Institute for Public Safety Crime and Justice

Fast-tracking vulnerable young people into the police cadets: Initial Evaluation of the Nottinghamshire VPC Pilot

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Executive Summary

In January 2019, Nottinghamshire Police launched a pilot project named 'Fast tracking of Vulnerable Young people into the VPC', working in partnership with the National Volunteer Police Cadets. This nationally pioneering project aimed to trial a new model for enhancing the methodology for engaging vulnerable young people into the VPC programme. This initial evaluation aimed to provide an independent assessment of the programme, documenting progress and identify developmental areas.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report demonstrates how the Nottinghamshire Fast-Tracking Vulnerable Young People into the Cadets Pilot has been very successful. The introduction of a new position, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer, has strengthened Nottinghamshire Police's commitment to youth engagement and enables more and wider opportunities for young people to positively engage with policing.

Of the 81 referrals, there was 68% engagement either in Cadet Roadshows or in the full Cadet programmes. This conversion from initial contact to engagement is testament to the outreach of the VPC Youth Engagement Officer and the wider support from different teams involved. The targeted focus on vulnerable young people is laudable and supports a shift in the ethos of cadets. Indeed, the considered location of cadet bases supported the engagement of young people who are on the edge of criminality, are in locations with high crime rates and from minority backgrounds.

Young people were very positive about their involvement in the cadets and felt that it had enabled them to create new contacts with other young people, develop a sense of belonging within their cohorts, to learn new things, expand their world view, increase their awareness of and engagement in social issues, and develop a richer understanding of policing. Crucially, involvement in the programme motivated some young people not to be drawn back into negative influences and their ongoing connections with officers gave young people another reason not to do what they see as being wrong.

The stakeholders who provided testimony of the pilot were equally positive towards what the programme is, why it exists and what it is achieving. In particular, the Cadet Roadshows were seen as offering something valuable to young people, raising aspirations and creating new connections within communities. Young people who had engaged in the Cadets were seen as being more confident, as having a richer understanding of right and wrong, and as displaying less defiant and chaotic behaviour. Strategically, the junior cadets fills a gap in provision between the Mini-Police and Senior Cadets and, through development, will complement these programmes enabling sustained engagement for selected children and young people who have long-term engagement needs.

Overall, the evidence provided in this report provides some justification for the programme to move from being a pilot to full implementation.

There are, however, a series of developmental issues that require some consideration to improve outcomes for young people, the overall resilience and cohesiveness of the programme and to secure it within Nottinghamshire strategy for the engagement of children and young people. This includes 1. Limited evidence to document impact and change among young people; 2. Staff being dislocated and disconnected resulting in differences between units; 3. Limited resources available to session facilitators to plan sessions; 4. Small number of staff involved with an over reliance on individuals; and 5. A series of unidentified risk to be identified and mitigated as the pilot is still developing. Recommendations are made at the end of the report for each of these developmental issues.

Contents

1. Introduction

In January 2019, Nottinghamshire Police launched a pilot project named 'Fast tracking of Vulnerable Young people into the VPC', working in partnership with the National Volunteer Police Cadets. There are currently 7 senior cadet units and 5 junior cadet bases in Nottinghamshire. Cadet units meet weekly during term time, though the length of senior cadet sessions is longer compared with junior cadet sessions. A VPC Youth Engagement Officer was appointed to engage with vulnerable young people referred into the programme as well as deliver wider engagement with young people outside of the programme. A novel feature in Nottinghamshire are Cadet Roadshows, which offer large scale engagement with communities and young people, which promotes the available activities and options for children and young people in Nottinghamshire that the police offer as well as enable the identification of vulnerable young people who might benefit from engagement activities. Overall, 166 young people have been engaged through the Roadshows to date and, consequentially, 9 young people have joined the junior cadets through this activity.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Nottinghamshire notes that "there are large disparities within the County with some children and young people facing greater disadvantages than others. Localities where there are higher numbers of families on low incomes are those localities where children and young people are less healthy and do less well at school. Some children and young people may face particular disadvantages and so need more support to fulfil their potential". The engagement by Nottinghamshire Police, coordinated by the VPC Child Engagement Officer is an important facilitator at promoting referrals for support and identifying those children who are at heightened risk, both in terms of wellbeing and future criminality, and supporting children to engage with a positive programme to improve their aspirations and outcomes.

This nationally pioneering project aimed to trial a new model for enhancing the methodology for engaging vulnerable young people into the VPC programme, with key aims to:
- Improve the approach for identifying and engaging with young people under the age of 18 who are vulnerable, socially excluded or involved in crime;
- Allow more effective and easier integration of a vulnerable young person into the Volunteer Police Cadets programme;
- Create a framework and process flow of how to safely integrate a vulnerable young person into a volunteer police cadet base which can be distributed to other police forces;
- Increase trust and confidence in the police due to positive engagement through the VPC;
- Explore how the model can help build stronger relationships between the police, young people and diverse communities;
- Enhance the diversity of Volunteer Police Cadets through breaking down barriers.

This initial evaluation aimed to provide an independent assessment of the programme, documenting progress and identify developmental areas. The approach to the initial evaluation involved:
- Desktop analysis of quantitative data provided to IPSCJ by Nottinghamshire Police, in respect of the operation and delivery of the pilot project;
- Interviews with strategic stakeholders and operational and delivery leads; and
- Interviews/focus groups with Cadets involved in the programme.

