

Review of evidence-based practice in policing to prevent children from being involved in violence

Exploratory study report

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About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put that 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'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activities.

And just as important is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and that we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence and agree what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart, it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it [here](#).

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About the research team

Cordis Bright was commissioned to undertake an exploratory study to understand the use of evidence-based practice in policing to prevent children from being involved in violence.

Cordis Bright (www.cordisbright.co.uk) believes that public sector services can change lives for the better. We collaborate with our clients to deliver improved outcomes for service users and their families. We provide research, evaluation, consultancy and advice aimed at improving public services. Our team has a unique combination of consultancy, research and evaluation skills, with previous experience in practice, management, leadership and inspection. Cordis Bright offers a range of research and evaluation services which aim to improve the evidence base from which public services are delivered.

The research team included Dr Jade Farrell (Project Manager, Senior Consultant), Dr Angela Collins (Project Director, Principal Consultant), Sneha Bhambri (Researcher), Dr Jordan Tomkins (Researcher) and Kam Kaur (Director).

Beyond Cordis Bright, the project has been supported by Professor Iain Brennan (University of Hull), who has played an integral role in shaping the project methodology, reviewing data-collection materials and analysing the findings for the rapid review and national survey.

In addition, Paul Quinton (College of Policing) and Rob Braddock (College of Policing) have provided advice and quality assurance throughout each phase and have supported survey dissemination and case study site selection.

For further information about this study, please contact Dr Jade Farrell at jadefarrell@cordisbright.co.uk or Dr Angela Collins at angelacollins@cordisbright.co.uk.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experience
CPD	Continuing personal development
EBP	Evidence-based practice
HMICFRS	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
NFA	No further action
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
PC	Police Constable
PCSO	Police Community Support Officers
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
SARA model	Scanning, analysis, response, assessment model
VCSE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise
VRU	Violence Reduction Unit
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund
YJS	Youth Justice Service

Glossary of terms

Defining children and vulnerability

When we say children, we are referring to children (10–17 years old).

This report takes the view that all individuals under the age of 18 are legally children and should therefore be considered vulnerable (Davis, 2022; HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024).

Interventions

An activity, approach or programme aimed at achieving a desired change in an individual or group. While utilising this definition, we focus on interventions adopted and delivered by police forces or delivered together with partners. Forces may also use the term operation or initiative.

Police officer ranks

For the purpose of this report, we have grouped officers into the following categories:

- Frontline officers: Police Sergeant, Detective Sergeant, Police Constable, Detective Constable, Special Constable and Police Community Support Officers.
- Senior leaders: Inspector upwards, including detective equivalents (i.e. Chief Inspector, Superintendent, Chief Superintendent, Commander, Assistant Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable and Chief Constable).
- Police staff: civilian employees, including analysts/researchers.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds

This umbrella term is used to refer to all minoritised ethnic groups other than White British. The Youth Endowment Fund acknowledges that this term is a necessarily imperfect way of describing a highly diverse group of people, perspectives and experiences. Wherever possible, the authors of this report have aimed to be more specific and refer to particular ethnic groups.

Race equity

Fair treatment, opportunities and outcomes for all people, regardless of race, achieved by addressing and dismantling systemic racism.

College of Policing

An operationally independent professional body for policing in England and Wales, supporting officers, police staff and volunteers to deliver the best service to the public.

National Police Chiefs' Council

The National Police Chiefs' Council brings UK police leaders together to set strategy and drive progress for the public through coordination, collaboration and communication.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services independently assesses and reports on the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services.

Home Office

The Home Office is the lead government department for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, counterterrorism and police.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) supports elected Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales by managing strategic policy, commissioning victim services and holding local police forces to account for their performance and budget. They ensure the delivery of the local Police and Crime Plan. In areas with a Combined Authority (e.g. Greater Manchester Combined Authority), the OPCC is integrated within the Mayor's office.

Violence Reduction Units

Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) operate across 20 police force areas with the aim of preventing and reducing serious violence by taking a whole-systems, early-intervention approach. VRUs are funded by the Home Office, and they bring together local partners to understand and tackle the drivers of serious violence in their areas.

Youth Justice Services

Youth Justice Services, formerly known as Youth Offending Services, are multi-agency partnerships that work to prevent offending and reoffending behaviour in children, focusing on addressing the underlying causes of their behaviour and supporting them to make positive choices.

Children's Services

A range of services within a local authority to meet the needs of children and their families.

Executive summary

Background

Children who come into contact with the police are often among the most vulnerable in society. Interactions with the police can shape their future outcomes, yet policing responses are not always consistently informed by the strongest available evidence. This study examines the extent to which evidence-based practice (EBP) is used across policing to reduce children's involvement in violence and how its application can be strengthened.

The project

This exploratory study examined the use of EBP in policing to prevent children from being involved in violence. This aim is addressed through five core questions:

-  **RQ1: Practice.** To what extent are police across England and Wales delivering EBP to reduce children's involvement in violence? Which interventions are being used (e.g. hot spot policing, problem-oriented policing, police in schools, knife crime awareness, stop and search, or others in the Youth Endowment Fund toolkit)?
-  **RQ2: Race equity.** How equitably is EBP delivered to support children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, considering different practices that may involve children (e.g. stop and search, hot spot policing)? How can policing better support minoritised children through EBP?
-  **RQ3: Funding.** To what extent are evidence-based interventions funded by the Home Office or the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners (OPCC)?
-  **RQ4: Knowledge.** What do commissioners, senior police leaders and frontline officers know about what works to reduce children's involvement in violence? What influences their knowledge, attitudes and decision-making when selecting and delivering interventions?
-  **RQ5: Policy and practice change.** What changes – at both the local practice level (e.g. day-to-day policing approaches) and the system level (e.g. policies, guidance, training, funding and inspection) – are needed to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions in response to children's involvement in violence?

This project used a five-phase, mixed-methods approach to understand the breadth of practice at the national level, alongside deeper insights from case studies across a range of local contexts.

Figure 1 highlights the methodological approaches employed.

Figure 1. Overview of project methodology



Key findings

Key findings from the rapid review, national police survey, national OPCC survey, case study forces and workshops can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Key findings

Research question	Triangulated findings
RQ1: Practice	Police forces reported delivering a wide range of evidence-informed interventions aimed at reducing children's involvement in violence. Surveyed police respondents (n = 528) commonly reported delivering restorative justice (76%), a high-impact approach based on the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit. This also included moderate impact approaches, such as hot spot policing (84%) and problem-oriented policing (69%). However, alignment between delivery and evidence was mixed. Focused deterrence, one of the strongest evidence-based interventions in the YEF Toolkit, was reported as being delivered by only 32% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528), indicating potential missed opportunities to implement interventions with the greatest impact. The perceived effectiveness of prison awareness programmes was not aligned with the evidence base, with 47% of surveyed respondents (n = 528) believing it to be an effective intervention, yet the YEF Toolkit reports a harmful impact (only 8% reported delivery).
RQ2: Race equity	The equitable use of evidence to inform policing responses to reduce children's involvement in violence is not yet systematically embedded across forces. While disproportionality in policing outcomes – particularly in stop and search – was widely recognised, understanding of differential impacts varied across roles and forces, and monitoring remained limited: only 17% of police respondents (n = 528) reported routinely collecting and analysing data on how interventions affect children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Existing research on interventions specifically designed and tailored for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds remains scarce, with limited awareness or confidence among practitioners. 25% of police respondents (n = 528) and 30% of surveyed Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) respondents (n = 36) reported there is neither clear evidence nor confidence in what works for these groups, while 47% of police respondents (n = 528) did not believe they deliver interventions proven to be effective for them. As a result, interventions are typically universal rather than proportionately targeted, and efforts to address inequities often rely on individual leadership or interest rather than consistent organisational processes.

**RQ3:
Funding**

Where external funding for evidence-based practice (EBP) was cited – which occurred infrequently – it typically came from the Home Office, OPCCs and, where applicable, Violence Reduction Units. Funding structures were widely reported to shape how evidence-informed approaches were implemented in practice. However, current funding structures are widely seen to constrain effective implementation. Short-term funding cycles were a key challenge, with 50% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) identifying them as a barrier, limiting the forces' ability to plan, deliver and evaluate interventions and often resulting in compressed delivery timelines and reduced impact.

Funding was also described as top-down and driven by national priorities, which do not always align with local needs, contributing to fragmented and sometimes ineffective delivery. At the same time, performance and reporting requirements were seen to prioritise short-term, measurable outputs over longer-term outcomes. Despite this, funding was considered a useful lever for EBP if it mandated evaluation and analytical input. Overall, the findings suggest that while external funding can support evidence use, its current structure often undermines the conditions needed for sustained, locally responsive and evidence-informed practice.

**RQ4:
Knowledge**

Knowledge about what works and how research evidence should inform policing decisions is unevenly understood across forces. Decision-making is still primarily informed by internal police data, professional judgement and operational demand, with external research evidence less consistently used. Organisational pressures play a significant role in shaping this: 78% of police respondents (n = 528) and 97% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) identified limited resources as a challenge, while 66% of police respondents (n = 528) cited time pressures and competing priorities. Only 42% of senior leaders (n = 101) felt they had sufficient capacity to support the implementation of EBP, reinforcing the dominance of reactive, demand-led activity over structured, evidence-informed approaches.

Wider system factors further limit the consistent use of EBP. Access to data and analytical support is uneven – only 53% of frontline officers (n = 301) reported having the tools they need, and just 46% of senior leaders (n = 101) felt they had sufficient data to inform decisions. Training and organisational support were also inconsistent: only 54% of frontline officers (n = 301) reported receiving training on what works, and 42% of police respondents (n = 528) identified skills gaps as a barrier. Partnership and data-sharing challenges compounded this (44% of police [n = 528] and 56% of OPCC [n = 36] respondents), alongside mixed leadership alignment, with only 44% of senior leaders (n = 101) believing decisions were informed by the best available evidence. Overall, the findings suggest that limited organisational capacity and system conditions – rather than resistance to the evidence itself – are the primary barriers to embedding EBP in practice.

