

YEF review of policing's role in safeguarding and child protection

Summary

- YEF is seeking a team to conduct a review of policing's role in safeguarding and protecting children at risk of, or involved in, serious violence – with a specific focus on best practice. This review will identify best practice, barriers and enablers of this practice, and explore ways of addressing any racial or other disparities, aiming to understand how effective safeguarding and child protection can be embedded within policing.
- The study will inform YEF's recommendations for the policing sector on how to reduce violence amongst children and young people (which will draw on a range of ongoing and completed research work).
- The deadline for the full draft report is 20th February 2026. The deadline for proposals is 3rd June 2025. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 18th July 2025.

Background

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluations to find out what works. We also synthesise the best available evidence from across the world, and then aim to mobilise what we learn across various sectors to make a change to the lives of children.

It is also imperative that YEF fully understands the context in which children live, and in which services operate to support them. Only then can we make evidence-based recommendations on how best to reduce serious violence amongst children and young people. Alongside our [programme funding](#), and [evidence synthesis](#) work, we fund a wide range of research projects (including data analysis, youth understanding work, and practice reviews) to better understand young people's lives, and the systems and services that surround them.

The policing sector is one such system that supports children.

YEF's policing sector work

In 2026 YEF will publish recommendations for how the policing sector across England and Wales can support the reduction of serious violence amongst children and young people. These recommendations will draw upon YEF's existing work in the policing sector, including:

- Projects YEF has funded and evaluated in the sector (such as evaluating [police in classrooms](#) and secondary data analysis on the use of [diversion](#))

- Relevant sections of the YEF [Toolkit](#) (e.g. hot spots policing, stop and search, and focused deterrence)
- Our annual [Children, Violence and Vulnerability survey](#) of young people

In addition, YEF is currently commissioning two other research projects, exploring evidence-based practice in policing and on tackling drug markets, exploitation and violence involving children. We are open to teams applying for more than one project, particularly if efficiencies can be achieved through combining methods or expertise.

The aim of this project

Police are a statutory safeguarding partner, yet there's evidence to suggest there's room for improvement in the police's safeguarding and protection response to children involved in, or at risk of, violence. The recent joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) of six areas' responses to serious youth violence¹ gives us a strong starting point for further research. It suggests that serious violence is not consistently treated as a safeguarding issue, police responses to children affected by serious violence are inconsistent across and within forces, there's a lack of timely and quality referrals to social care, and a lack of police oversight to ensure children are referred for support. We also suspect that there are different safeguarding and protection responses based on the status of the child's involvement in violence (e.g. as a victim, suspect or witness), and potentially other protected characteristics. Forces may not be adequately evaluating their practice, sharing information or contributing to multi-agency forums, or dedicating enough resource to safeguarding and protection.

We are also very interested in exploring current good practice. We know very little about what good practices police forces use to safeguard and protect children who are at-risk of, or involved in serious violence. The drivers of good practice are also not fully understood, and the practices may not be widely shared or consistent across policing.

The aim of this project is to fill these research gaps. We want to understand the role of policing in safeguarding and protecting children at risk of, or involved in serious violence – specifically focussed on examples of good practice. To make helpful, realistic recommendations for practice change and system reform, we need to understand more about what 'good' looks like and how it can be embedded.

Race equity

There are significant racial disparities in children's experience of violence, policing and youth justice. Our 2023 survey of 7,500 children found that while the majority of violence was committed by White children (70%) and the majority of victims were White (72%), Black teenage children were, on average, more likely to be vulnerable as both victims (21%) and perpetrators (22%) compared to White children (16% and 14%, respectively).²

Racial disparities in the justice system are particularly pronounced for Black children, who continue to be over-represented across stop and search, arrest, youth cautions, first-time entrants, children in custody and reoffending rates.³ Black children make up 6% of all 10–17-year-olds, but in 2022/23, they accounted

¹ [Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence: working together to support and protect children – GOV.UK](#)

² <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2023/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024/youth-justice-statistics-2023-to-2024#gateway-to-the-youth-justice-system>

for 26% of children in custody. Other communities are also overrepresented. For instance, Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller children make up less than 1% of children; yet a self-reported 7% of children in custody are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds – over 7 times their population share.⁴

The Youth Endowment Fund's mission is to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We can't achieve this mission if we do not challenge this racial inequity. Addressing these disparities is an important aspect of our work, and race features in the research questions posed in this call for proposals.