This report is organised into the following chapters:
Chapter 2: Measuring Impact and Outcomes
Chapter 3: Cadet and Stakeholder Perceptions
Chapter 4: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
Chapter 5: Observations and Recommendations

2. Referrals and Impact

This section provides an overview of secondary analysis of data provided by Nottinghamshire Police related to the pilot. It is organised into the following sections: 2.1: Programme Referrals
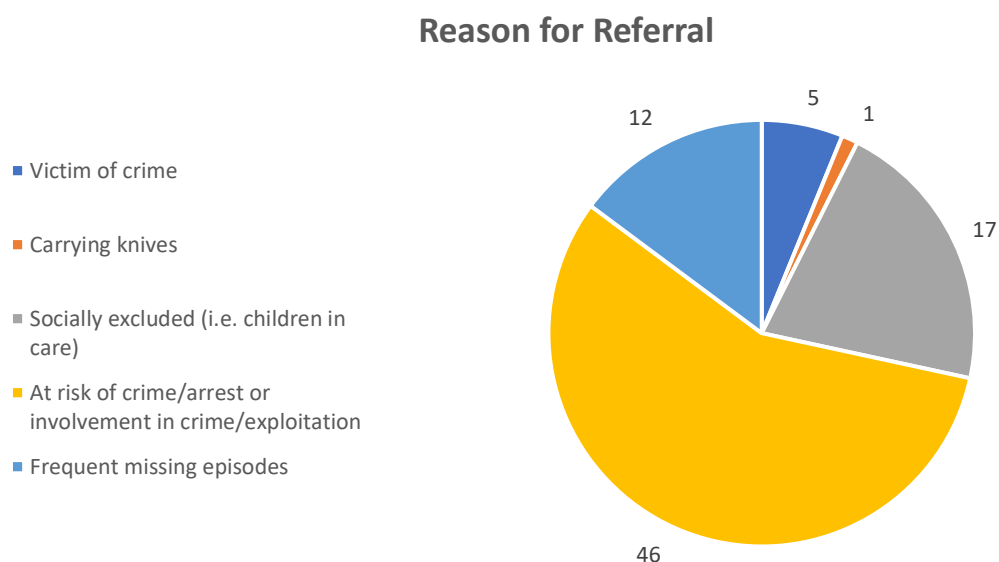
2.1 Programme Referrals

There were 81 children and young people referred or identified to the programme since its conception to 26 February 2020. Around 79% of these children and young people were male, 60% were aged between 12 and 15 years, and 64% were White British.

Gender

17
64

■ Male ■ Female

Ethnic Origin

21
8
52

■ Black/Asian/Mixed ■ White Non-British ■ White British
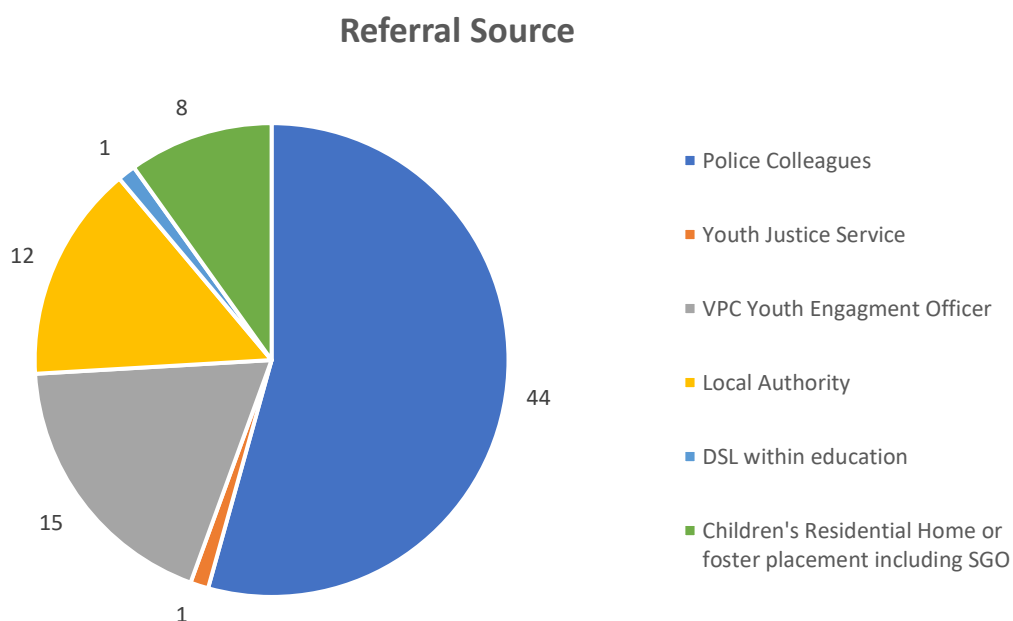
Referral Age

The demographic profile of referrals demonstrates good inclusivity in terms of gender, age and ethnic origin. The ethnic origin of children and young people referred to the programme is significantly above the county profile, indicating that the programme is successful at engaging ethnic minority groups in terms of referral and participation. In terms of ethnic profile, Nottinghamshire is recognised as having concentrated populations from BAME groups in Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe. While most referrals into the programme are White British, the programme overall is recognised as having experienced a significant

increase in children and young people from BAME groups engaging in the programme. For instance, in 2018-19, the cadet profile went from 8% to 20% of cadets who were from BAME groups.

The main reason for referral was being at risk of crime/arrest or involvement in crime/exploitation (57%). There were vulnerabilities identified for children and young people referred, including: victims of crime, possessing weapons, witnessing current or historic DV within the home, social isolation or exclusion, children in care and repeated missing episodes. The main reason for referrals are categorised in the image below.