**RQ5:
Practice
and
system-**

Collectively, the findings suggest that strengthening the use of EBP in policing will require coordinated changes across both local practice and wider system conditions. Five themes were identified:

Knowledge and appetite for evidence-based practice: Strengthening EBP will require embedding evidence use more consistently within routine policing practice. Practice-level

Research question	Triangulated findings
level changes	changes included moving away from individual champions towards broader cross-team ownership, increasing leadership support, and expanding role-specific training and development opportunities to improve research literacy, confidence and practical application of evidence in decision-making. At a system level, national organisations and professional networks were viewed as important mechanisms for strengthening organisational buy-in and promoting EBP more consistently across forces. Project cycle from implementation to evaluation: Greater emphasis was placed on embedding monitoring and evaluation processes earlier within intervention design, including involving analysts earlier in the process. System-level changes included improving funding arrangements, strengthening external support and challenge, and improving how learning is shared across forces to support more consistent application of evidence in practice. Intervention equity: Respondents emphasised the need to strengthen accountability for disproportionality and embed consideration of equity within routine decision-making. Practice-level changes included improving multi-agency understanding of targeted approaches, strengthening training on bias and data interpretation and moving towards more embedded cross-team accountability structures. At a system level, changes centred on strengthening expectations around disproportionality through funding, reporting and wider partnership accountability. Data quality and accessibility: Improving data quality, accessibility and analytical capability was viewed as central to strengthening EBP. Practice-level changes included improving recording practices and the usability and consistency of analytical products. Broader system-level changes focused on strengthening analytical skillsets and improving consistency in the use of data across forces. Effective partnerships: Practice-level changes included strengthening trust, communication and shared objectives across agencies to support more coordinated prevention activities and improve data-sharing arrangements. At a system level, greater cross-government alignment of priorities, funding and accountability was viewed as important to support more coordinated and sustainable prevention activity.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Children who come into contact with the police following an incident involving violence are often among the most vulnerable in society. Their involvement in violence may reflect complex and unmet needs, such as early childhood trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), poor mental health and experiences of growing up in poverty (Liddle et al., 2016; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2017; Gray et al., 2021; Clemmow et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2023; Adjei et al., 2025).

The policing sector is a key system that responds to and supports such children. Police responses to both the alleged offences and children's individual needs remain a significant challenge, with decisions about issues such as diversion, enforcement and safeguarding playing an important role in shaping children's safety, wellbeing and ongoing involvement in the criminal justice system. Decisions made at the point of police contact can have long-term implications for children's outcomes. Evidence from the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit suggests that diversionary and supportive approaches are associated with more positive outcomes for children, including reductions in reoffending (YEF, n.d.).

Although there has been progress in recognising children's vulnerability in this context, research suggests that opportunities to consistently identify and respond supportively to these children are still missed (Barton et al., 2019; His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services [HMICFRS], 2023). Barton et al. (2019) found that while there was consistent agreement on the need for specialist training to strengthen responses to vulnerability and mental health, some officers still viewed understanding children's past experiences and ACEs as outside the core remit of policing, instead prioritising criminal investigation. This highlights a disconnect between the recognition of vulnerability and its consistent application in policing practice. Barriers such as limited training, inconsistent leadership support, workforce pressures and stigma around help-seeking in policing mean that such approaches are not necessarily embedded in routine practice (Barton et al., 2019; Quigg et al., 2025).

Alongside this, while a range of interventions are used to reduce children's involvement in violence, the evidence base underpinning some commonly used approaches, such as knife surrender schemes and media campaigns, remains limited, raising questions about their effectiveness (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022b,d; Hobson et al., 2022; Gaffney et al., 2023).

In this context, evidence-based practice (EBP) is increasingly emphasised as a means of supporting more effective and consistent decision-making. The College of Policing (n.d.) defines EBP as the use of the best available evidence to inform and challenge policing policies, practices and decisions. Without the use of robust evidence, responses may rely on professional judgement, local practice norms and resource constraints, which can lead to variation in how children are responded to. EBP may also play an important role in addressing disproportionality by supporting more transparent and consistent decision-making and enabling forces to assess the differential impact of their practices on different groups of children.

Disproportionality in policing responses further underscores the importance of this issue. The Lammy Review (2017) identifies persistent racial disparities across the criminal justice system, including evidence of differential decision-making and unequal access to diversion. These patterns are reinforced by wider evidence highlighting lower levels of trust and perceived bias among Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (Bradford et al., 2023), as well as concerns about the role of policing and related systems in shaping unequal experiences for children and young people (Nijjar, 2021). Further, data from the Youth Justice Board (2021) highlights that Black children are least likely to receive an out-of-court disposal (17.9%), followed by children

of other ethnicities (21%), children with mixed ethnicities (21.9%) and Asian (27.6%) children. White children are most likely to receive an out-of-court disposal (32.8%).

National-level documents demonstrate clear commitments to racial equity in policing (e.g. the Police Race Action Plan [2022; 2025], Anti-Racism Commitment [2025], Children and Young Persons Policing Strategy [2024–27]). However, at a local level, inspection evidence highlights inconsistencies in the adoption and prioritisation of responsive practice for children from minority ethnic groups. For example, HMICFRS (2023) reported that while some of the Police and Crime Commissioners' (PCCs') plans included equality, diversity and inclusion, only one in eight reviewed plans explicitly prioritised race, while the others omitted it altogether. This inspection also noted that the College of Policing had not published national standards for race and diversity training, resulting in considerable variation between forces. Overall, this suggests that while national policy and guidance provide a framework for race equity, implementation among police forces remains uneven.

This context highlights the importance of ensuring policing responses to violence involving children are informed by robust evidence and applied equitably. However, the extent to which police officers understand and apply EBPs to reduce children's involvement in violence remains unclear. Key knowledge gaps include:

- The extent to which police draw on evidence when making decisions about preventing and responding to children's involvement in violence and the factors influencing those decisions.
- Which interventions are delivered in practice, and how delivery aligns with existing evidence.
- How EBP can be embedded at both operational and strategic levels.

As such, the YEF commissioned this project, which explores these knowledge gaps as part of their wider policing sector work, to inform recommendations on how the sector can support the reduction of violence involving children.

1.2 Our understanding of evidence-based practice

EBP refers to the use of the best available research evidence, alongside professional judgement and local data, to inform policing policy and practice (Sherman, 1998; Hoyer, 2022). It provides a framework to guide policing decisions and operational approaches, with the aim of improving effectiveness, legitimacy and the efficient use of resources (Bullock et al., 2022b). The College of Policing (n.d.) defines EBP as the use of the best available evidence to inform and challenge policing policies, practices and decisions. In this context, EBP also provides a basis for considering how policing practices affect different groups and for identifying approaches that may contribute to more equitable outcomes.

Resources such as the YEF Toolkit and the College of Policing Crime Reduction Toolkit provide evidence on the impact of different interventions. These tools support police colleagues in applying EBP by selecting and implementing interventions that are backed by research to reduce children's involvement in violence. Examples of interventions include:

- **Focused deterrence.** A targeted, multi-agency approach combining support with clear communication of consequences and enforcement to prevent further offending among high-risk individuals or groups. On average, focused deterrence strategies reduce crime by 33%, with the strongest crime reduction impacts found in programmes designed to reduce serious violence generated by conflict between groups (Gaffney, Farrington & White, 2021a).
- **Problem-oriented policing.** A structured, analytical approach to identifying and addressing the causes of offending, rather than just focusing on responses to incidents. It is guided by the [scanning](#).

[analysis, response, assessment \(SARA\) model](#), usually developed in partnership with the police, local authorities, schools, youth services, health services and community organisations. On average, problem-oriented policing may reduce the risk of violent crime by 24%. Greater reductions have been achieved when working with children whose peer groups are involved in crime or those at risk of criminal exploitation (Keenan et al., 2025).

- **Hot spot policing.** The concentration of police activity and resources in small geographic areas where crime has been identified as most prevalent. International studies estimate an average reduction in violent crime of 14%, in drug offences of 30% and in overall offending of 17% (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022a).

However, in this study, we use the term EBP in its broader sense, treating EBP as an approach that informs operational decision-making and practice. This reflects the focus of the wider research, which examines both the interventions delivered and how research evidence informs decision-making, wider policing practice and organisational culture.

1.3 Research questions

The overarching aim of this research project is therefore to examine the use of EBP within policing, with a focus on the evidence base preventing children from being involved in violence. This aim is addressed through five core questions:



RQ1: Practice. To what extent are police across England and Wales delivering EBP to reduce children's involvement in violence? Which interventions are being used (e.g. hot spot policing, problem-oriented policing, police in schools, knife crime awareness, stop and search or others in the YEF toolkit)?



RQ2: Race equity. How equitably is EBP delivered to support children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, considering different practices that may involve children (e.g. stop and search and hot spot policing)? How can policing better support minoritised children through EBP?



RQ3: Funding. To what extent are evidence-based interventions funded by the Home Office or the OPCC?



RQ4: Knowledge. What do commissioners, senior police leaders and frontline officers know about what works to reduce children's involvement in violence? What influences their knowledge, attitudes, and decision-making when selecting and delivering interventions?



RQ5: Policy and practice change. What changes – at both the local practice level (e.g. day-to-day policing approaches) and the system level (e.g. policies, guidance, training, funding and inspection) – are needed to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions in response to children's involvement in violence?

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

This study used a mixed-methods approach, as summarised in Table 2. We (the research team) conducted data analysis iteratively, drawing on multiple sources and using a coding framework that we refined over time.

Table 2. Methods overview

Data collection methods	Research question	Participants/data sources	Analysis
Rapid review	RQ1–4	115 pieces of literature met the inclusion criteria (2015–2025, England and Wales, published in English)	Thematic synthesis
Semi-structured interviews	RQ1–5	10 subject matter experts, including academics and experts by practice	Thematic synthesis using a structured coding framework
National survey for police forces	RQ1–5	528 police officers or staff across 44 ¹ police forces in England and Wales	Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis
National survey for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners (OPPCs)	RQ1–5	36 out of 42 OPCCs or Mayoral Offices across England and Wales	Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis
Case study interviews and workshops	RQ1–5	71 police officers or staff across five police forces. One workshop per force	Thematic synthesis using a structured coding framework

2.2 Rapid review approach

2.2.1 Aims and approaches

We conducted a rapid review to address the five research questions, identifying and synthesising findings from the existing literature.

2.2.2 Search strategy

In this review, we structured the search using a population–interest–context framework:

- **Population:** Police forces in England and Wales.
- **Interest:** Delivery, equity, funding, knowledge and system change related to EBP to reduce children’s involvement in violence.
- **Context:** National and local policing structures in England and Wales.

We reviewed a range of evidence types, including:

- Research papers.

¹ This includes 43 regional forces and British Transport Police. You can find the full list [here](#).

