

CPCGLambeth

COMMUNITY-POLICE CONSULTATIVE GROUP
FOR LAMBETH



Young People and the Police in Lambeth

Submission to MPA Scrutiny

MARCH 2008

INTRODUCTION

This is a submission by CPCG for Lambeth to the Metropolitan Police Authority's Scrutiny into Youth and the Police. It has been based on:

- CPCG's recurring consideration of Youth issues throughout its programme of events;
- Experience of CPCG members and membership organisations working with young people;
- A specially commissioned collaborative event with SE1 United, a youth based organisation in the north of Lambeth, held in February 2008.

SE1 United is a youth led organization based in Waterloo and is the largest community youth forum in South London, reaching over 1000 young people annually. It is made up of young people aged between 11-19 years, from a range of cultural, economic and religious backgrounds, all of whom work, rest or play in Southwark and Lambeth. Its main aims are to provide a voice for young people, promote a positive image of young people and raise their aspirations through new opportunities.

FEBRUARY YOUTH EVENT

The event, which had an attendance of around fifty, the majority of whom were young people, the balance people who work with young people, had three principal elements:

1. A questionnaire which was completed by all young people attending, and others outside the event.
2. An open floor debate, led by two young facilitators from SE1 United
3. A series of workshops with feedback session. Again, the workshops were facilitated by young people

The three elements were structured to capture:

Young people's knowledge
Young people's experience
Young people's views and opinions, particularly for improvements

Taken across the questionnaire, the debate and the workshops, the SE1 United facilitators have drawn the following main points and themes.

Image of Young People

- Young people describe themselves as 'bored, energetic and aggressive'.
- They believe that they are seen by wider society as 'criminals, aggressive and violent'.

This presents the very negative view of young people today. SE1 United feels that the media paints a very damaging picture of young people to the public which stereotypes them and also encourages young people to believe that they are expected to behave badly. Much of SE1 United's previous research highlights the fact that young people do not have access to enough positive activities which lead to boredom and then unsociable behaviour.

Legislation, Structures and Partnerships

- No young people knew what the following terms meant: ABCs, the IPCC, PACE, Dispersal Zones, Section 44 or Section 60. After these terms were explained to them they felt that it was essential that they know about them.
- They suggested that the best way of informing them about them was to have short, animated information adverts about them on TV channels/programmes that they watch (e.g. MTV Base, Channel U, Ross Kemp's gangs, cinema trailers).
- They also suggested that leaflets were a no-no, and that any printed information should be placed in magazines that young people already read (e.g. Live Magazine).
- They thought that a policeman/ woman coming to their school (plain-clothed) and speaking to small groups of students about their rights and laws affecting them would be a good idea.

Policing

- Young people felt that better strategy, improved policies, local developments, effective training and good practice were the best ways to police more effectively and enable them to appear more friendly to young people. Most important was the direct contact between young people and police.
- CS gas, tasers, mediation, Safer Neighbourhood teams and especially tagging are the best ways of policing violent crimes – however tagging can be seen as a ‘trophy’ rather than a punishment. Community Support Officers are seen to be more friendly than other officers.
- Dispersal zones and mosquitoes (i.e Noise Boxes) were seen as the worst method of policing.
- They said that they would ‘sometimes’ report a crime to the police, but that the reasons why they might not are because they don’t believe that the crime would get solved, that reporting a crime is ‘long’, and because they would rather deal with it themselves.
- The best ways to report crimes are by doing it via the internet, anonymous reporting, and a faster service when you are on the phone or in the police station.

The idea of reporting crimes to the police in an environment outside a police station with youth workers present is another method which has been cited in previous situations witnessed by SE1 united where young people do not want to go to a police station at all.

Prevention

- They believe that the police’s current attempt to fight crime is poor.
- The best way to prevent crime would be to have more youth provision, teach people about their citizenship rights, have more locally based police, to teach the police better communication skills and to have more CCTV.
- Also, more advertising about the dangers of crime, more after school clubs and early intervention would help prevent crime.
- The worst way to prevent crime are using dispersal orders, mosquitoes, having free travel and using ASBOs.

Participation

- They believe very strongly that the police do not spend enough time listening to young people and linking in with community organisations.
- Over half of the young people have had contact with the police in the last 12 months, however the majority said that this contact was very poor.
- Conversely, over half the young people had said that they had contact with the police when it was part of a youth project, and the majority of these said that this contact was good or ok.
- Police should visit schools, youth clubs or youth projects (not in uniform) and talk to young people about what they do, why they do it, and be seen to care about youth activities.