Reason for Referral

Legend:
- Victim of crime
- Carrying knives
- Socially excluded (i.e. children in care)
- At risk of crime/arrest or involvement in crime/exploitation
- Frequent missing episodes

Most referrals to the programme being made by Police Officers (54%). It should be noted, however, that nearly a fifth (19%) of children and young people were identified by the VPC Youth Engagement Officer. The specific policing departments from which referrals were received were the hate crime team, missing persons team, children in care team, priority family's team and the county lines team.

Referral Source

Legend:
- Police Colleagues
- Youth Justice Service
- VPC Youth Engagment Officer
- Local Authority
- DSL within education
- Children's Residential Home or foster placement including SGO

The charts above show that most young people were referred by police officers (both the VPC Youth Engagement Officer and colleagues), representing c. 44% of all referrals. Therefore, there were just over half of referrals that were from a non-police source, which indicates the programme has developed good connections with external services. The development of connections between different agencies (and sub-departments) is critical at ensuring the most appropriate young people are offered a place within the programme given its limited capacity.

2.2 Impact

There is currently limited evidence available to demonstrate the impacts and value of the programme for young people, though the evidence available is positive and suggests the programme enables positive change. As documented in Section 2.1, there were 81 young people referred to the programme up until 26 February 2020. Of these young people, the image below illustrates how around two-thirds (68%) have positively engaged either with the full cadet programme or through shadowing cadet sessions, participating in cadet roadshows or other forms of youth engagement.
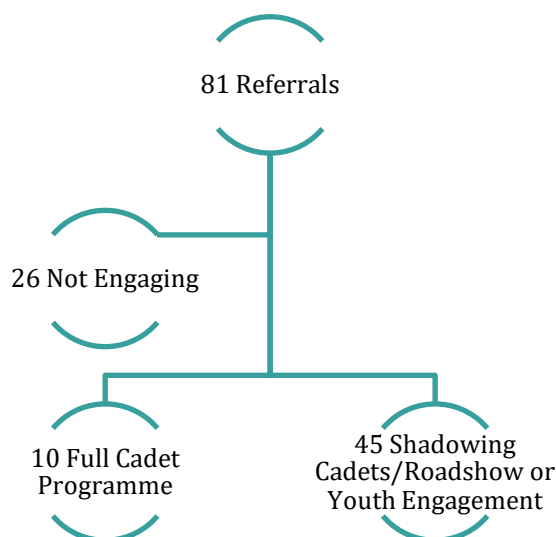
Data were provided for 16 vulnerable young people, documenting the number of missing from home enquiry's prior to, and following approximately 6 months engagement in the programme. Some of the young people had a very high number of missing from home enquiry's, with one young person having 24 prior to participation.

Based on an estimated cost of a missing from home enquiry at £2,500, the 16 vulnerable young people accumulated 91 incidents costing £227,500. Following engagement in the programme, the same young people have accumulated 24 incidents costing £60,000. These figures should be treated with extreme caution, given the lack of reliable evidence to link the participation with reduced incidents and that the time periods before and after the intervention are not identical.

There is no reliable evidence or data to determine causality or a relationship between the programme and the reduction in missing from home enquiries for these young people. Furthermore, it is likely that these young people are engaged in multiple interventions and service provided by both the police and wider agencies. Nevertheless, this difference is worthy of further investigation using a robust methodology that will enable a more accurate reflection of the effect and value of the programme. It should also be noted that for the first time in ten years, Nottinghamshire has experienced a reduction in Missing from Home incidents.

The following are a series of short vignettes about some young people who have been engaged in the programme. They illustrate some of the challenges and needs of the young people involved.

Person A had been missing 3 times before engagement in the programme and none since. They have since had minimal involvement from social care. They are not currently involved in the cadet programme but has recieved a package of mentoring support.

Person B had been missing 8 times before the programme and has since been missing on 5 occasions. They have had minimal involvement from social care. They are not currently involved in the cadet programme but has recieved a package of mentoring support.

Person C had been missing 13 times before engagement in the programme and has been missing on 2 occasions. They are currently involved in the full cadet programme and have recieved a targeted family support package.

Person D was previously involved in criminality before their involvement in the programme. They have been involved in the cadets for 3 months and, following their review and police system checks, there have been no reported incidents or major concerns. They are also now in the full cadet programme with no involvement with social care. They are currently open to CAMHS.

Person E had been missing 7 times before their involvement in the programme and has since been missing on 2 occasions. They are also now in the full cadet programme and are also supported by social care.

Person F was previously involved in criminality before their involvement in the programme. They have been involved in the cadets for 3 months and, following their review and police system checks, there have been no reported incidents or major concerns. They are also now in the full cadet programme and are also supported by social care.

3. Cadet and Stakeholder Perceptions

This section provides an overview of cadet and stakeholder perceptions of the pilot. It is organised into the following sections: 3.1: Cadet Perceptions and 3.2: Stakeholder Perceptions.

3.1: Cadet Perceptions

This section provides an overview of cadet perceptions of the pilot and is organised into two sections: 3.1.1: Views of the programme and 3.1.2: Views of the impacts of the programme. Overall, 18 young people participated in interviews and focus groups.

3.1.1: Views of the programme

Overall positivity: All the young people who participated in the evaluation were positive towards the pilot and outlined how the pilot created a positive space for them to engage in interesting activities and meet new people. Importantly, the cadet leaders and facilitators were seen as good and their general behaviours and interactions with young people were instrumental at keeping young people engaged.