- Grey literature, including academic dissertations, briefings, news, blogs and annual government statistics.
- Reports by think tanks, watchdogs, foundations, non-profit organisations and consultancies.
- Policy guidelines and action plans by various government departments and professional bodies.
- Relevant organisational websites (e.g. Home Office, National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCCs) and OPCCs) to identify policy, guidance and funding documents.

2.2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We applied the following inclusion criteria when selecting literature for this review:

- **Language.** Produced in English.
- **Focus.** Examined EBPs and interventions adopted by the police to reduce children's involvement in violence.
- **Date range.** Published within the last 10 years (since 2015).
- **Geography.** Focused on England and Wales (best practice examples for EBP also considered international literature).

2.2.4 Screening and selection

We screened titles that fully or partially met the inclusion criteria's focus and date range by reading the abstract (or research questions when an abstract was not included). Where the abstracts and research questions did not provide adequate detail on the geographical focus, we screened the methods section to determine their inclusion. Using these criteria, we identified and reviewed 115 pieces of literature, as highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3. Resource types

Resource Type	Count (n = 115)
Research papers	50
Reports	29
Websites	12
Toolkit reports and web sources	13
Practice banks	4
Policy documents	3
Dissertations	2
Annual government statistics	1
Briefing(s)	1

2.2.5 Analysis

We extracted and organised relevant content under each research question. This process ensured a structured data collection approach across all documents. We then synthesised the extracted findings to summarise the existing evidence.

2.3 National survey

2.3.1 Recruitment

We used the online platform SmartSurvey to host the following two surveys:

- **Police force survey.** Police officers and staff working for any of the 43 regional police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police.
- **OPCC survey.** A representative (Serious Violence Duty Lead or Commissioning Lead) from each of the 37 OPCCs and five Mayoral Offices exercising PCC functions in England and Wales.

The police force survey was live for 12 weeks (1st October to 22nd December 2025), and the OPCC survey was live for nine weeks (23rd October to 22nd December 2025).

For the police force survey, we distributed the survey through key networks, including:

- College of Policing EBP network (n = 300).
- Direct contacts from Dr Paul Quinton at the College of Policing (n = 50).
- Direct contacts from Cordis Bright colleagues (n = 27).
- Knife Crime Working Group (n = 66).
- Children and Young People's Network (n = 150).
- The YEF's mailing list of police email addresses (n = 350).
- The Society of Evidence-Based Policing mailing list (n = 6,000).
- Analyst network (n = 43).

These numbers reflect all those who would have directly received the survey invitation through our dissemination efforts. This suggests the survey directly reached 6,986 individuals. See the Limitations section (4.2) for the implications of this recruitment approach in terms of the representativeness of the sample.

We sought responses from as many police officers and staff as possible – mainly analysts/researchers – across all eligible forces, aiming for a minimum of one response per force.

For the OPCC survey, the YEF has direct connections to all areas and sent personalised emails to promote completion (one response per area).

We monitored responses on a weekly basis, which helped identify incomplete responses and prompted targeted follow-ups near the deadline to encourage completion.

2.3.2 Data collection

We developed survey questions iteratively, aligning them with the study's research aims and incorporating feedback from the YEF and the wider research team. This included using interventions in the YEF Toolkit that would typically be (a) delivered by police forces or (b) commissioned by OPCCs.

The survey was split into 11 sections (see Table 4) and contained both closed and open-ended questions to generate quantitative and qualitative insights.

Table 4. National survey question sections and themes

Section in the survey	Main themes covered – Police survey/OPCC	Types of questions
Introduction	• For police forces: Name of police force, rank, department/unit of work and years in policing. • For OPCCs: Name of OPCC or Mayoral Office, role and department, if the force's Police and Crime Plan prioritises reducing children's involvement in violence.	Single-choice questions.
Knowledge and perceived awareness	• Access to research, knowledge of effective initiatives and use of research in decision-making.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings.
Knowledge and perceived awareness	• For police forces: Interventions (in the YEF Toolkit) delivered by the force and their perceived effectiveness. • For OPCCs: Interventions (in the YEF Toolkit) commissioned by the OPCC or Mayoral Office and their perceived effectiveness.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings. Free text – only for the OPCC.
Capability, opportunity and motivation	• Access to training, data, opportunities and motivation to use research evidence.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings.
Equitable initiatives	• Knowledge of initiatives disproportionately affecting Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. • Data on, and steps taken to tackle, disproportionality.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings.
Barriers to adopting research-based initiatives	• Challenges faced in the past 12 months in using research evidence to reduce children's involvement in violence.	Multiple-choice questions. (Yes/No). Free text.
Significance of various factors in decision-making	• Factors influencing decision-making.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings. Free text.
Funding research-based initiatives	• Extent of funding by the Home Office and PCCs.	Free text.
Evaluating what works	• Sources influencing initiatives in the force. • Monitoring and evaluating data on what works. • Decisions made using research evidence.	Multiple-choice questions. Likert scale ratings. Free text.
Accountability	• For OPCCs: Mechanisms to hold police forces to account for reducing children's involvement in violence.	Free text.
Optional questions	• Factors that help or get in the way of delivering research-based initiatives. • Anything else you'd like to share?	Free text.

2.3.3 Police participants

Overall, 528 police officers and staff participated in the national police survey, with representation across all 44 police forces in England and Wales. Table 5 provides a breakdown by police officer and staff ranks, which suggests good coverage across policing roles. Senior leaders and sergeants are somewhat overrepresented relative to constables (Home Office, 2025a). National workforce statistics do not separately identify analyst roles, meaning it is not possible to assess the representativeness of this group. However, the inclusion of analysts ensures that specialist analytical perspectives are reflected in the findings.

Table 5. Police survey respondents stratified by rank

Police officer and staff rank	N	% rank
Senior leaders (Inspectors upwards)	101	19%
Sergeants	80	15%
Constables (including Specials)	202	38%
Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)	31	6%
Analysts (non-ranked role)	48	9%
Any other civilian staff or volunteer (non-ranked role)	66	13%
Total	528	100%

To ensure the anonymity of individual responses, it was not possible to break down the number of responses by force. Instead, we detailed the number of responses by force size (see Table 6). The largest percentage of respondents was from the Metropolitan Police (7% of total participants) and Derbyshire Constabulary (7% of total participants). Police constables constituted the highest percentage of the total number of participants across both forces (2% of all participants from the Metropolitan Police and 4% of all participants from the Derbyshire Constabulary).

Table 6. Police survey responses by police force size

Force size	Forces N	Respondents N	%
Small (<2,000)	3	42	7%
Medium (2,000–4,999)	25	283	57%
Large (>5,000)	16	203	36%
Total	44	528	100%

Table 7 provides a breakdown of respondents by the number of years they have been in the force, suggesting the majority of the sample had been in the force for 16+ years.

Table 7. Police survey respondents' years in force

Years in force	N	%
Under 1 year	12	2%
1–2 years	23	4%
3–5 years	74	14%
6–10 years	94	18%
11–15 years	47	9%
16–20 years	98	19%
21+ years	179	34%
Prefer not to say	1	0%
Total	528	100 %

Note. Respondents were asked to include the total time they have actively worked in a police force, rounded to the nearest whole year (excluding any breaks).

2.3.4 Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner participants

Of the 42 OPCCs and Mayoral Officers exercising OPCC functions in England and Wales that were invited to take part, 36 participated (83%). Participants' roles included directors, commissioning leads, and policy and partnerships leads from the OPCC and the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU).

2.3.5 Analysis

We cleaned the survey data in Excel by removing incomplete responses and coding variables. We used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods for the analysis. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis was undertaken using deductive coding and thematic analysis of free-text responses, in which we identified key themes and divergent views linked to the project's research questions. We collapsed responses to 5-point Likert items (strongly disagree to strongly agree) into three categories (disagree, neither, agree) by combining neighbouring agreement categories to support interpretation. This approach is commonly used where the distinction between adjacent response options is not analytically meaningful. We did this in the following three sections: knowledge and perceived awareness; capability, opportunity and motivation; and equitable initiatives.

We collapsed responses on 7-point Likert items into three categories to aid interpretation and reduce granularity where finer distinctions were not required for the analysis. This was conducted in two sections – factors influencing decision-making and sources influencing initiatives delivered by the force – and the three categories included:

- Low–moderate importance, including responses to the following options: not important/slightly or somewhat important/moderately important.
- Highly important, including responses to very important and essential.
- Don't know/N/A – retained as is.

2.4 Expert interviews

2.4.1 Recruitment

We identified 30–40 people across England and Wales with expertise in EBP, including people in national organisations and university academics. Following wider team considerations and feedback from the YEF, we shortlisted 10 key individuals who were formally invited by the YEF or the College of Policing to take part in the research project. The interviews were carried out by members of the research team at Cordis Bright.

2.4.2 Data collection

To support structured and effective data collection, we developed an interview topic guide that aligns with the research questions and incorporates feedback from the project advisors: Professor Iain Brennan and Dr Paul Quinton from the College of Policing and the YEF. We conducted all interviews virtually on Microsoft Teams and obtained verbal informed consent at the start of each interview. We collected data through recordings and/or note-taking and subsequently organised data in an analysis framework, allowing for comparison across interview responses.

2.4.3 Participants

We interviewed 10 individuals from across a range of national organisations (including the [College of Policing](#), [NPCC](#), [HMICFRS](#) and the [Society of Evidence Based Policing](#)) and universities.

2.5 Case study forces

2.5.1 Site selection

We selected the five case study forces in collaboration with project advisors and the YEF, and we considered the following factors:

- **Geographic location and population diversity** to ensure broad representation across England and Wales.
- **Existing contacts** to facilitate faster engagement with potential participants.
- **Knife crime trends** to ensure broad representation across forces, with both increases and decreases in [knife crime statistics from 2022/23 to 2023/24](#) (Allen & Wong, 2025). We also reviewed police-recorded crime from the [Office for National Statistics \(2025\)](#) and [Transform Justice Crime Resolution Tracker](#).

We gave each case study force a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, minimise potential risks to individuals or services and encourage honest reflection from stakeholders. We have removed all identifiable references to individuals and organisations in this report.

2.5.2 Recruitment

We considered a range of recruitment and methodological factors to recruit case study forces, including support from the YEF and our College of Policing advisors. Once senior buy-in was secured, we used a purposive sampling approach to recruit participants across a range of roles and departments (see Table 8).

