



# Child

## CENTRED POLICING

National Strategy for  
the Policing of Children  
& Young People

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Chief Constable  
**Olivia Pinkney**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia Pinkney".

*I am delighted to be the National Police Chiefs' Council portfolio lead for the policing of children and young people.*

It is a complex area of policing and one that we often struggle to get right. I am pleased to bring you this strategy, which was endorsed by the National Police Chiefs' Council in April 2015.

In this strategy we have set out our key principles which we believe are important when policing children and young people. In order to provide focus, we have aligned the strategy with the four priority areas identified within the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children Report "Its all about trust; building good relationships between children and the police."

They are;

- Stop and search
- Looked after children (children in care)
- Detention, custody and criminalisation of children and young people
- The relationship between young people and the police

Youth crime continues to fall but too many young people are still becoming victims and suffering harm. It is essential that we work, alone and with partners, to intervene early and prevent harm to children and young people. Recognising their vulnerability is an important part of this work. I urge you to read this strategy, but more importantly take action.

A core role for policing is to protect the vulnerable in our society. All forces need to use this strategy to better serve those who are vulnerable through age - it will make a difference to all children and young people across the country. Children and young people are not "mini-adults" and the better our policing for them is now, the less they may need us in the future. Every interaction leaves a mark and we need to think carefully about what sort of mark that is. In our time of increasingly prioritised policing effort, this strategy will help forces focus on what is essential and what works.

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# INTRODUCTION

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**1.1** Children and young people (C&YP) account for over 12 million of the population in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They come from a wide range of backgrounds with different cultures and experiences. Many of them will come into contact with the police service as they grow up for a myriad of reasons.

**1.2** C&YP are not mini-adults and a unique criminal justice system was established to respond to young people at risk. Their emotional, physical and emotional maturity is different from adults and needs to be understood – in particular, distress or trauma manifests itself differently in a young person's behaviour. Policing policies, processes and interactions with C&YP can have a significant impact on their lives, both in the short and long term. Our ability to engage and interact with C&YP will affect our relationship with them and, ultimately, our effectiveness in reducing policing demand in the future by preventing them from becoming victims or offenders.

**1.3** Policing must be sophisticated enough to look beyond the blanket negative labelling of young people to identify the small numbers who are serious and persistent offenders. Often for these offenders enforcement may be the most effective tool, but for many others it can be a blunt instrument. Evidence shows that highly punitive sanctions have little impact on recidivism, so enforcement should be considered appropriately and used only where necessary to prevent others from becoming victims. Getting it wrong, especially when it results in the unnecessary criminalisation of C&YP, can mean heavy costs to the individual for life and the wider society.

**1.4** We cannot do this alone. As pressure on the police service increases both in terms of demand and financial restriction, we need to work with our partners and young people to identify the right people to deliver the right intervention at the right time.

**1.5** Previously C&YP have been described as those below the age of 18. It has been recognised that the 18-24 year age range is a key stage of development; the brain is still developing, independence is gained, socialising activity increases, and experimentation with drugs, alcohol and sexual relationships takes place. This coincides with a time when they are most likely to come into contact with the police. Whilst this strategy and resultant activity will largely focus on those below the age of 17 it is important to remember the impact on this older age group as they transition to adulthood.

**1.6** For these reasons, for the purpose of this strategy, C&YP should be defined as everyone up to and including the age of 24 years. We have split this into three distinct groups:

- Under 10;
- 10 -17 years of age – subject to the majority of legislation aimed at young people;
- 18-24 years of age – transition to young adults.

**1.7** The policing of C&YP continues to be in the public spotlight. Recent evidence 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. This strategy provides the direction and focus needed to improve the quality of policing for C&YP in each police force.

## Our ambition

*To improve the quality of policing for children and young people by acknowledging their differences, recognising their vulnerabilities and meeting their needs.*

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# WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

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**3.1** A recent study by The College of Policing highlights the fact that the demand on the police service has changed significantly and we are expected to understand and deliver a range of different services for a complex society <sup>1</sup>. It is also recognised that as financial constraints continue to affect the shape of the organisation the challenges we face become greater. An ability to reduce the demand coming into the service is essential in maintaining the service we currently provide.