> *"I can't really think of a negative"*
> *"I love it and I hope other people do too"*
> *"I think it's the way they [instructors] are that makes people come back"*
> *"Just positivity. It's learning in a positive way. It's interesting and it's not boring like school… like you have the choice to come here"*
> *"I think that when people think of cadets, they think of the army and the military, but it has both sides, a fun side and a serious side. Those two together creates a good environment and a place to come to."*

Meeting new people and developing connections: The participants described how they had met lots of different people unlike themselves in the pilot which had been good for their social development. The participants recognised that the early stages of engagement were particularly nerve-wracking, considering the different ages, experiences and needs young people had prior to engagement. However, some young people had now been involved in the programme for an extended time and had formed new friendships.

> *"It's getting all sorts of people together, different people, and so it's good for your social development…"*
> *"I'm quite a shy person so at first it was a bit nerve-wracking. But it's alright now, everybody gets on"*
> *"At first it as scary but then when you meet everyone, and they are here for the same reason… then you start to make friends"*
> *"The way that people engage is good. We don't know each other but there are friendships that have been created."*

Learning new things: The pilot was seen as offering young people new knowledge that was both relevant in their lives and different from what they receive at school. For instance, information about what to do in certain situations they may experience was perceived as valuable. Overall, the learning opportunities in the pilot were seen as beneficial for their applications to college and/or opportunities to join other programmes.

> *"I like it… you learn things that you don't learn in school… you learn about what the police do because you only see things that are on the news, but you get to see what happens behind the scenes"*

"I just really like learning about everything new. For example, they teach you how to help if something happens… that's really useful"

"You get to meet different people like the army and the ambulance. You get to learn what they are doing, not just the police."

"There's so much that I enjoy here. First, it's finding out new information and opportunities that this is giving to me. Like when I apply to a college, they [the college] are so interested."

"We learn about like just general laws, we do activities based on the things that we learn, and we all engage in like group work. It gives us the opportunity to go onto bigger things like cadets or army cadets"

Long-term motivations and interests: There were a few young people who interpreted the opportunity of the pilot as giving them a head start at realising their career aspirations, particularly for those who have a long-term interest in joining the police.

"I wanted to do it [join the programme] to join the police… to give me a head start"

"I did this more for the experience then to join the police"

"I've always wanted to be a police officer and so this [the programme] has given me a good idea about what it's like"

Some negative experiences and developmental opportunities: There were a few specific negative experiences some young people outlined, such as engagement in fitness activities. There were a few young people who indicated sessions could be better designed suggesting that it would be good if both informative and practical or interactive components were included. There was a desire amongst some to have more inputs from policing departments, especially police dogs, and visits to policing spaces such as stations. Finally, it was suggested that whilst there was much focus on specific policing issues like knife crime, less attention and information was provided on how to stay safe and protect themselves if needed.

"I didn't enjoy the fitness thing… like the bleep tests."

"It's not really that bad but sometimes you just kind of sit there… it would be nice to be a bit more interactive"

"I would be good if we did more experiments [practical] rather than just watch or read something."

"Sometimes it would be good to go to police things but fun and outside."

"It would be good to do more educational things like going to a police station and walking around"

"I would like to quite like to get involved with dogs… like how they work and stuff like that"

"It would be good to learn self-defence… we learnt a lot about knife crimes and things but if we learnt about how to protect ourselves it would be good."

3.1.2: Views of the impacts of the programme

Supporting vulnerable young people: The pilot created a unique environment that brought together vulnerable young people, who were either at risk of future criminalisation or had been victims of crime. These young people spoke highly of the pilot and its value at supporting them to make a positive change in their attitudes and outlook.

"I went through quite a lot of trouble and the police helped me out a lot. It made me want to help others and be that someone for someone else"

"I got groomed and because it affected me so much, my behaviour went downhill. I started carrying a knife and then because I met this copper and he helped me so much, it made me want to help other people the way he helped me."

Improved views of and relationships with policing: Perhaps the largest identified impact in young people accounts were their views of and relationships with policing. Young people described how their previously

held negative attitudes of policing had now changed positively and they now had more respect for the police and a greater appreciation for the demands and risks police officers experience.

> *"I didn't really like them [the police] because there's a stereotype there and I guess it's like when people are in trouble, they don't like the police because they're doing something wrong but if you need them they will be there. Them being there for me and helping me out has changed my view of them. I think they are there to make things better."*
> *"It's made me realise that a police officers job isn't easy"*
> *"… in the movies, the police just catch the criminals but you learn how much what the police does impacts the community"*
> *"It's made me respect police officers a lot more because you get eyesight of what they have to deal with… and how scary it can be for them to engage with criminals and knife crime and stuff like that"*

Increased engagement in issues and an expanded worldview: It was indicated that the learning opportunities outlined in the previous section had increased young people's awareness and engagement in social issues, which had in turn increased their worldview. This is especially important on key issues that threaten the welfare and safety of young people.

> *"I feel like it gives you, it's hard to describe, it's like it makes you see how in a youthful sense about the police and the laws… not like you are being told, we will aim to understand and engage in activities that are based on the laws and that changes how we think"*
> *"It's made me see how the world really is… for example like the stabbing crimes and stuff like that. It's made me more aware and so it helps prevent those things happening to us and how to contact the police if we see or hear about crime in our area."*

Motivation not to engage with negative influences: With young people engaging with police officers on a weekly basis, young people saw themselves as less likely to engage in negative activities. For young people previously engaged in or at risk of future criminalisation, a form of social contract between the instructors and young people acted as extra motivation not to slip back into negative behaviours.