Table 8. Roles of police participants

Police role/department	Rationale
Neighbourhood teams	Engage with children in everyday interactions; often responsible for neighbourhood-based problem-solving plans.
Serious violence leads or leads for key prevention activity	Offer intervention-specific insights on interventions (e.g. Hot spot Response Fund, focused deterrence, school-based programmes). This may also include officers focusing specifically on prevention.
Analysts	Has oversight and conducts analysis on data the force monitors and evaluates to track changes in offending and other relevant metrics.
Evidence-based practice (EBP), child-centred and race action plan leads	Insights into EBP, taking a child-centred policing approach and any efforts the force might be taking to ensure approaches are equitable for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
Across departments, we spoke to Police Community Support Officers, Constables, Sergeants, Inspectors, Chief Inspectors, Superintendents and Chief Superintendents.	

2.5.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

To support structured and effective data collection, we developed an interview topic guide with relevant prompts for each stakeholder group, aligning with the research questions and incorporating feedback from the YEF. We mostly conducted interviews virtually on Microsoft Teams, except for one case study force (East

Kenmere), which included two days of in-person interviews. We obtained verbal informed consent at the start of each interview. We collected data through recordings/note-taking and subsequently organised data in an analysis framework, allowing for comparison across interview responses.

Workshops

We organised and facilitated a multi-agency co-production workshop for each case study force following interview analysis. The same mix of police officers and staff who took part in the interviews attended these workshops. This allowed us to review and discuss initial analysis themes with participants in small cross-role/department breakout groups. Each workshop explored effective practices and areas for improvement within each case study force across three key areas (decision-making around EBP, equitable delivery of EBP, and local and system changes to support effective EBP). We conducted three of these workshops virtually and two in person (Aldercombe; Fenhurst).

2.5.4 Participants

Across the case study forces, we conducted 54 in-depth interviews with 75 police officers and staff across a range of ranks, roles and departments (see Table 9). As mentioned, we have given each case study force a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.

Table 9. Case study force characteristics

Pseudonym	Area description	Force size	Knife crime (22/23–23/24)	Participants (n)
Aldercombe	Urban and rural	Medium (2,000–5,000 officers)	Decreased	13
East Kenmere	Urban	Large (>5,000 officers)	Increased	17
Fenhurst	Urban	Medium (2,000–5,000 officers)	Increased	14
Moorhaven	Rural	Large (>5,000 officers)	Increased	19
Silvermarsh	Urban and rural	Large (>5,000 officers)	Decreased	12

2.6 Qualitative analysis

We used a framework-based thematic analysis approach to analyse the data from the expert and case study force interviews. A coding framework was developed in advance and aligned to the research questions. Three members of the research team applied deductive descriptive codes to the data while also identifying additional themes iteratively as the analysis progressed. This was completed in Microsoft Excel. One team member conducted spot checks on coding and theme development to support consistency and robustness. Since the multi-agency workshops took place after the interview data analysis, we reviewed the notes taken during the workshops and added the data directly into the overarching analysis framework to ensure we integrated these findings with emerging themes (see section 2.7).

2.7 Triangulated analysis

We conducted the overarching analysis using a structured framework organised around the five research questions. In the first stage, we integrated pre-coded qualitative data from the expert interviews, case study force interviews and multi-agency workshops into this framework to identify cross-cutting themes and sub-themes.

Following refinement of the thematic structure, we conducted a second stage of triangulation by incorporating findings from the national survey and rapid review. Responses to the qualitative survey questions largely reflected the quantitative sections, with only a small number of additional themes emerging. As a result, open-text responses were used primarily as supporting evidence to contextualise and corroborate the quantitative findings, particularly where they provided additional explanation or detail.

This process enabled comparisons across the perspectives of experts, police officers and analysts while also identifying broader system-level patterns across the different data sources. It helped ensure that stakeholder perspectives were not presented in isolation and enabled us to examine where senior leaders' assumptions aligned with or diverged from the day-to-day experiences of frontline officers.

Findings that demonstrated strong consistency across multiple data sources were prioritised. However, we also examined meaningful divergences – particularly across case study forces – to capture contextual variation. Themes were iteratively reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, analytical rigour and accurate representation of the data.

3 Findings

3.1 Overview of themes

The following sections answer the five research questions (see section 1.2). Table 10 cross-references the themes and research questions.

Table 10. Themes cross-referenced with research questions

Section	Themes
Interventions currently being used (RQ1)	- Alignment between delivery, perceived effectiveness and evidence - Interventions most commonly being used - Interventions less commonly being used - Summary of intervention delivery
Equitable delivery and design of interventions (RQ2; RQ5)	- Attitudes on disproportionality and equitable delivery - Ethnicity-related data quality and analysis - Current delivery practices - Measures taken or identified to address disparity
The extent and influence of funding (RQ3)	- Structure and sources - Timelines and duration - Centralised priorities - Performance and administrative requirements
Culture and understanding (RQ4; RQ5)	- Stated appetite and understanding of evidence-based practice (EBP) - Knowledge and buy-in
How forces know what works and make decisions (RQ4; RQ5)	- Internal intelligence and data sources - Professional judgement - Feedback from local partners - External evidence sources - Cross-force learning - Existing monitoring and evaluation practices - The role of universities and research partners
What influences decision-making and EBP (RQ4; RQ5)	- Competing priorities and capacity - Data quality - Data accessibility - Analytical influence as a condition of EBP - Training - Partnership working - Data sharing - Leadership and organisational governance - Changing the political and media narrative

3.2 Interventions currently being used

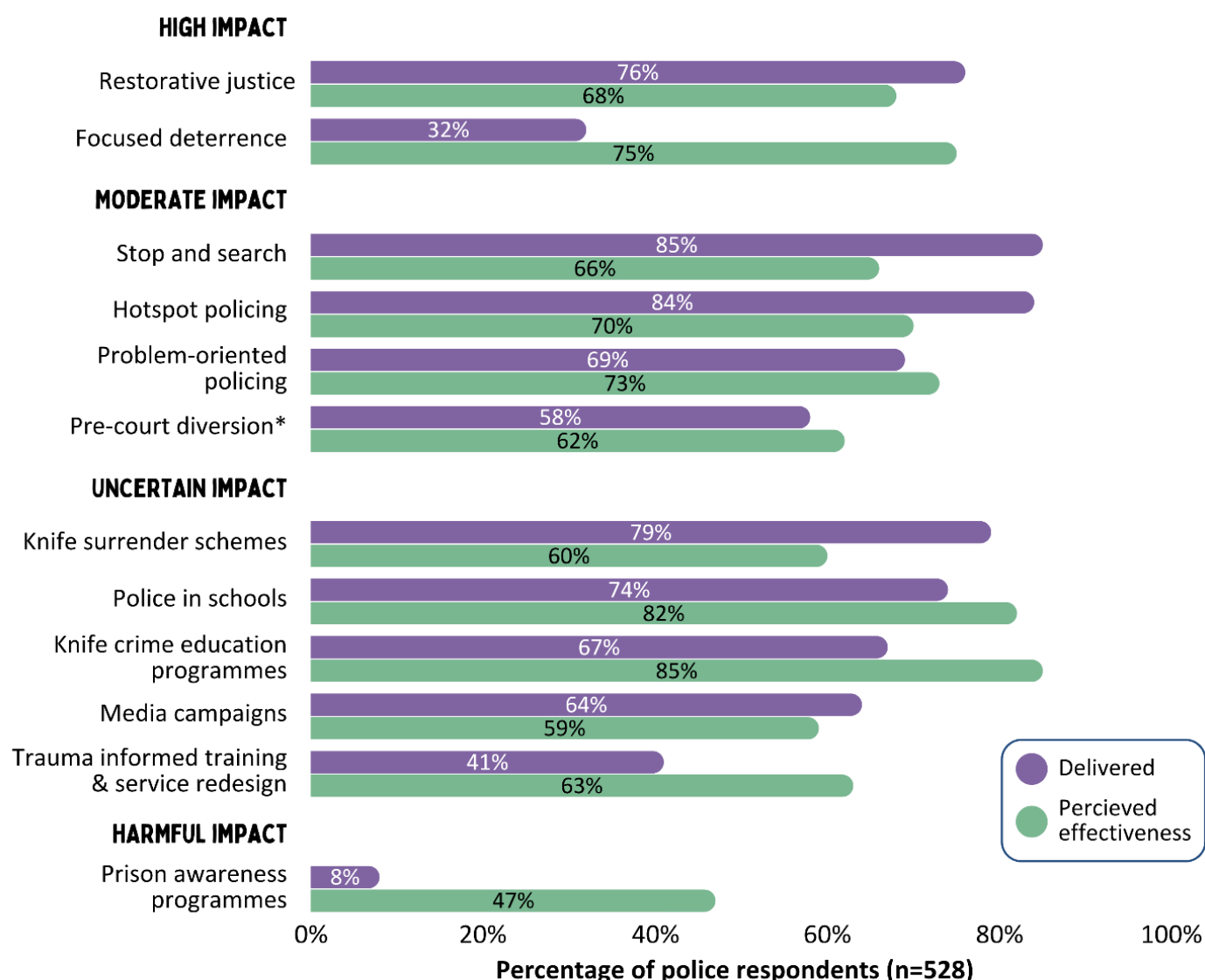


This section examines which interventions, drawn from the YEF Toolkit, are being delivered across police forces in England and Wales to reduce children's involvement in violence, alongside their perceived effectiveness. It draws on survey responses from police forces and OPCCs to provide national insights, alongside findings from five case study forces.

3.2.1 Alignment between delivery, perceived effectiveness and evidence

Figure 2 presents surveyed police respondents' (n = 528) reports of intervention delivery and perceived effectiveness, grouped by impact rating in the YEF Toolkit. Overall, there is broad alignment between the delivery and perceived effectiveness across many interventions, although some notable differences emerge. These findings suggest policing practice is largely oriented towards secondary and preventative approaches, with similar patterns observed in the case study forces (see Table 11).

Figure 2. Police-reported intervention delivery and perceived effectiveness in reducing children's involvement in violence.



*At the time of the survey, pre-court diversion was rated as moderate impact. Since, the YEF Toolkit has separated this and rated informal pre-court diversion as high impact and formal pre-court diversion as moderate impact.

Respondents were asked (1) which of these initiatives does your force deliver and (2) which of these violence reduction initiatives do you think can reduce children's involvement in violence?

Interventions are categorised by impact and ordered by the proportion of respondents reporting they are commissioned.

For high-impact interventions, restorative justice was reported as being delivered by 76% of surveyed police respondents. Furthermore, focused deterrence was reported as being delivered by around a third of respondents (32%) but was perceived as effective by a higher proportion (75%), suggesting potential under-implementation relative to perceived benefit.