**3.2** For C&YP this is particularly relevant as we know that early identification of vulnerability and reducing their exposure to harm will have a significant impact. We understand more clearly the issues of mental health, domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation and recognise that young people are as much at risk of this as adults are. However, there is still more that we can do.



**3.3** Policing is changing. As communities become more socially mobile through technology and engagement changes the police service must keep up to date with the young community we serve and evolve with them.

<sup>1</sup> College of Policing(2015) Estimating Demand on the Police Service. London UK:College of Policing. Retrieved February 20015 from; <http://www.college.police.uk/About/Pages/Demand-Analysis-Report.aspx>

*...we know that early identification of vulnerability and reducing their exposure to harm will have a significant impact.*

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# KEY PRINCIPLES





- It is crucial that in all encounters with the police those below the age of 18 should be treated as children first. All officers must have regard to their safety, welfare and well-being as required under S10 and S11 of the Children Act 2004<sup>2</sup> and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup>.

- The vulnerability of C&YP should be identified and responded to effectively in order to protect them from harm.

- In all situations where C&YP come to the attention of the police a full understanding of their circumstances should be sought. It is unusual for a young person to be a serious offender without being a victim of circumstance or offending themselves.

This may not affect the way we utilise the criminal justice system but should open our eyes to alternative avenues for addressing their behaviour.

- Every interaction is both an intervention and an opportunity. Engagement should be positive and opportunities sought to enhance our relationship with them.

- The voices of C&YP must be heard and their opinions respected.

- Policing supports YJB's evidence-based practice by keeping C&YP out of the criminal justice process unless necessary.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

*Every interaction is both an intervention and an opportunity.*

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# PRIORITY AREAS



**5.1** The policing of C&YP is challenging and “cross cuts” into nearly every area of our activity. In order to focus the response of the police service to C&YP we must prioritise activity and ensure our approach is consistent and focused. To achieve this, the strategy is specific to key areas of policing activity and does not try to tackle every issue pertaining to C&YP.

**5.2** C&YP will come into contact with the police in many different circumstances and environments. Policing must be able to flex its response dependent on need. Evidence tells us that there are some critical areas that will make the greatest difference, as follows:

## STOP AND SEARCH

- Stop and search can be highly emotive and if misused it can be harmful to the trust and confidence of young people in the police. Young people’s confidence in our use and transparency of this power is critical because it is one of the most intrusive powers we have and can give rise to strong feelings and resentment.

- One of the biggest challenges in relation to stop and search is the lack of data available. A number of independent enquiries have taken place. These suggest that significant numbers of young people are stopped across the country. The Children’s Rights Alliance for England<sup>4</sup> show that the numbers

of stops and searches being used have fallen significantly. In 2008/9 the police stopped and searched 239,198 children below the age of 18. Whilst this has fallen to 78,449 stops in 2013/14 it is still a significant number. These figures also show a disproportionate number of stops on BME and ethnic minority children. However, the figures reflect responses from only 10 forces. The APPG enquiry identified over a million stops of young people in 26 forces between 2009 and 2013.

- The Home Office have recognised the impact of stop and search on our communities and have introduced a package

of reforms to improve our understanding of its use and impact. Young people tell us that they understand the need for the use of stop and search but are not being given clear reasons for why it is used and when. They simply want to be treated with dignity and respect and for our use of the power to be more transparent.

- The numbers of searches conducted indicate an enormous number of interactions and opportunities to improve our relationship with young people. We will work in partnership with the national police lead for stop and search and the Home Office in order to understand where we need to improve in this area.

*Those below the age of 18 should be treated as children first.*

<sup>4</sup> Children’s Rights Alliance for England (2014). State of Children’s Rights in England. London, UK: crae. Retrieved January 2015 from: [http://www.crae.org.uk/media/64143/CRAE England Report WEB.pdf](http://www.crae.org.uk/media/64143/CRAE%20England%20Report%20WEB.pdf)



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## CHILDREN IN CARE

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- Children in care continue to be significantly over represented in the youth justice system relative to their non-looked after peers. There are challenges again in relation to available data but we know that they are at least two or three times more likely to offend than their peers. In 2013, 6.2% of children in care aged 10 to 17 were convicted of a criminal offence or were subject to a final warning, compared to the national average of 1.5% for all children. One third of children in custody have been in care, although children in care make up just 1% of the total child population. Over 25% of the

prison population have spent time in care during their childhood.