Research questions

These research questions are only indicative, and we encourage bidding teams to propose amendments to them and/or additional questions that they think could help meet the aims of the project. We would expect to finalise the detailed research questions and methods with the appointed team.

1. **Best practice.** What represents 'best practice' in policing in England and Wales when safeguarding and protecting children from involvement in violence?
In addition, specifically, what is 'best practice' in:
 - a. a stop and search of a child;
 - b. in response to a missing child; and,
 - c. when a child is in possession of a weapon?
2. **Knowledge.** To what extent are frontline officers across England and Wales aware of 'best practice safeguarding and protection' and follow this?
In addition, specifically:
 - What is officers' understanding of child-centred policing?
3. **Barriers and facilitators.** What are the barriers and facilitators to 'best practice'?
4. **Inequities.** Is there evidence of racial or other disparities in current safeguarding and child protection practices, and if so, how can these disparities be addressed? We require specific consideration of safeguarding and protecting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children; children who have SEND needs or are neurodivergent; and safeguarding and protecting a child who is a suspect or victim; boy or girl.
5. **Policy and practice change.**
 - What practice changes are required to improve policing's safeguarding and protection of children at risk of involvement in violence?
 - What changes in law, regulation, guidance, training, funding, and/or inspection can improve policing's role in safeguarding and protecting children from involvement in violence?

Required outputs and suggested methodology

To answer the research questions, we would expect to see a detailed written discussion that may draw from a range of methods, including:

- a. Desk based research. This may include a review of current statutory guidance, policy and the literature to establish 'best practice'.
- b. A large-scale national survey of police officers on safeguarding and child protection.
- c. A review of serious case reviews to identify opportunities for improvement.

⁴ <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/racial-disproportionality/>

- d. Case studies to identify 'best practice' approaches, likely to include interviews with policing and safeguarding professionals.
- e. Interviews with experts in policing, safeguarding, national policy and governing bodies.
- f. Any data analysis that the review team deem possible.
- g. Additional resources suggested by the research team.

At the end of the study, we would expect all these outputs to be drawn together in a written report, comprising:

- a. An executive summary
- b. An introduction
- c. Methodology
- d. Findings (written discussion of each of the research questions in turn)
- e. Conclusion and insights for policy and practice

Upon sharing the final report with us, we would expect the research team to provide a short presentation to the YEF team on the study's findings. YEF will pay for the peer review of the report.

Timeline

The deadline for proposals is 12pm on 3rd June 2025. We intend to have appointed the successful team by 18th July 2025. The deadline for the full draft report is 20th February 2026 after which a peer review process will take place.

Budget

We expect the project to cost approximately £75-110k. However, we have some flexibility here, and will be judging bids on value for money rather than absolute cost. This range gives an indication of the scale of budgets we envisage – we will consistently prioritise proposals that give good value for money and strongly discourage research teams using these figures as the sole driver of their costs.

We would not expect VAT to be included in teams' budgets. Pass through VAT via sub-granting work to other organisations may in some circumstances be included. However, it is up to the bidding team to decide if they need to include VAT and any charges must be covered within the total grant amount.

We do not require budgets to use a specific template in proposals. Any approach that enables us to see total cost, the cost of project components, day rates, and number of days assigned to each team member is sufficient.

How to apply

YEF will judge research applications using the following criteria:

- **Subject expertise (20%).** How much expertise does the team have relating to policing, safeguarding, child protection, and violence involving children?
- **Research experience (20%).** How much experience does the team have in delivering similar research projects? Does the team have expertise and experience in delivering research projects that aim to understand racial disparities?
- **Proposed methodological approach (40%).** What methodology has the team suggested, and does it match our needs?

- **Value for money (20%).** Does the bid represent value for money?

Where teams may be weak in any of the above areas, we encourage applicants to seek expert consultants and partnerships to supplement their bid.

Proposals should be no longer than 2,500 words, and should set out the team's expertise, experience, methodological approach, and budget. You may attach relevant documents to support your application – this will not be included in the word count.

As noted above, we are open to research teams suggesting their own research questions and methodology, and/or suggesting improvements and amendments to our own. Teams are welcome to apply for multiple projects, particularly if there are opportunities to streamline methods or reporting for greater efficiency.

Please email your application to leanne.robinson@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 12pm on 3rd June 2025. If you have any questions regarding the project, please email these to leanne.robinson@youthendowmentfund.org.uk by 5pm on 23rd May 2025.