For moderate impact interventions, both delivery and perceived effectiveness were consistently high. Hot spot policing (84% delivered, 70% perceived effectiveness) and problem-oriented policing (69% delivered, 73% perceived effectiveness) were widely delivered and similarly perceived as effective. Pre-court diversion also showed close alignment between delivery (58%) and perceived effectiveness (62%).

Across interventions with uncertain impact, delivery and perceived effectiveness were generally closely aligned. Knife surrender schemes (79% vs 60%), police in schools (74% vs 82%), knife crime education programmes (67% vs 85%) and media campaigns (64% vs 59%) were all widely delivered and perceived as effective. However, trauma-informed training and service redesign showed a notable gap, with lower reported delivery (41%) than perceived effectiveness (63%).

For interventions categorised as harmful, prison awareness programmes were rarely reported as being delivered (8%), although a substantially higher proportion of respondents (47%) perceived them as effective.

Figure 3 pools survey responses by force to estimate the coverage of interventions delivered across police forces in England and Wales. Some variation was observed, with respondents within the same force reporting a mixture of yes and no responses. This may reflect differences in visibility across teams and departments, or it may be an artefact of the survey design, given the question asked respondents to tick interventions their force is delivering, meaning no responses may represent a more passive omission rather than an active denial of delivery. To capture this nuance, responses have been stratified by (a) forces where all respondents reported yes and (b) forces where some respondents reported yes and others reported no.

Across the 44 included forces, coverage for most interventions was high when combining confirmed delivery (yes) and partial delivery responses. Stop and search, hot spot policing, knife surrender schemes, police in schools and problem-oriented policing were reported as being delivered across all 44 forces (100%). Restorative justice, knife crime education programmes, media campaigns and pre-court diversion showed similarly high combined coverage (98%; 43 forces), as did trauma-informed training and service redesign (93%; 41 forces).

Focused deterrence showed slightly lower combined coverage (89%; 39 forces), though the majority of these were partial responses, suggesting delivery may not be consistently embedded across teams within forces – particularly notable, given that it is one of the highest-impact interventions in the YEF Toolkit.

Prison awareness programmes stood out as an outlier, with approximately half of forces (48%; 21 forces) reporting partial delivery, while 52% (23 forces) reported no delivery at all. This is particularly notable given the YEF Toolkit's classification of this intervention as harmful (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2021b).

The prevalence of partial yes responses across most interventions – including common approaches such as stop and search and hot spot policing – suggests considerable within-force variation in awareness of what is being delivered. This may indicate that strategic priorities and operational decisions are not consistently communicated across teams and departments, raising questions about organisational coherence that sit alongside, and arguably precede, questions about EBP. If officers and staff are unaware of what their force is delivering, the extent to which delivery is strategically coordinated, rather than ad hoc, is unclear.

Figure 3. Estimated proportion of police forces in England and Wales delivering interventions to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

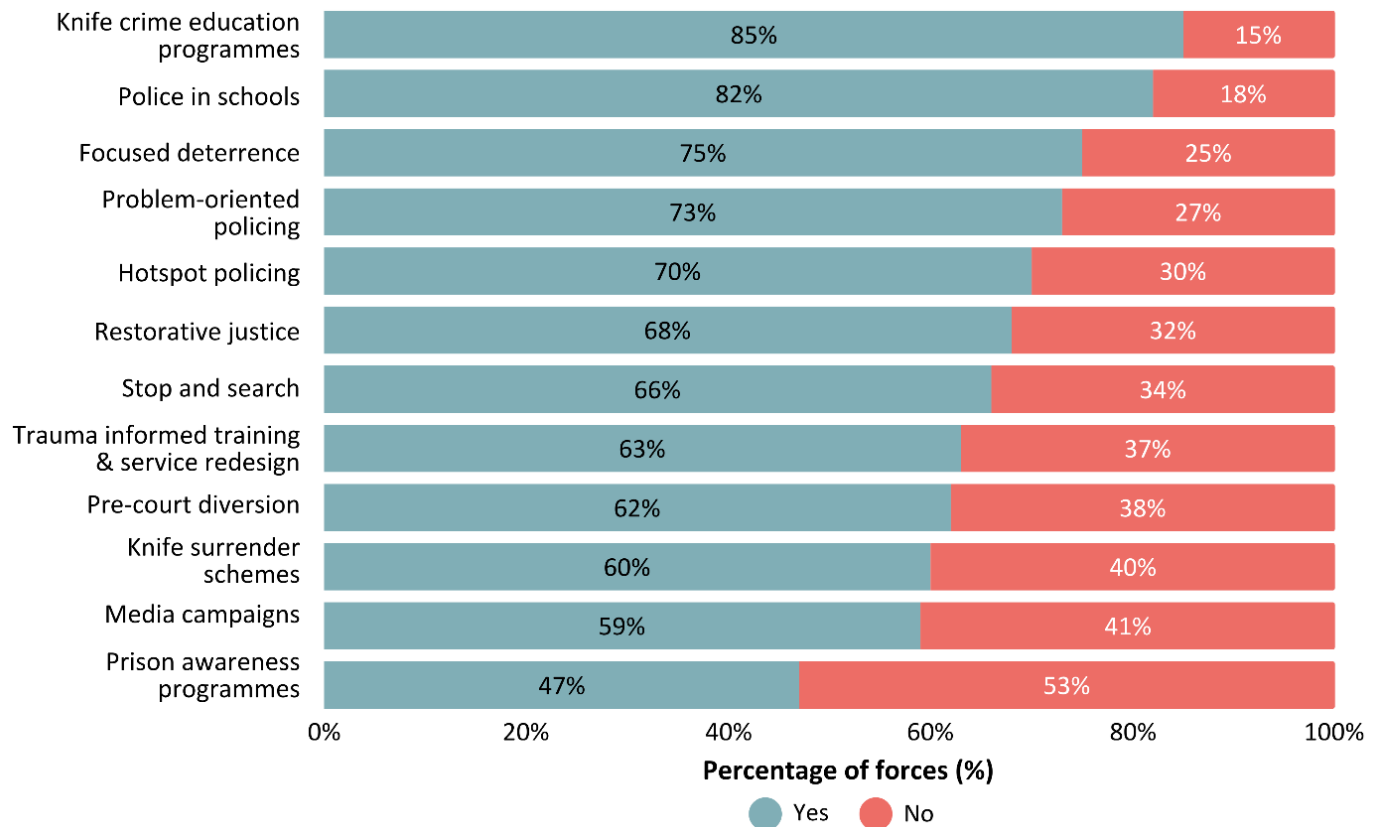


Figure 4 presents the proportion of police forces in England and Wales that perceive each intervention to be effective in reducing children’s involvement in violence.

Knife crime education programmes (85%; 37 of 44 forces) and police in schools (82%; 36 forces) were deemed the most effective interventions. Focused deterrence (75%; 33 forces), problem-oriented policing (73%; 32 forces) and hot spot policing (70%; 31 forces) were also reported as effective across most forces.

In contrast, lower levels of perceived effectiveness were reported for pre-court diversion (62%; 27 forces), knife surrender schemes (60%; 26 forces) and media campaigns (59%; 26 forces). Prison awareness programmes had the lowest levels of perceived effectiveness at 47% (21 forces).

Figure 4. The estimated proportion of police forces in England and Wales perceiving these interventions to be effective in reducing children’s involvement in violence.

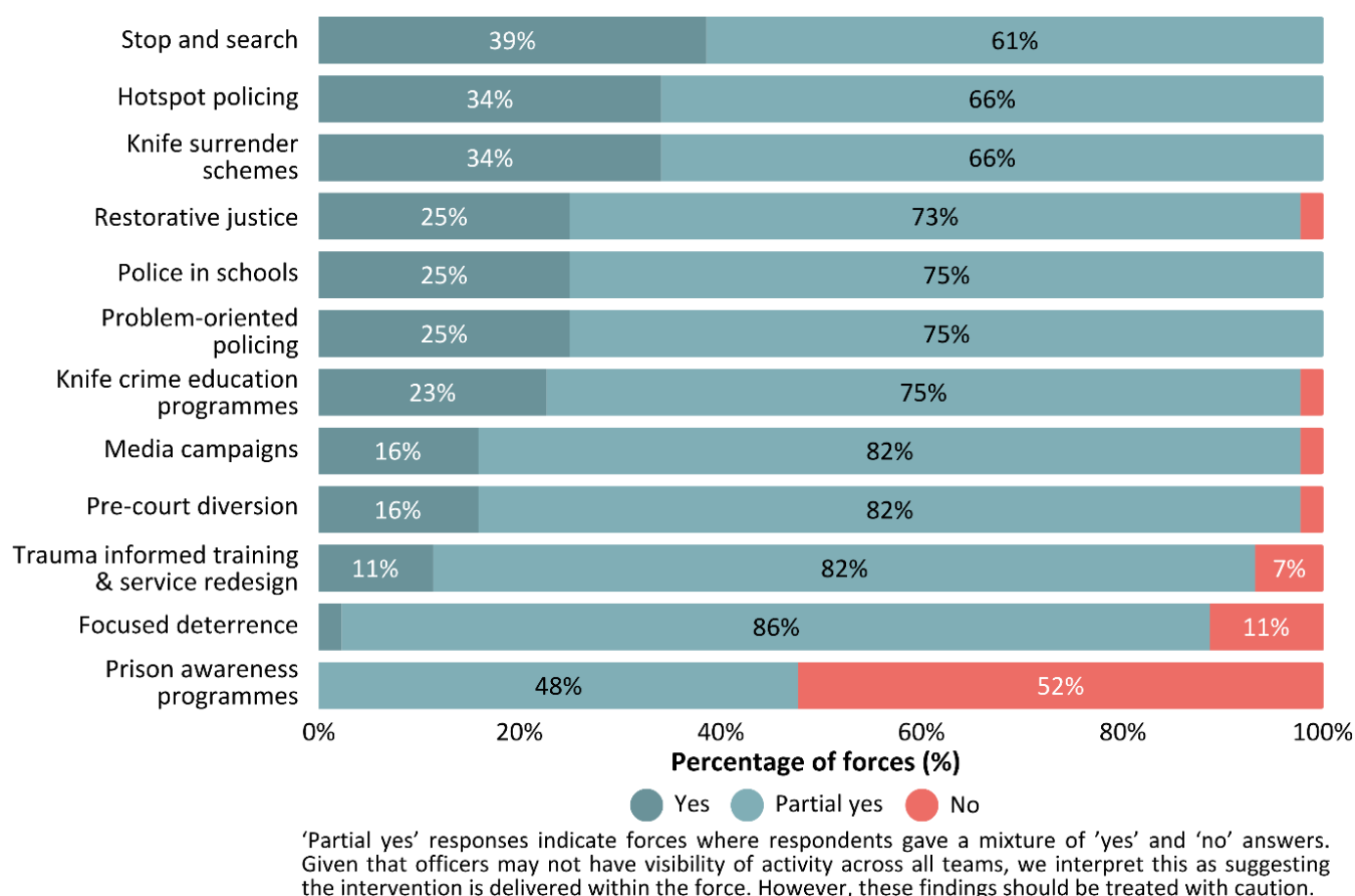


Figure 5 presents OPCC respondents’ reports of intervention commissioning and perceived effectiveness, grouped by impact rating in the YEF Toolkit. Overall, there is broad alignment between many interventions, although some notable gaps remain.