- Children in care often have a negative view of police which can be based on their experiences of police engagement with their family or passed onto them from their birth parents<sup>5</sup>. They are more likely to be vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime or being exploited and the boundaries within which they behave are often different to those in a 'traditional' family unit. They are likely to have experienced trauma which will affect their behaviour disproportionately.

- Children in care also make up a significant proportion of the cohort of C&YP who go missing on a regular basis and we must recognise the potential risk of harm to the individual and put measures in place to mitigate this.

- We need to make every effort to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children in care, making sure that the criminal justice system is not used for resolving issues that would ordinarily fit under the umbrella of parenting. We need to work with our partners to improve our understanding of the child in care to improve outcomes for them.

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## CUSTODY, DETENTION AND CRIMINALISATION

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- We recognise that there will be occasions where young people are rightly detained in custody and that the use of the youth justice system is necessary to address their offending behaviour. However, it is also recognised that for the majority, entering custody for the first time is a traumatic experience. Between 2008 and 2013, arrests of under 18's fell by 59% across England and Wales which demonstrates a significant step in reducing the number of children

entering the criminal justice system. However, in 2013 alone there were 129,974 arrests of C&YP of which 9% (11,369) were below the age of 14<sup>6</sup>.

- We need to make sure that young people enter custody for the right reasons at the right time and that we appropriately explore other options first. We will work with partners to improve our custody facilities for young people but, more importantly, we will seek

alternative disposals and ways of addressing behaviour.

- It is important that young people are not criminalised for behaviour which can be dealt with more appropriately by other means. We need to work in partnership with the Youth Offending Service and criminal justice agencies to ensure that the right support and intervention is in place to reduce offending.

# ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP

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- The biggest challenge and arguably most critical areas for police work with young people is our relationship with them. In order to fully understand the impact of what we do and how we can improve our service to C&YP, we must be able to engage in an open and transparent manner.

- We must understand what works well in engaging with young people so that we can break down barriers and improve our relationship with them as well as consult with them when introducing policy and practice. By sharing good practice and understanding the differences across forces we will ensure the promotion of good quality engagement initiatives. If we are to improve the service we provide to C&YP we must listen to them and act upon what they tell us. In order to improve the trust and confidence of young people in the police service we need to improve our communication and interaction with them. They want to be treated fairly and justly but they perceive that much of the time they are not.

- We believe that early intervention with C&YP will prevent problems from escalating. There are many good examples of where this is working such as the Families with Multiple Problems programme but investment in early intervention is limited. Getting up stream at an early stage and getting the right intervention by the right person will pay dividends to many services across the country and reduce their demand for service in the future.



<sup>5</sup> All Parliamentary Group for Children (2014). Its all about Trust: Building good relationships between Children and the Police. Retrieved January 2015 from: [http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1164355/appgc\\_children\\_and\\_police\\_report\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1164355/appgc_children_and_police_report_-_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Howard League for Penal Reform. (2014) Research Briefing: Child Arrests in England and Wales 2008-2011. London: UK: Howard League for Penal Reform. Retrieved January 2015: from: [https://d19ylpo4aovc7m.cloudfront.net/fileadmin/howard\\_league/user/pdf/Publications/child\\_arrests.pdf](https://d19ylpo4aovc7m.cloudfront.net/fileadmin/howard_league/user/pdf/Publications/child_arrests.pdf)

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# MONITORING AND SCRUTINY

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**6.1** The strategy has been ratified through the NPCC, the C&YP lead will now implement the strategy and develop an action plan through the network of Chief Officer Regional Leads. The C&YP portfolio sits within the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Coordination Committee. Engagement with the Professional Committee for The College of Policing will be essential for the success of this work.