- They also should be trained by youth organisations on how to deal with young people, and have more consultation events with young people to discuss issues with young people.
- If the police would stop and search people with more respect (in their body language, in their tone of voice, in the way they look at you), then young people would be more friendly. When their approach is aggressive, it breeds an aggressive response.
- The police need to be from the area so that they can understand things better and not from 'out of town'. This may be why the police might be intimidated by a group of young people.
- The best way to encourage young people to join the police force is to pay them good money, to try to remove the social stigma, and to stop the media from making the police out to be the bad guys.

Crime

- The overwhelming opinion is that crime is increasing in Lambeth, and that both the victims and perpetrators are younger now than they were before.
- The reasons given are that more young people are selling drugs due to the lack of jobs, parents don't care about their kids, and organised violence has engrained gang issues in the minds of young people.
- Drugs, Robbery, Knife Crime, Group Offending and Guns were the most frequent crimes in their area
- Guns, Knives, Drugs, Robbery, Organised Crime and Dog Crime are the most serious crimes in their area.

Risk Factor and Protective Factors

- The main reasons why young people commit crimes are because they desire things, poverty, peer group influence, bullying, mental health issues and lack of aspirations.
- The best way of tackling these problems are to reduce hours for working parents, to stop trying to create a desire for material things on TV, to improve housing, to increase youth employment and to improve youth provision.

It was apparent that the main issues causing friction between young people and the police were in communication, stereotyping, lack of knowledge of rights and laws, lack of positive interaction with police and lack of faith and trust in the police system. Young people are willing to engage in trying to make a positive difference and had many potentially effective ideas

Detailed breakdowns from the Questionnaire and Workshops can be found in the Appendices.

CPCG EVENTS

CPCG has generally devoted at least one of its monthly events, on an annual basis, to Youth issues (see <http://www.downloads.lambethcpcg.org.uk/Minutes%200606.pdf> and <http://www.downloads.lambethcpcg.org.uk/Minutes%200703.pdf>, for example).

Additionally, Youth issues are invariably highlighted when particular topics are considered (eg Stop and Search, Guns and Gangs, Violent Crime, Street Crime and so on), be it in public meetings, or in Sub-Groups such as the Stop and Search monitoring Group.

Drawing from this background, it is clear that mixed groups of young and older people (including those who work with young people) the relationship between young people and the police cannot be easily isolated from the wider context in which young people are growing up, covering such areas as worthwhile leisure activities, education, training and employment, prevailing cultures and aspirations and so on. In this respect the views from mixed groups are entirely consistent with those

The key issues affecting young people, which determine their relationship with the police (only some of which are directly in the police's gift to change) fall largely into three groups:

Direct Interactions between the police and young people.

These, usually street based interactions, have a huge impact on young people's attitudes to the police and (where negative) serve to reinforce inherited perceptions from early times. They can cover a range of interactions but Stop and Search is a recurrent source of friction. Qualitative aspects are important – notions of respect, courtesy, friendliness even.

Equally, the persistence of Stop and Search (some young people get stopped recurrently, even though they have done nothing wrong), perceptions of disproportionality and a belief that this is a result of stereotyping together with a questioning of what are 'good grounds', all serve to undermine confidence. Procedural shortcomings (such as failure to give Stop Slips), and the belief that the police have targets to meet, serve only to further undermine

Equally, there are examples of good interactions between young people and the police, acknowledged by young people themselves and the wider community. Examples are of police involvement with the 'Summer Projects' (schemes of diversionary activity in the school summer holidays) or of particular local police officers who by dint of their familiarity with an area but also of their personal skills and approach are able to gain the respect of young people and adults in particular communities.

The first example suggests that there are particular initiatives which the police can take and build on. The second suggests that there are identifiable professional skills, ways of working and perhaps even character traits which can be identified, developed and deployed.

The degree to which young people look to the police to help them stay safe.

We know that, in extremis, there can be serious issues of unwillingness of young people to report crime to the police, or to pass on information, following tragic incidents – in part due to fear of reprisals but also because many young people do not feel the police (and officialdom generally) to be their allies.