> *"I am reminded that if I do something wrong then it will be [names of instructors] who will come to see me… and if I do slip up then they will pull me up. It's always that in your head."*
> *"You have like a responsibility… if you see the police like every week, you have that in your mind like you shouldn't be doing that"*

Increased confidence and work ethic: For some young people, their experiences in the pilot had resulted in them having an increased sense of confidence, with them feeling able to better engage with others and in learning activities. One young person described how they now had a better attitude towards work and understood the need to apply themselves in learning to realise their goals and ambitions.

> *"It's [the cadets] made me realise that I have to work for what I want to do… like I've got to get my head down and do what I need to do"*
> *"At the start of this, I wouldn't have spoke out and asked questions and stuff... but now I am comfortable to."*

3.2: Stakeholder Perceptions

This section provides an overview of stakeholder perceptions of the pilot and is organised into two sections: 3.1.1: Views on policing strategy for engagement of young people and 3.1.2: Views on the fast-track pilot. Overall, 9 stakeholders participated in interviews.

3.2.1. Views of policing strategy for engagement of young people

Addressing a recognised gap in provision: The introduction of a Junior Cadets programme and offer for young people in Nottinghamshire addresses a recognised gap within the uniformed policing programmes between the Mini-Police and Senior Cadets. Moreover, the Junior Cadet programme was seen as supporting young people at a key life developmental stage, their transition from primary to secondary education, where it was felt attitudes towards and relationships with policing weakened.

> *"Let's bring together a lot of the good work we are doing, whether that's prevention or safeguarding, care for etc. and bring it all into one spot. So that's what the child centred policing did. What we then did was some gap analysis… one of the areas identified was alternative provision (to secondary education)."*
> *"It was really obvious that there was this gap [between mini-police and cadets] where you would lose people. There is a massive drop off in attendance between primary and secondary, and it was at that point we were losing kids."*

A rapidly developing Cadet programme: It was recognised that the Cadet programme had experienced significant development over the past few years, with the pace of development for some being a challenge to remain up to date. The increased scale and remit of in the programme was identified as placing significant pressure on the Cadet Coordinator, who was now juggling their time between multiple programmes. It was indicated that some teams were separated, being managed by different leaders, which represented a challenge to the cohesiveness of the Cadet programmes. Nevertheless, it was strongly felt that the developments had been extremely positive and had dramatically increased representation and engagement in the programme from under-represented groups.

> *"I'd describe the cadet scheme as a little bit messy and I mean that in the nicest way possible… we're travelling very quickly at the minute at a high pace and it's hard to keep up with all the changes that are coming…"*
> *"(for the cadet coordinator)… it's a massive job for an expanding programme. We've got it right for our senior cadets because it's been running for several years although the syllabus needs updating, but for our junior cadet scheme it needs tightening up a bit. But the overall results are positive"*
> *"There are loads of pockets of teams doing stuff, if the cadets, the mini-police, the schools officers, the child-centred policing team worked in the same office, I think we'd do a lot better, we'd pull our resources together… but at the minute we are separate and managed by different supervisors and it doesn't really work".*
> *"The cadets was seen as an exclusive, white middle-class club… with police officer's family members who joined… and that was how it was seen. What we have done in the last year as an organisation is to completely start again… and a big success is increasing that representation from BAME representation from 8% up to 20%."*

More focus on positive youth engagement: A key shift in focus for Nottinghamshire Police has been to focus more on positive youth engagement in the programmes, rather than an extended pathway of recruitment for young people to join the police at a later stage. This shift has been received positively and has enabled more engagement and investment in deprived communities that have fractured relationships with the police.

"We are a lot more established. We are in what I would say are the right areas. If you take traditionally the mini-police and cadets, we probably focussed on areas where people wanted us to be… what we have done with the junior cadets is focus on areas where engagement is less forthcoming, deprivation is higher and opportunities to engage with the police on a trust basis were lower."

"It's changes a lot from being career focused to a lot more around youth engagement and linking it less to careers in the police to the police aims of engaging with vulnerable young people."

VPC Youth Engagement Officer: The introduction of a defined VPC Youth Engagement Officer has been reported as being critical to the perceived success and impact of the new approach to working with young people and supporting them to be involved in positive policing programmes. It was indicated that, in addition to the specific Fast-Track pilot, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer coordinates initiatives during demanding periods such as school holidays. Critically, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer's practice was seen as instrumental to engaging young people who otherwise would be opposed to or a challenge to policing.

"The VPC Youth Engagement Officer has been an absolute God-send! In addition to his support with vulnerable young people, during the holidays he will pull events together… and lots of young people engage!"

"When the pilot started [without the VPC Youth Engagement Officer in position], there was no engagement… anything with police in the title, it was a 'no'… but it's been down to having somebody as that engagement officer and wrapping it up in a non-policey way".

3.2.2. Views of the fast-track pilot

Lots of positives: The feedback overall on the pilot was extremely positive and achieved a positive impact on young people who had engaged. The pilot enabled better and new relationships with young people and the wider community who previously would have held negative attitudes. Following participation in the programme, the young people were seen as being more confident, as having a richer understanding of right and wrong, and as displaying less defiant and chaotic behaviour.

"The pilot has been very successful at building relationships with young people and building their confidence."

"The community really likes the pilot".

"Some of the young people I know involved in the pilot are absolutely buzzing… a couple are getting their uniform soon and another one [young person in care] last night was saying how great it is!! The feedback they were 'they (instructors) don't speak to you like police speak to you'"

"There's been some great impact… it's been empowering the young people with a sense of what is right and wrong… and it's really rewarding to see that change in the young people we work with… like a young person saying an incident went off in the children's home but I didn't get involved because I know it's better to stay out of it".

