: strategy and practice.

## Strategy

### **R To define a national vision for the mini-police, supported by a value framework and strategy.**

There is a need to agree what the mini-police is as a programme, what it is trying to achieve and how it should develop. It would be beneficial if the mini-police agenda is located within a wider force approach to promote the child-centred policing agenda, to create a culture and environment that facilitates developments. Local approaches have been isolated resulting in subtly different underlying purposes to programmes, effecting selection, design and delivery. This would have a unifying effect on programmes, contributing to a greater collective good.

### **R To mature police-led uniformed youth programmes, designing pathways between mini-police, junior cadet and cadet initiatives.**

The evidence shows how participation in the mini-police increases both interest in continued involvement in uniformed police group participation and civic engagement. In many sites, there is a gap in provision between the mini-police and senior cadets, which potentially compromises the positive effects achieved in the mini-police. A larger strategic vision for all uniformed children and youth police engagement (from mini-police age 8 through to cadet age 18) would create continued opportunities for children and young people to both get involved and stay involved. Junior police cadet initiatives are beginning to be considered or formed in some sites, seen as the natural progression of youth engagement, though at

present is limited to a few sites.

### **R To establish a guiding framework to inform the selection of schools to be involved in the mini-police.**

The selection of schools is paramount to meeting the overall programme aims and objectives. This is the part of the selection process that forces have the strongest ability to influence, being able to identify schools in areas that generate high levels of demand and include communities that have fractured relationships with the police. By establishing a guiding framework to assist in selecting schools, this will increase the likelihood that the scheme is reaching those children that would most benefit. Moreover, this would support forces to justify why some schools are selected and others are not.

### **R To develop a national evidence-base for the mini-police that focuses foremost on the value and social impact of participation on children.**

There is a need to embed processes that capture the activities and outcomes for children in the mini-police. Several forces have initiated local evaluative practices, though these are not aligned between sites nor do many include measures relating to impact and social value. This would better position the mini-police programme within national funding opportunities to expand or embed the provision locally.

## Practice

### **R To encourage child-centred approaches and ideologies, enabling the active involvement of children at setting direction and agreeing issues to be explored.**

Encouraging a child-centred approach in which children participate in setting the direction will facilitate the 'child's voice' within strategic and operational development, which positions children as playing an important and active role in the programme, rather than passive recipient of it. It was highlighted in a few sites that children had different perceptions to adults about what issues are important to them and what they find engaging. In addition, a child-centred approach could increase their feelings of empowerment, responsibility and confidence, which are important factors in their ability and willingness to become active and responsible citizens in the future.

**R To produce local programme documentation, outlining roles, responsibilities and accountabilities between schools and police.**

While the scheme is working well, in some sites there were issues in the understanding of schools of what the mini-police consists of and what the responsibilities of schools and the police are. Local documentation that outlines the 'offer' of the mini-police to schools as well as the commitments needed by the school to develop and sustain the mini-police should assist in the effective running of schemes and ensure that expectations are well managed.

**R To establish guiding principles concerning the composition and representativeness of mini-police cohorts, in relation to children in need and children who are interested.**

It was recognised in many sites that some children who it is perceived would benefit greatly from participation in the mini-police are not engaged or do not engage with the opportunity. The evidence shows the value of achieving a balance and diversity within cohorts,

though strategies are needed to better attract specific children for whom participation in the mini-police could intervene early and positively change their perceptions of police. This would better position the mini-police as a programme within national policy guidelines and increase the relative size of impact to children.

**R To create opportunities to share good practice and build a repository of 'what works' locally, sharing information with national partners.**

There is a need to create mechanisms to share good practice and resources between sites. At present, many sites were developing materials and approaches independently, duplicating efforts which represent wasted public resource.

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