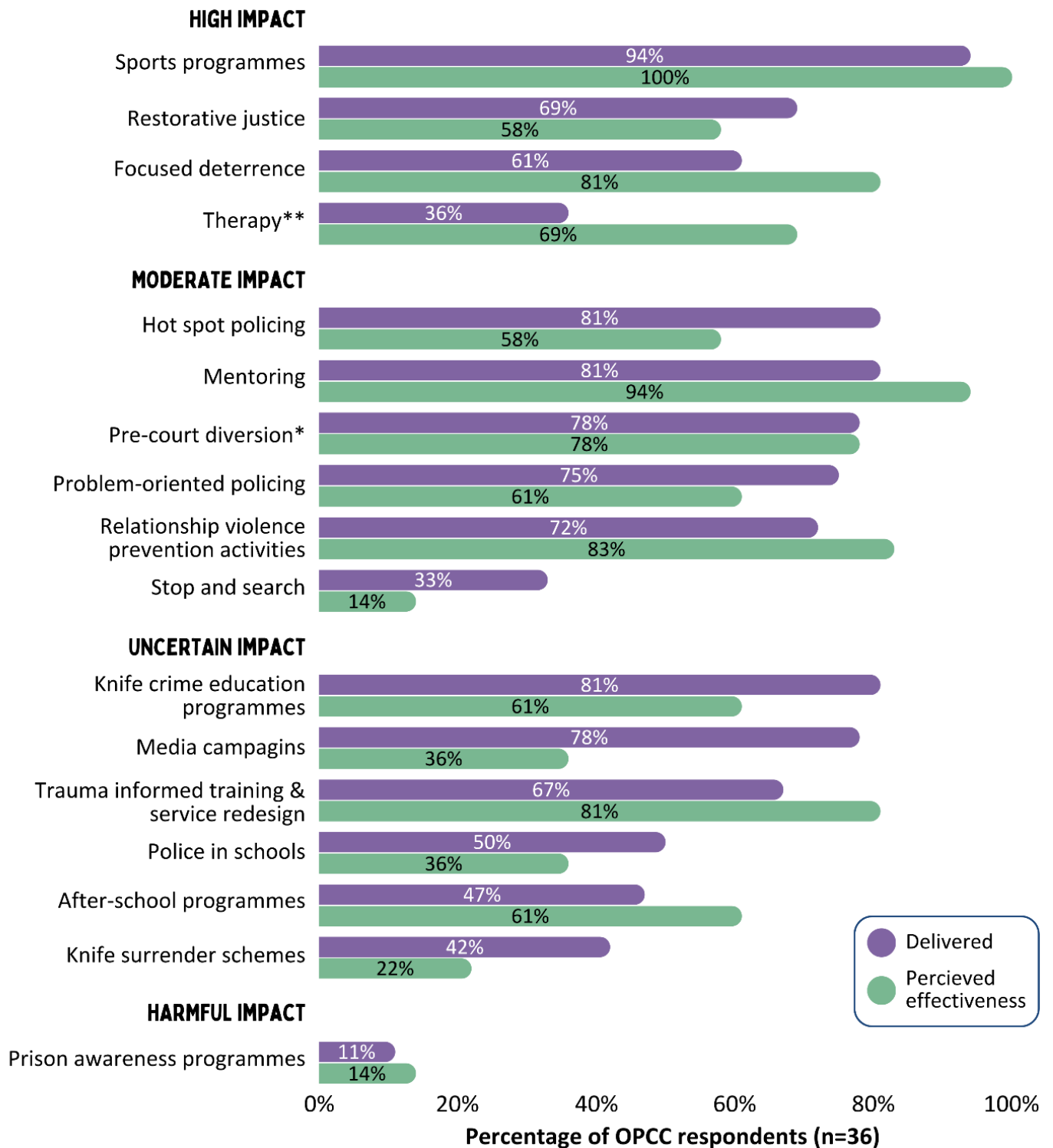
High-impact interventions, as per the YEF Toolkit, show mixed patterns. Sports programmes were widely perceived as effective (100%) and commonly delivered (94%). Focused deterrence was reported to be regularly commissioned (61%) and widely perceived as effective (81%). Restorative justice was commonly commissioned (69%) and seen as effective (58%). Therapy was only commissioned by 36% of OPCCs, yet 69% perceived it as an effective intervention.

Across moderate-impact interventions, commissioning was high for hot spot policing (81%), mentoring (81%), pre-court diversion (78%) and relationship violence prevention activities (72%), with similarly high perceived effectiveness. In contrast, stop and search was reported as being commissioned by 33% of respondents, with only 14% perceiving it as effective.

For interventions with uncertain impact, knife crime education programmes were widely commissioned (81%) but less commonly perceived to be effective (61%). Similarly, media campaigns were widely commissioned (78%) but perceived as less effective (36%). Trauma-informed training and service design were commonly seen as effective (81%) but less commonly commissioned (67%). Similarly, after-school programmes were perceived as effective (61%) but less commonly commissioned (47%).

Prison awareness programmes, categorised as harmful in the YEF Toolkit, were reported as being delivered by a small proportion of respondents (11%), although slightly more respondents (14%) perceived them as effective.

Figure 5. Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner responses on interventions being commissioned and interventions they think can reduce children's involvement in violence (perceived effectiveness).



*At the time of the survey, pre-court diversion was rated as moderate impact. Since, the YEF Toolkit has separated this and rated informal pre-court diversion as high impact and formal pre-court diversion as moderate impact.

** The YEF Toolkit states cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) has a high impact whereas other types (i.e. multi-systemic therapy, functional family therapy) have a moderate impact.

Respondents were asked (1) which of these initiatives do you commission and (2) which of these violence reduction initiatives do you think can reduce children's involvement in violence?

Interventions are categorised by impact and ordered by the proportion of respondents reporting they are commissioned.

Additional interventions in the OPCC survey (not included in the police survey as we believe police do not deliver them) were: after-school programmes, mentoring, therapy, and relationship violence prevention.

3.2.2 Interventions most commonly being used

This section includes additional details for the interventions most commonly delivered by police forces in England and Wales. This includes stop and search, hot spot policing, problem-oriented policing, knife surrender schemes, police in schools, knife crime education, restorative justice, pre-court diversion and media campaigns. Mentoring and sports programmes were also commonly reported to be commissioned by OPCCs.

The interventions most frequently reported to be delivered by police forces and OPCCs vary in the strength of their supporting evidence. Some widely delivered approaches – such as hot spot policing and problem-oriented policing – are supported by a moderate or strong evidence base, while others – such as knife surrender programmes, policing in schools and knife crime education programmes – are commonly cited in practice but have uncertain evidence of effectiveness. The figures on reported use should be interpreted with caution, given that not all officers within a force would be aware of every intervention being delivered.

Stop and search

Delivery: 85% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported using stop and search. In contrast, only 33% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning stop and search. Given that stop and search is a police power, it is unsurprising that the numbers reported by OPCC respondents were low when asked if they commissioned stop and search.

Perceived effectiveness: 66% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) perceived stop and search to be effective at reducing children's involvement in violence, compared to only 14% of surveyed OPCC responses (n = 36).

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of stop and search on reducing children's involvement in violence is moderate, with moderate confidence in this impact estimate (Nair et al., 2024). That said, the evidence base provides a mixed picture about the impact of stop and search on violence due to differences within the UK compared to global evidence. Globally, increased levels of stop and search have a moderate impact on reducing violent crime, an average of 13% across nine studies (Nair et al., 2024). In contrast, the impact in studies within the UK is smaller, with an average of 5% across two studies (Nair et al., 2024). The YEF Toolkit estimate is based on the global evidence base.

Alongside evidence of crime-reduction effects, the YEF Toolkit highlights potential harms associated with stop and search, including negative impacts on children's trust in the police and their wellbeing (Nair et al., 2024). These considerations are relevant to how and with whom stop and search is used in practice, particularly given evidence suggesting that adolescents may be disproportionately affected by negative experiences of stop and search.

Across the case study forces, some officers described stop and search as a visible deterrence and engagement tool, stating that in hot spot areas it often resulted in a high impact in reducing crime (e.g. Aldercombe). Other officers – particularly those working with children through prevention activities – felt that while stop and search was an effective approach, the follow-up aspect to support children was often missed:

“I think [stop and search] does work, but I think what you then need is the support that I suppose my team does provide in terms of explaining to the young person why they've been stopped and [explaining] to the parents as well”. – Moorhaven

Moorhaven reported piloting home visits by officers in a prevention team following a stop and search to follow up with parents/carers to understand the child's circumstances and build a better picture of what

might be going on in the child's circumstances. While there are no expectations for the child to willingly share information about their life, this may explain their behaviour and actions and determine subsequent actions by the police in trying to support the child and prevent them from becoming involved in violence:

"For stop and search, we're now doing a follow-up visit as well, so if they're ~~on~~[in] our cohort, we're going to see them, or if they've had a missing episode as well, we're going to [do] a secondary visit with that child, if they're on our cohort, and that builds trust and competence as well". – Moorhaven

An analyst in Silvermarsh was spending significant time examining stop and search practices, including issues of disproportionality and the thresholds used to justify searches. They noted that terms such as disproportionality and disparity were sometimes used interchangeably, despite reflecting different concepts. However, there was no clear guidance on how to balance effectiveness with the potential for harm. Although officers expressed a commitment to fairness and procedural justice, performance continued to be measured by the volume of searches, rather than the quality of interactions. See section 3.3.1 for more information on the disproportionality of stop and search.

Hot spot policing

Delivery: 84% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 81% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported delivering and/or commissioning hot spot policing.