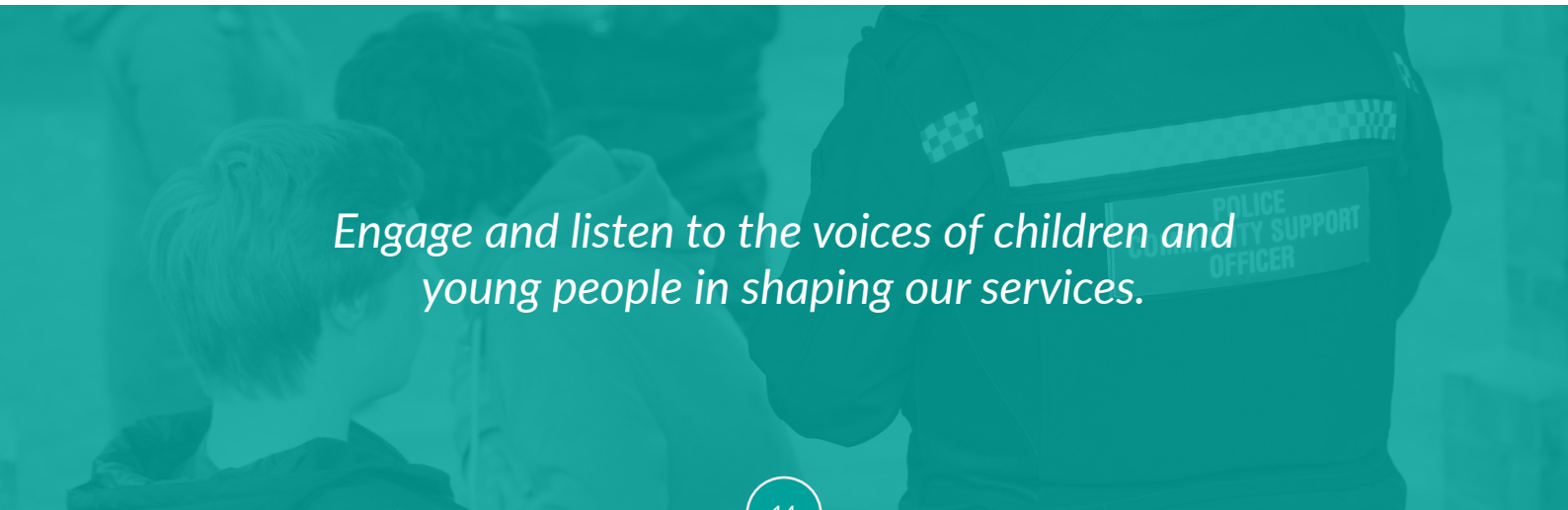
**6.2** A national meeting of regional leads will meet twice annually and will be supported by a tactical group implementing activity across force areas.

**6.3** This strategy has alluded to the complexity of the C&YP business area due to its interdependencies with so many other areas. It does not intend to hold responsibility for the development of practice in all areas that 'touch' C&YP. However, it does recognise the need to understand and challenge activity where it has an adverse impact on young people.

**6.4** In order to implement the identified areas within this strategy, an action plan will be developed which outlines the specific activity needed to change policing delivery. This action plan will form the basis of change across the country. It is intended that this will be subject to scrutiny by young people and external agencies to ensure a joined up and consistent approach.

**6.5** In order to ensure the action plan supports policing activity, we will:

- Engage and listen to the voices of C&YP in shaping our services.
- Actively engage with partners, building on those successful relationships already established in providing a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to delivering services for all C&YP.
- Work with Police and Crime Commissioners to develop an appropriate focus on C&YP.
- Through The College of Policing, identify and share evidence based best practice across the country, making good practice common place.
- Develop a network of police and partner practitioners to lead the delivery of this work.
- Work together with other national policing business areas where our priorities are interdependent.
- Develop a toolkit to demonstrate success.
- Be influential in the development of national strategy etc.



*Engage and listen to the voices of children and young people in shaping our services.*

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# CONCLUSION

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*The way in which we  
police this population  
now will affect attitudes  
and culture long into  
the future.*

**7.1** The policing of C&YP is an incredibly important part of the service we deliver. The way in which we police this population now will affect attitudes and culture long into the future. It is not an easy challenge and is not made any easier by the competing pressures across the public sector. However, we know that getting it right WILL make a difference and reduce demand in the future.

**7.2** C&YP represent our future society so it is vital that we engage them and involve them in today's decision making. What we do now will influence the confidence they have in us to make them feel and be safe, supported and engaged for generations to come.