"One of the things the junior cadet scheme does really well is build confidence in young people so that they can not only engage with the police when they need to but potentially with us in the future"

"I think (the impact of the pilot on young people) has been generally positive… generally the vulnerable young people are better behaved… settled down a bit… but what I find difficult is that it's all quite qualitative stuff… even the quantitative stuff we can look at we can't correlate to the pilot".

"People who drop the kids off… that's where we are seeing the benefits… that people who wouldn't previously have spoken to the police are doing so at drop-off time and again when we are out doing normal work again."

"The public reception of the pilot has been really positive."

Huge success of the Cadet Roadshows: The Cadet Roadshows were reported to have achieved unparalleled success compared to the approaches previously in Nottinghamshire at reaching and engaging with young people in deprived communities. The Roadshows were perceived as creating a unique offer, distinct from the long-term structured programme of the full Cadet programmes, which was more attractive to young people who were sceptical of the police or who would not thrive in a more structured setting.

> *"The interest in the Roadshows has been phenomenal"*
> *"This is where almost the project splits into two things… so you've got your more low-level kids who aren't at that level where they are in gangs and stuff… they're the kids who we are finding have been easier to help support and bring into the cadet programme. Whereas the more hard-to-reach kids or high-risk kids we have developed a second strand to the cadet programme which is the cadet roadshow. It is less intense… we get them off the streets which is always a bonus and we do activities. It's not just the police… the fire brigade, ambulance, the army, the RAF are there…."*
> *"The amount of parents coming onto Facebook and Twitter asking when is the roadshow coming to us has been really positive"*

Increased demand: The success of promoting the pilot to young people and partner agencies has resulted in a large demand and volume of referrals, which based on the data presented in Section 2 will increase. The programme is already at full capacity, which could lead to a position of 'letting young people down'. The demand increases the importance of selecting the right young people for places. A further demand within the system are the reviews for young people who are engaged in the full cadet programme beyond shadowing.

> *"The infrastructure [of the pilot] has been a challenge… even now there is a waiting list… we've opened lots of bases… because the programme has taken off so much, we could have done more."*
> *"I think it's lovely the thought of helping everyone, but at some point we are going to have so many referrals that we are going to be letting people down."*
> *"We do a review 1, 3 and 6 months after engagement but this is something we need to review because it can take a week or so to complete a review… but what [we] find is that I be waiting for a lot of calls back… and sometimes people feel like they have just spoke to me before we start the next review… so we need to look at whether they are correctly spaced apart"*

Too much flexibility and difference: As a pilot, the Junior Cadets was described as being a little too flexible, with too much difference between units, and there was a desire to tighten up processes and expectations. The differences between the units is both positive and negative, as positively they are designed to meet the needs and focus of specific locales but negatively may hinder young people's opportunities to move between units and threatens the overall cohesiveness of the programme.

> *"It's a little bit messy and has been developing quickly… we need to tighten things up"*
> *"We are all based differently… one unit is focussed on vulnerable young people, one's based on a multi-cultural focus…"*
> *"The lack of similarity between the bases is a bit of a problem… but then this is a problem nationally… there's a different vibe if you go into each unit…"*
> *"If the groups aren't similar and a young person moves somewhere else… they now live closer to another base and they think it's going to be the same but it's nothing like that…"*

Managing multiple entry points into the Cadets: The opportunity for young people to begin their journey in the Cadets at different stages is valuable and potentially will increase engagement with the programme. It is, however, not without challenges and risks. Literature demonstrates an increased sense of belonging is a key outcome for young people, it is unclear what the effect will be for different entry points on group dynamics. In particular, how multiple entry points work with Senior Cadets needs some thought considering the

structed qualification young people work towards. Nevertheless, enabling opportunities for vulnerable young people at stages outside of the traditional starting points in cadets is progressive and widens opportunities.

> *"Different entry points are difficult with the Senior's because of the qualification."*
> *"(multiple entry points for vulnerable young people) is really tricky… I mean event the referrals that come through to some of the cadet bases…like for instance if there are a group of 20 who all started in September and (the VPC Youth Engagement Officer) has got one who might want to start say now in January, they might come across resistance in joining that group, it might be hard for them to join in…"*
> *"It might also be tricky if one of the group has got a friend who wanted to join and we said no but this referral has been allowed in, how do you mange that?! I don't have the answer at the minute"*

Unknown risks: It was suggested that the pilot is still developing and there are a series of unknown risks to be identified and mitigated. A key focus moving forwards will be monitoring the development of young people especially for those high-risk young people with different needs that interact in the programme. Whilst the safeguarding reviews occurred at the outset of the programme, there is a need for ongoing monitoring as well as creating a feedback opportunity for young people who do not fully engage in the programme to enable development.

> *"I feel there are some ongoing challenges…I think that it still feels like a pilot scheme and we haven't found out a lot of the obstacles yet and we don't know what's ahead of us. I think some of the things haven't been ironed out yet so whether all the policies have gone through and been signed-off, there's still some questions arounds elements of consent for data and what we do with it… so there's still some unknowns and working through to be done."*
> *"I think there is a vulnerability in having perhaps the higher end of vulnerability… perhaps more at risk from themselves or others or some kind of harm together and does that increase risk or increase vulnerability."*
> *"We only do reviews of those young people if they are engaged in the cadet programme so we haven't done any reviews for those who have just shadowed…"*

Need for improved resources: A key concern of participants were the available resources to support sessions. At present, it was felt there was too much differentiation between units and more alignment between activities would enable a more cohesive programme whilst reducing duplication. However, it was recognised that individuals and groups were very different, necessitating a tailoring of resources to fit with the interests and abilities of each group. Consolidating learning between units concerning sessions that worked well would be a valuable exercise and facilitate consistency.