Perceived effectiveness: 70% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 58% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported that they perceived hot spot policing to be an effective intervention to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of hot spot policing on reducing children's involvement in violence is moderate, with moderate confidence in this impact estimate (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022a). Similarly, the College of Policing crime reduction toolkit notes an overall reduction in crime and a very strong quality of evidence.

All five case study forces described delivering hot spot policing. Many officers referenced some of the perceived benefits, especially in urban areas, such as:

"Hot spot patrolling was good because we managed to seize 1,000 knives off the street. Crimes in those areas went down by 5% ... But [in] the rural areas, we had no impact at all". – Moorhaven

Some officers in Aldercombe questioned the effectiveness of hot spot policing, noting that designated areas can quickly become outdated and that crime may displace to nearby locations. Moorhaven also commented on the complexities in choosing hot spot areas, going on to explain that areas may often remain active in terms of anti-social behaviour, but the type of children congregating in these areas can change:

"Obviously, there are people in those places, but they're hot spots because the underlying reason why those locations are hot spots is based on data that there are elevated levels of crime or antisocial behaviour. I suppose what that means is if you take one hot spot [area], the location is still hot, but the people have changed; they've come and gone". – Moorhaven

That said, previous findings have suggested there is limited crime displacement and that hot spot policing can lead to a small reduction in crime or antisocial behaviour in areas adjacent to the targeted hot spots (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022a).

Fenhurst talked about using quantitative data – such as crime rates, anti-social behaviour rates, deprivation levels and crimes per 1,000 population – and qualitative insights from community surveys to determine the

quality and success of chosen patrol routes. Officers reflected on differences due to the time of day and seasons and on the need to continuously assess hot spot locations to ensure the best response.

In Moorhaven, officers suggested that while hot spot policing can generate useful intelligence, it does little to address the underlying drivers of knife crime among children, limiting its preventative impact. In this area, additional funding for knife-crime-related hot spot policing is in place, in addition to hot spot funding from the Home Office. East Kenmere reported that its approach was primarily focused on anti-social behaviour. These reflections may be down to how hot spot policing is implemented locally, particularly the balance between enforcement activity and preventative engagement.

Problem-oriented policing

Delivery: 69% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 75% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported delivering and/or commissioning problem-oriented policing.

Perceived effectiveness: 69% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 61% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported that they perceived problem-oriented policing to be an effective intervention to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit estimated the impact of problem-oriented policing on reducing children's involvement in violence as moderate, with moderate confidence in the impact estimate (Keenan et al., 2025).

This is supported by evidence which suggests a moderately positive impact and quality of evidence (YEF Toolkit and College of Policing crime reduction toolkit).

Across all case study forces, the use of problem-oriented policing was typically limited to neighbourhood teams, with some input from analysts and self-serve AI platforms to support problem-solving plans (e.g. Moorhaven, Fenhurst and East Kenmere). There was some mention of using the SARA model² from the College of Policing to support this.

Moorhaven mentioned that many problem-oriented policing activities are led by what service providers are delivering and that new solutions might come from the council. For example, officers might interact with experts at the College of Policing as a starting point, then work with the local authority and local practitioners to understand the most effective way forward and to prevent overlap. Fenhurst cited similar processes, with their OPCC assessing and triaging potential problem-oriented policing initiatives, as well as the force using a creative approach and a new portal to support officers:

"We trialled a [dragons]-den-type structure, as a way of giving teams a focused space to work on this, which has been positive". – Fenhurst

Knife surrender schemes

Delivery: 79% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported delivering knife surrender schemes, and 42% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning knife surrender schemes.

Perceived effectiveness: 60% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) perceived knife surrender schemes to be effective at reducing children's involvement in violence, compared to only 22% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36).

² The [SARA model](#) is a tool used for problem-solving policing. There are four stages: Scanning, analysis, response, assessment.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit suggests there is not enough evidence to estimate the impact of knife surrender schemes (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022b), meaning their effectiveness in reducing children’s involvement in violence is unknown. The lack of evidence and uncertainty in impact may explain the variation in delivery and perceived effectiveness between police forces’ and OPCC responses.

Several case study forces mentioned the use of amnesty bins, with mixed community responses. Some officers believed they helped raise awareness of safe places to dispose of knives and other sharp objects (Aldercombe and Silvermarsh), while other officers believed this increased community concerns and fear around knife crime happening in their community (Fenhurst) or created a false sense of security (Moorhaven), rather than reducing knife crime and the root causes behind knife carrying.

“[Amnesty bins have] not shown any real good reduction but feel [to be a] good thing for [the] public ... don’t know if the evidence is there to say these work”. – Moorhaven

“Knife Angel is well meant in raising [the] profile of [the] issue, but [I] now think it’s harmful, [and I] don’t want to increase visibility of knives. Knife bins stoke fear and do not deal with the issue; there’s no evidence behind these”. – Fenhurst

Similar views were reported by experts, who stated that amnesty bins are a key example of an approach being used with little evidence to support it and uncertainty that these approaches are actually capturing lethal weapons:

“On the surface, the public [likes] them because it feels nice if you’ve got a bin, but actually, I don’t think the people we really want to dispose of their knives are putting the knives in. Bins are a classic example of – we do it, but we’re not really sure [whether] it makes a difference”. – Expert

“The academic research says that there is no correlation [between] the number of knife bins and knives recovered [and] drops or increases of knife-enabled crime, but inherently, it feels like it is the right thing to do to give people who don’t know how to get rid of knives an opportunity [to do] so ... But we mustn’t, in my view, conflate that with some of the terminology, including surrender or amnesty, that suggests that these are lethal weapons”. – Expert

Evidence from the rapid review highlighted Operation Sceptre, a national awareness campaign launched in 2015 that takes place twice a year and targets habitual knife carrying through police patrols, weapons sweeps, stop and search, and joint awareness campaigns with schools (NPCC, 2023). A number of local force-wide interventions were also highlighted, where a substantial number of knives have been collected through school presentations, films and amnesty bins. Some forces have also taken a household-level approach, enabling families to swap pointed kitchen knives for rounded-tip versions where a child is considered at risk; while feedback from families and caseworkers has been positive, this scheme has not yet been formally evaluated (College of Policing, 2025).

Police in schools

Delivery: 74% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 50% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported delivering and/or commissioning police in schools.

Perceived effectiveness: 82% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) perceived police in schools to be effective at reducing children’s involvement in violence, compared to only 36% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36).

Evidence: There is not enough evidence to estimate the impact of police in schools (Gaffney, Farrington & White, 2021a), meaning their effectiveness in reducing children’s involvement in violence is unknown.

All case study forces mentioned having school (or community) engagement officers, with a range of models and approaches used to support schools.

Moorhaven reported delivering a universal offer to schools, including education sessions on the consequences of getting involved in knife crime and how to equip children with the skills to manage certain situations. This includes working with army reserves, doctors and paramedics to support the sessions.

Fenhurst reported having an assigned Police Constable (PC) or PCSO as the main point of contact for the school, and they would regularly meet with the school to decide what content to deliver to each school. The main topics included social drug use, vaping and peer-on-peer sexual abuse.

Both Aldercombe and East Kenmere mentioned their approach had recently been reviewed to ensure the delivery model was as effective as possible. At Aldercombe, this included going back to a universal offer for all children and consulting with a Personal, Social, Health and Economic consultant to ensure the approach is strengths-based and trauma-informed to consider the child as a whole and not only to consider violence. In East Kenmere, this involved taking a more community-focused approach as opposed to a school-based approach. The changes in East Kenmere were sparked due to funding changes and a review of the current model to understand what was working and what could be changed to improve the programme. The new model includes improved monitoring processes and regular team meetings with coordinators to track engagement levels.

While high levels of delivery were cited across the case study forces, the effectiveness could not be confirmed, as no formal evaluations had been conducted. Instead, policing in schools was described as an effective way to support children based on past experience and perceptions of what works.

As highlighted in the YEF Toolkit, the evidence on police presence in schools is too limited and mixed to estimate a clear impact. Findings from a recent pilot study suggest that police presence in schools may enhance children's perceptions of safety at school and their trust in police (Sanders et al., 2025). In contrast, Nijjar (2021) argued that police presence in schools could contribute to multi-agency surveillance of Black children and young people, resulting in the embedding of racialised assumptions into school discipline and student profiling. Similarly, Connelly et al. (2020) found that children in Greater Manchester, especially from Black, Muslim, Asian, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, viewed police negatively, with perceptions of bias and harsher treatment towards students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. As such, police presence in schools can reassure some children, but it can create unease for others.

Knife crime education

Delivery: 67% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported delivering knife crime education, and 81% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning knife crime education. This increase among OPCCs may be due to additional organisations offering this type of intervention.

Perceived effectiveness: 85% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 61% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported they perceived knife crime education to be an effective intervention to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit states that there is not enough evidence to estimate the impact of knife crime education (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2023), meaning its effectiveness in reducing children's involvement in violence is unknown.

The case study forces referred to knife crime education in relation to police in schools. East Kenmere and Moorhaven discussed delivering educational sessions on the consequences of knife violence. Except for

Operation Sceptre – a national bi-annual week of action led by the NPCC across England and Wales to create awareness about knife crime – educational sessions were not consistent across all areas, with Fenhurst stating that schools typically did not request this sort of material to be delivered.

The inconsistency in knife crime education was corroborated by a few experts who noted that while it would be beneficial to utilise schools and colleges as spaces to educate children on knife crime and create awareness, most schools and colleges refused to allow the delivery of such programmes. Experts also suggested that knife crime education-related activity remains individually driven, rather than a national priority undertaken by all forces. However, they noted that evidence on the efficacy of these interventions remains questionable and limited, which aligns with the above-mentioned YEF Toolkit.

Restorative justice

Delivery: 76% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported delivering restorative justice, and 69% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning restorative justice to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Perceived effectiveness: 68% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 58% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived restorative justice to be an effective intervention to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit-estimated impact of restorative justice on reducing children's involvement in violence is high, but there is very low confidence in the estimate (Skinner et al., 2025).

Fenhurst briefly mentioned its restorative justice approach, which includes a dedicated team of officers and Youth Justice Service (YJS) staff. Once a child is identified, the approach is personalised, with longer-term problem-solving and a range of bespoke diversionary interventions through partnerships with a trusted officer assigned to the case and linked to the school's officer. Typically, these children have been involved in repeated offences or have repeatedly come to police attention.