Clearly, this itself is a product of negative attitudes indicated above and underscores the damage that poor relationships between the police and young people can do. In addition, some young people express similar levels of scepticism in regard to the value of reporting (“will anything get done?”) as some parts of the older population and also exasperation with the difficulties sometimes encountered with reporting crime.

In some parts of the community, young people have concerns about being seen in, or leaving, a police station. This at least may be addressed by developing further third party reporting and building on the role of schools officers.

The social circumstances which put young people at risk of becoming victims and/or perpetrators of crime.

This is an area that has generally been most frequently highlighted whenever CPCG and partners have addressed issues of policing, community safety and young people. Key issues identified have been:

- Lack of diversionary activities for young people, including both the scarcity of facilities and the inadequate opening hours of those available;
- Paucity of specialist workers to orchestrate wrap-around services to young people at risk;
- Economic disadvantage, including inadequate preparation for work and lack of available work opportunities;
- Problems in schools, including bullying and inadequate pathways for excluded students back into education and training;
- Lack of intergenerational cohesion, and even antagonism between age groups, exacerbated by media depictions of young people;
- Prevailing consumer and material values fostering aspirations which cannot be met legitimately;
- Gang membership and weapon carrying encouraged through fear of becoming victims;
- Domestic circumstances including economic pressures on families, domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse;
- Parenting issues.

A general conclusion is that police attempts to reposition themselves in relation to young people must be directed both at their own behaviours, tactics and initiatives but also can only be successfully achieved in partnership with other agencies to collectively change the environment in which both young people and the police interact.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire Results

1. Crime in Lambeth is...	
Increasing	74%
Staying the Same	20%
Decreasing	4%
Not Sure	2%

2. The victims and criminals of crime are getting...	
Younger	86%
Staying the same	10%
Older	4%

3. What words would you use to describe young people?	
Bored	48%
Aggressive	48%
Energetic	42%
Lazy	40%
Violent	54%
Criminals	30%
Stupid	24%
Intelligent	22%
Motivated	20%
Positive	18%
Happy	16%
Helpful	14%
Good	14%
Other "Undetermined"	2%

4. How do you think the general public portray you?	
Criminals	48%
Violent	46%
Aggressive	44%
Lazy	38%
Bored	34%
Stupid	34%
Motivated	18%
Happy	16%
Energetic	14%
Intelligent	14%
Positive	14%
Helpful	8%
Good Citizens	8%
Other "Unfocused", "lost", "bad", "annoying"...	8%

5. How would you rate the Police's attempt to fight crime?	
Very Poor	27%
Poor	31%
Ok	27%
Good	10%
Very Good	6%

6. Do the police spend enough time listening to young people and linking in with community organisations? (1 = no time at all, 10 = lots of time)	
1 -	40%
2 -	25%
3 -	5%
4 -	11%
5 -	6%
3 -	5%
6 -	5%
7 -	2%
9 -	2%
10 - inc "Not unless Trident are called"	6%

'They only have time to stop and search you'.

7. Would You Report A Crime To The Police?	
Never	25%
Sometimes	54%
Always	17%
Depends	4%

If not 'Always', why?	
Because you don't feel that the crime would get solved	34%
Because reporting a crime is 'long'	26%
Because you would rather deal with it yourself	22%
Because you wouldn't want to be spotted in a police station	12%
Because you don't think that you would be treated in the same way that other people would be treated	10%
Don't want the possibility of repercussions	6%
Other reasons: 'Because I have my life'. 'Because I want to live'. 'Waste of time.' 'Because things always happen and the world is not going to change'. 'Lines in Police stations are very long'. 'Only if it's really serious'. 'Depends on how big/bad it is'	14%

8a. Have you had any contact with the police in the last 12 months? i.e. internet, on the phone, face to face?	
No	54%
Yes	46%

8b. If yes, was the contact...	
Very Poor	55%
Poor	9%
Ok	27%
Good	9%

9a. Have you ever been involved in a youth project with or any other work with the police?	
No	56%
Yes	44%

9b. If yes, was the contact...	
Very Poor	14%
Poor	10%
Good	33%
Ok	29%
Very Good	14%

Appendix 2: Qualitative Feedback from Workshops

Your Rights and Laws

Do You Know About...