> *"Need to have resources and I need to know what I am doing. There is a lack of standardisation with a different types of units"*
> *"One of the challenges is making it (the sessions) exciting because if you have got the kids here for an hour and if it's not enthralling, they are never going to come back."*
> *"There should be more standardisation... so we are all selling the same messages"*
> *"There's no point in reinventing the wheel… if someone has a lesson plan that worked and is accredited…"*
> *"With some of the needs of the young people, they won't sit there in a structured session… so we've had to develop something different… we try to mix it up so we are focussing more on the engagement at the moment, which is why they are not in uniform at the moment"*
> *"It's not very structured which is good but it's also bad because for me (if I was a session facilitator) I would want structure… I would want to know what would be taught next week… but a lot of leaders are planning week-to-week"*

Over-reliance on individuals: As a pilot, the programme has operated with key individuals but is arguably over reliant on them for the programme to operate. Taking into account the needs of the young people, it was suggested that the current number of staffing was low, and more resource would strengthen the resilience of the processes surrounding the programme. Whilst the VPC Youth Engagement Officer was outlined above to be extremely valuable, it was indicated there was no or little contingency if the individual currently in the post changes roles or leaves the organisation.

> *"We rely on a small number of people to deliver these services. We've got some support staff who assist but it is largely a volunteer-led initiative that sees us being a success. It's not a weakness but a vulnerability"*
> *"It's hard to manage with the staffing levels… which raises questions of sustainability"*
> *"I don't know how they are going to manage engaging the hard-to-reach kids with one individual… I think they need more"*
> *"It certainly is something that needs a wider team and I think that (the level of staffing) is a weakness of it…"*

Governance: There were mixed views on the current governance arrangements and processes. It was suggested that the pilot feeds into a couple of boards at a senior level and it appears that some staff were not aware of the reporting procedures. This resulted in a feeling of uncertainty and risk for some towards the pilot.

> *"I think because it's (the programme) is reported on a couple of boards, I feel that any risks concerning staff changes that we identify them. We haven't yet dropped the ball but we need to ensure that is always the case"*
> *"We need a stronger governance board…"*
> *"A big threat is we don't have a governance board… we don't have regular checks… we do have checks but all of it falls onto [cadet coordinator] which is ok… but who else is there to support [the cadet coordinator].. to make sure each base runs safely… I think needs to be more of a safeguarding oversight…"*

Desire to identify and understand long-term impacts and value: There was a desire to better understand the impacts and value of the pilot on the long-term trajectories of young people who have engaged in the programme. The challenge to isolate impacts deriving from the pilot was understood as being very challenging, given the multiple interventions young people in the pilot were engaged in, but nevertheless a desire to document the social impacts and difference the pilot has made to young people was important to staff.

> *"I would like to see what's the re-offending rate… what's the social capital that these people are putting back into society and were not having to pick-up as they have made a life choice and change."*
> *"For the VPC… it would be a little arrogant to assume that they could turn somebody around…they might be the epiphany for individuals but it's part of a quite a comprehensive package of support and package of interventions."*

4. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

This section details identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the pilot from the accounts of stakeholder interviews.

4.1: Strengths

Improved community engagement: By being located and engaging directly with local communities, the programme is well positioned to improve the relationship between the police, young people, and the local community.

Enhancing young people's perceptions of policing: The programme engages positively with young people, especially the number of young people who are vulnerable and from minority communities and improves perceptions of who the police are and what they do.

Diversity of cohorts: The pilot has been successful at engaging young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and creating connections between young people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Fosters a sense of belonging: By engaging with young people in a positive, constructive, and safe space within the community, young people can form bonds and connections with peers as well as the connection with the wider policing family.

Pilot bridges gap between mini-police and senior cadets: The pilot fills an observable strategic gap between the mini-police and senior cadet programmes, though the force should design an overarching strategy for the programmes, developing connections between programmes in aims and focus, to meet Nottinghamshire Police's child engagement strategy.

4.2: Weaknesses

Over reliance on individuals: It was suggested that the pilot relied upon key staff for delivery with limited contingency, which introduced challenges in the day-to-day management of the programme and threatened sustainability.

Resource deficit: As the pilot is new, there are limited resources available to leaders to structure sessions. Whilst there are some resources that can be adapted from the senior cadets and the VPC Marshall Portal, leaders are required to improvise sessions.

Lack of standardisation: Whilst recognising the need to tailor content to the interests and focus of the different groups, where overlaps exist, the programme would benefit from standardised materials and activities.

Meeting spaces and venues: Different spaces were being utilised by each unit, with some having restrictions and challenges due to other commitments by space providers.

Pace of development: It was suggested that the programme had developed too quickly before processes and an understanding of what works had been developed.

Capacity: The demand and volume of referrals is higher than provision, with the flow of referrals building a backlog.

4.3: Opportunities

Alignment and connections between units: At present, the units were different and relatively isolated, with different focuses and cohort make-up. Whilst being strong at forming bonds within units, there are significant opportunities to create meaningful connections between cadet units, creating different opportunities for young people to experience belonging and establish relationship with other young people different to themselves.