- Section 44
- Section 60
- PACE (The Police and Criminal Evidence Act)
- Stop and Search
- ASBOs (Anti-Social Behavioural Order)
- ABCs (Acceptable Behaviour Contract)
- Dispersal Zones
- PCSOs and Safer Neighbourhood Teams (Community Police Officers)
- Youth Offending Teams
- IPCC (Independent Police Complaints Commission)
- Safer Schools Partnerships

Q1: Which of these organisations/ terms have you heard of?

Organisation/term	Number who had heard of them
Stop and Search	4
ASBOs	4
PCSOs and Safer Neighbourhood teams	4
Youth Offending teams	4
Section 44	1
Safer Schools Partnership	1
Dispersal Zones	1
ABCs	1
IPCC	0
PACE	0
Section 60	0

Q2: What do you know about them?

	Number who could explain them
Stop and Search	4
ASBOs	4
PCSOs and Safer Neighbourhood teams	4
Youth Offending teams	4
Section 44	1
Safer Schools Partnership	1
Dispersal Zones	1
ABCs	1
IPCC	0
PACE	0
Section 60	0

The knowledge was very limited and young people wanted to know more.

Q3: What is the best way of helping young people to understand the services and policies which affect them?

MTV Base
Channel U
Radio
Buses
Billboards
Live Magazine or similar
Famous people
Cinemas- trailers
Texts
Youth/ gang documentary TV programmes (Ross Kemp)

Not leaflets
Cartoon formats/ animation
Young people like catchy acronyms

Policing: How to Make Your Area Safer

- Strategy: Prioritising issues and focussing on particular crimes
- Policy: The way the police work
- Central Division: allowing the government to make policing decisions in your area
- Local Development: allowing the local police and the community to make policing decisions in your area
- Problem Solving
- Quality of Contact: more interaction between police and young people
- More Police Operations
- Training police in how to interact with young people
- Stop and Search more people
- Increase arrest and custody of young people suspected of committing crimes
- Good Practice: learning from other areas in which the crime rate has significantly reduced

Q1: If you had to ensure the police force made London safer, can you please choose five heading which you think are most important?

1. Strategy
2. Policy
3. Local Development
4. Training Police
5. Good Practice

As well as these, the young people said that quality of contact between young people and police is also important. It was suggested that the police carry a small booklet to show young people about their rights before they carry out the stop and search. Young people don't have time to research these facts themselves.

Home life is a big issue leading to street safety and street life for young people can be very different than for others.

Q2: If you had the make the police force more 'friendly' and respectful to young people, which of these are most important?

1. Good Practice
2. Training Police
3. Quality of contact
4. Local development

Also problem solving was listed but seemed too broad- it would need to be done with both police and young people together. Quality of contact would be important as it sets the 'mood' of the young person/ police- e.g. polite respectful contact is more likely to get better result from both parties.

Q3: What do you think is the best way to tackle violent crimes from the list below?

- CS Spray
- Tasers
- Use of Weapons by Armed Police
- Tagging
- Mediation (where victims and perpetrators or crimes meet and talk about their actions and where they go for now)
- Diversity in the Police Force
- Safer Neighbourhood Police (the police that walk around)
- Dispersal Zones (around where young people cannot hang in groups of more than 5)
- Mosquitos (alarm system which only young people under the age of 25 can hear).
- ASBOs (Anti-social behavioural order) – where young people are not allowed into certain areas
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) – where young people are asked to sign a contract which means that they have to act a certain way

1, CS
2. Tasers
3. Tagging
4. Mediation
5. Safer Neighbourhoods

However it was noted that tagging can be seen as a 'trophy' for some young people rather than a deterrent. Also young people felt that armed police should only be used in emergency situations.

Q4: Which methods are the worst?

1. Dispersal Zones
2. Mosquitoes - Noise box

They also said that ASBOs and ABCs are also some of the ineffective methods of tackling crime.

Q5: How could reporting crimes be made easier...?

- Faster service, the current service too long and increases stress
- Anonymous reporting – internet
- Come quicker in an emergency. Most calls not taken seriously. Prank calls?
- Knowledge of numbers to call and knowledge of how to do it.

Are the police properly trained? Young people wanted to have a Q & A's with the Police about stop and search, as well as drugs and personal safety.

Young people to learn their rights in school

Stop and search not helpful because young people don't have time to research this situation properly. A small booklet to be shown to the young person at the time of stop and search which explains it simply would be useful.