Further developing the relationships with the local community: It was suggested that the local communities where the units were based were supportive of the programme and opportunities exist to expand the connections between the programme and local communities through targeted activities that take place in the community, perhaps with the involvement of local residents.

Build an evidence base: There is a need to establish a framework to capture impact of the programme, to both justify resource costs and evidence its value. A robust independent longitudinal evaluation is required to document how different young people experience the programme and measure positive change.

Explore sponsorship and external inputs: There is a prospect to identify external commercial sponsorship and inputs to both reduce the cost of the programme to the force and potentially increase the opportunities available to young people in the programme.

4.4: Threats

Limited training for unit leaders and deliverers: It was indicated that cadet leaders and session deliverers received limited training to deliver the programme, which in turn impacted consistency between units and overall cohesiveness of the programme.

Overreliance on individuals: The sustainability of the programme was an identified threat, considering the small number of people involved in the pilot. This is especially the case for the engagement officer position.

Safeguarding in practice: Whilst appropriate safeguarding procedures were evident, the dynamic nature of the programme, especially for the 'vulnerable unit', creates unique challenges for safeguarding in practice when bringing together large groups of young people with different needs into the same spaces. The mitigation of risk within units and quick response to emergent issues is paramount to ensure the internal and external reputation of the programme are not challenged.

Governance and Oversight: It was suggested that the governance and oversight of the programme should be reviewed and strengthened, especially if/when moving from the pilot stage to roll out.

5. Observations and Recommendations

Overall, the evidence presented in this report demonstrates how the Nottinghamshire Fast-Tracking Vulnerable Young People into the Cadets Pilot has been very successful at engaging large numbers of vulnerable young people, especially those from minority backgrounds. The introduction of a new position, the VPC Youth Engagement Officer, has strengthened Nottinghamshire Police's commitment to youth engagement and enables more and wider opportunities for young people to positively engage with policing.

Of the 81 referrals, there was 68% positive engagement either in Cadet Roadshows or in the full Cadet programmes. This conversion from initial contact to engagement is testament to the outreach of the VPC Cadet Coordinator and the wider support from different teams involved. The targeted focus on vulnerable young people is laudable and supports a shift in the ethos of cadets from being for the privileged. Indeed, the considered location of cadet bases supported the engagement of young people who are on the edge of criminality, are in locations with high crime rates and from minority backgrounds.

Young people were very positive about their involvement in the cadets and felt that it had enabled them to create new contacts with other young people, develop a sense of belonging within their cohorts, to learn new things, expand their world view, increase their awareness of and engagement in social issues, and develop a richer understanding of policing. Crucially, involvement in the programme motivated some young people not to be drawn back into negative influences and their ongoing connections with officers gave young people another reason not to do what they see as being wrong.

The stakeholders who provided testimony of the pilot were equally positive towards what the programme is, why it exists and what it is achieving. In particular, the Cadet Roadshows were seen as offering something valuable to young people, raising aspirations and creating new connections within communities. Young people who had engaged in the Cadets were seen as being more confident, as having a richer understanding of right and wrong, and as displaying less defiant and chaotic behaviour. Strategically, the junior cadets programme fills a gap in provision between the Mini-Police and senior cadets and, through development, will complement these programmes enabling sustained engagement for selected children and young people who have long-term engagement needs.

> **R1: The evidence provided in this report provides some justification for the programme to move from being a pilot to full implementation.**

There are, however, a series of developmental issues that require some consideration to improve outcomes for young people, the overall resilience and cohesiveness of the programme and to secure it within Nottinghamshire strategy for the engagement of children and young people.

1. There is limited evidence to support the identification of change and impact from engagement in the programme. The lack of evidence makes the programme vulnerable to discontinuation as there is not a reliable or objective evidence base to justify its continuation.

   R2: An evaluative framework should be developed to capture the impacts of the programme on young people, tracking the value and benefits longitudinally.

2. The individuals across the programme are relatively dislocated and the resultant implementation across units was differentiated. This results in a fragmented offer to young people and may cause confusion internally and externally to Nottinghamshire Police. The programme had been developing rapidly and there is a need to consolidate learning before initiating further change.

R3: To host a 360 Appraisal event involving all involved in the programme (including young people) to identify learning and enable programme development, to improve consistency between units and overall programme cohesion.

3. There are limited resources available to session facilitators resulting in different approaches and content being utilised between groups, representing a key concern of session facilitators.

   R4: To invest in the development of resources to be shared across units, aligning the programmes between units to improve consistency and support cohorts to belong to a wider whole.

4. The sustainability of the programme was an identified threat, considering the small number of people involved in the pilot. This is especially the case for the VPC Engagement Officer position. Considering the small number of people in the pilot, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of 'success' to enable an appropriate 'exit' point of engagement to enable other young people to be engaged.

   R5: To review staff involved in the programme in respect of work volume and create contingency plans for key staffing positions.

   R6: To create an exit strategy of engagement, creating opportunities for other young people.

5. The pilot is still developing and there are a series of unknown risks to be identified and mitigated. Whilst the safeguarding reviews occurred at the outset of the programme, there is a need for ongoing monitoring as well as creating a feedback opportunity for young people who do not fully engage in the programme to enable development.

   R7: To confirm governance arrangements for the programme and the ownership of a programme risk register.

6. The pilot is currently reliant on face-to-face interaction and engagement, for both the junior cadets and cadet roadshows. Considering the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the likely risk mitigation post-pandemic period, digital alternatives to facilitate engagement of vulnerable young people will improve the relative 'offer' for young people.

   R8: To create digital approaches to complement face-to-face engagement.