Aldercombe mentioned that some cases for children that come through out-of-court disposal panels with the YJS and police involve looking at diversionary schemes – including restorative justice – to keep children out of the criminal justice system:

“The referral panel would decide if [someone] is suitable for restorative justice, but if a person is not prepared to engage with the scheme, then it is not appropriate”. – Aldercombe

Other case study forces did not comment on restorative justice, which may indicate that the person interviewed had no knowledge of the intervention, rather than indicating that police forces were not delivering it.

Pre-court diversion

Delivery: 58% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported delivering pre-court diversion, and 78% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning pre-court diversion to reduce children's involvement in violence. While these figures are lower for police respondents, this is likely due to the role or department; those not closely aligned to prevention-focused work may have less awareness of this type of support.

Perceived effectiveness: 62% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 78% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived pre-court diversion to be an effective intervention to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of informal pre-court diversion on reducing children’s involvement in violence is high, with low confidence in the impact estimate (Keenan et al., 2025). The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of formal pre-court diversion on reducing children’s involvement in violence is moderate, with low confidence in the impact estimate (Mallion et al., 2025).

Across case study forces, very few officers mentioned pre-court diversion. That said, Fenhurst mentioned having a positive working relationship with its local YJSs. This included offering children bespoke interventions based on risk and demand, ranging from advice to 16-week programmes delivered by the YJS and community organisations. With partners primarily doing the work with children, having a strong partnership relationship was seen as a key component of intervention success. When asked about what supports pre-court diversion, officers cited reviewing the use of community resolutions to divert children from the criminal justice system. These reflections prompted officers to reflect on the need for additional training opportunities and internal resources to improve the use of community resolutions where appropriate.

Aldercombe and Moorhaven reported processes in place for officers to attend out-of-court disposal panels with their local YJSs. When asked about what might support or hinder this intervention, officers in Moorhaven reported the challenges they have with an increase in officers giving out No Further Action (NFA) outcomes to children, as it’s often the most straightforward approach from an administration perspective. This typically means the child received no support from their YJS, which, long-term, is often not the best approach to support children and reduce their involvement in violence.

“We’ve got a culture that [officers are] so busy in our policing [demands] that they take the route of least resistance in certain cases, which isn’t right, but sometimes you just need to understand the cold hard realities and then be able to find solutions to overcome them. We’ve got issues with creating capacity for our officers to kind of have the headspace to make these decisions in the right way”. – Moorhaven

Fenhurst also mentioned having a specific focus on children under the age of criminality (under-10-year-olds), which included a multi-agency panel to consider prevention support for the children and their families (where necessary).

Mentoring

Delivery: 81% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning mentoring programmes. While mentoring was not included in the police survey, several case study forces – Aldercombe, East Kenmere, Fenhurst and Moorhaven – reported the use of mentoring schemes, including police cadet schemes and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)–led initiatives (e.g. music-based initiatives and individual and group mentoring).

Perceived effectiveness: 94% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) believed mentoring to be an effective intervention in reducing children’s involvement in violence.

Impact: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of mentoring on reducing children’s involvement in violence is moderate, with moderate confidence in the impact estimate (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022c; Lakshminarayana et al., 2022).

Aldercombe touched on several mentoring programmes being delivered in the area by partners, including individual mentoring programmes and a music-based mentoring programme for children at risk of exploitation or extra-familial harm.

Moorhaven officers believed the police could fill a gap in mentoring children on the edge of criminality once relationships had been established. However, they highlighted that the challenges of such work taking place within the police stem from limited funding and leadership buy-in. Similar challenges were cited by community partners, often with limited funding cycles, creating instability for staff:

“From a policing point of view, mentoring works. We all know mentoring works, but the problem with mentoring is that you’ve got a person, and you’ve got to employ them, and they’ve got to have a contract and a little bit more stability than six to nine months. Then you have to reapply [for] the money again, and even when you get something settled, and there are charities doing the mentoring, they’d ask us, ‘Am I going to have the job past March?’ and I don’t know what to say. So our mentoring programmes are really struggling”. – Moorhaven

Sports programmes

Delivery: 94% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning sports programmes. While not specified in the police survey, some case study forces cited similar prevention-focused interventions, including sport-based interventions, that are typically delivered by the community sector as opposed to the police (Moorhaven and Silvermarsh).

Perceived effectiveness: 100% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived sports programmes to be an effective intervention to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of sports programmes on reducing children’s involvement in violence is high, with low confidence in the impact estimate (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2021a).

Silvermarsh mentioned working with community partners to refer children to opportunities to engage in sports (e.g. football) as a way for adults to build relationships and trust with them, especially with children identified as being harder to reach or at risk.

As highlighted in section 3.7.9, officers cited community challenges around the police’s role in prevention, with an expectation from their communities to focus on enforcement-led approaches, such as increased visibility and patrolling, where crime rates were increasing.

Media campaigns

Delivery: 64% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) reported delivering media campaigns, and 78% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning media campaigns to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

Perceived effectiveness: 59% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 36% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived media campaigns to be an effective intervention to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

Evidence: There is not enough evidence to estimate the impact of media campaigns (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2022d), meaning their effectiveness in reducing children’s involvement in violence is unknown.

Aldercombe and Fenhurst mentioned the use of media campaigns. Aldercombe said this came about due to specific knife crime incidents, which led them to undertake communication campaigns on knife crime, targeting children with the aim of educating and encouraging them to report knife carrying and crimes. While East Kenmere did not mention the use of media campaigns, literature in the rapid review highlighted positive results from a campaign undertaken in the region (Collefe of Policing, 2025).

These examples used a range of communication channels, including social media, short-form video content, advertising and wider digital communications, to disseminate messages about the risks associated with

violence, knife carrying and county lines. Campaigns vary in their target audiences. Some are directed at children themselves, while others focus on adults who influence children's behaviour, such as parents, teachers and community leaders, encouraging them to support positive decision-making and conversations about violence.

Several media campaigns were also reported in the rapid review across Essex, Leicestershire and West Midlands police forces (Essex Violence & Vulnerability Unit, n.d.; Hobson et al., 2022). A social media campaign in Colchester, Essex, sought to prevent young people from getting involved in county line drug networks (Essex Violence & Vulnerability Unit, n.d.). The campaign tweeted five short films on social media. While reach was high, engagement levels were low, as the campaign ads interrupted social media viewing and were not seen as of interest to young people. In Leicestershire and the West Midlands, fear-based knife crime media campaigns were adopted in the *Lives not Knives* campaign (2020) by the former and *#LifeorKnife* campaign (2019) by the latter, using stark imagery to highlight the dangers of knife carrying (Hobson et al., 2022). Hobson et al. (2022) evaluated such approaches with 14–18-year-old boys, testing whether knife-related imagery shifted the willingness to carry a knife. While participants reported increased awareness of their own mortality, exposure did not change their willingness to carry knives or their perceptions of the benefits of knife-carrying.

3.2.3 Interventions less commonly being used

This section provides additional details on interventions that are being delivered or commissioned less commonly to reduce children's involvement in violence. This includes focused deterrence, prison awareness programmes and a number of additional interventions reported in the case study forces.

Focused deterrence

Delivery: Only 32% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) are delivering focused deterrence. That said, looking at the proportion of police forces confirming delivery indicates that delivery may be higher, with 39 out of 44 police forces having at least one respondent confirming delivery. While we cannot say for certain, this may be down to variations in officer or staff knowledge. In contrast, 61% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported commissioning focused deterrence.

Perceived effectiveness: 75% of police respondents (n = 528) and 81% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived focused deterrence to be effective.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of focused deterrence on reducing children's involvement in violence is high, with high confidence in the estimate (Gaffney, Farrington & White, 2021b). It is among the highest-impact policing approaches, with estimated average reductions in violence substantially greater than many traditional tactics.

The costs of focused deterrence may be the reason for the delivery being considerably lower. Silvermarsh reported intermittent delivery, with the first iteration only stopping because of funding, not because it wasn't working. While a new iteration was currently being delivered, officers were still concerned about the continuity of focused deterrence and getting widespread adoption across the force, given the complexity of delivering the intervention, which results in the intervention being costly.

“Important, as we don't know what funding looks like, [but] can we deliver without a specific post? Yes, funding is an issue, but focused deterrence is expensive. If we can prove we can do this with minimal funding, that would be really attractive to forces. Not [an] off-the-shelf product.

[There are] so many intricacies. We can't say, 'This works if you see a child'. It has to be the partnership working, the drive [and] passion [to] keep going back and delivering". – Silvermarsh

Prison awareness programmes

Delivery: 8% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 11% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported delivering prison awareness programmes to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Perceived effectiveness: 47% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 14% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) perceived prison awareness programmes as an effective intervention in reducing children's involvement in violence. This indicates a potential disconnect between police forces' perceptions and the research evidence base.

Evidence: The YEF Toolkit–estimated impact of prison awareness programmes on reducing children's involvement in violence is that it is harmful, and there is high confidence in the estimate (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2021b).

Prison awareness programmes – which include a range of deterrence-based approaches, from Scared Straight–style interventions to educational talks delivered by current or former prisoners – were among the least commonly reported interventions delivered or commissioned by police forces and OPCCs. Evidence from the YEF Toolkit suggests that programmes relying on deterrence through exposure to prison environments are ineffective and may increase the likelihood of offending among participants (Gaffney, Jolliffe & White, 2021b).

Across case study forces, prison awareness programmes were rarely discussed. When asked about interventions discontinued due to concerns about harm or ineffectiveness, officers in Fenhurst referenced a mobile prison van previously used for awareness-raising. While not perceived as overtly harmful, officers described it as ineffective in changing behaviour.

"Some interventions we can't prove the impact, but none have been harmful, meaning we have had to stop delivering. [The] only thing close to it was a prison awareness project – [a] prison badge into school, [and a] mock-up prison van. It was not scary, but it didn't work. [However, the] organisation delivering it [disagreed]". – Fenhurst

Officers in Fenhurst went on to say more broadly that police can't always control if or when an intervention is stopped, especially if strategic or delivery partners are involved in terms of funding, delivery or wider community pressure:

"We wouldn't necessarily stop [the intervention] even if harmful, as [there is] often funding or political pressure to keep delivering intervention". – Fenhurst

Additional interventions being locally delivered or commissioned

Case study forces and OPCC respondents identified a range of additional interventions that were not explicitly captured in the survey or reflected in the YEF Toolkit categories. These were typically locally developed, prevention-focused or cross-cutting in nature.

Prevention-focused and early intervention approaches: Several case study forces described prevention-focused work targeting cohorts of children at risk of criminalisation (Fenhurst, Moorhaven and Silvermarsh). This typically involved multi-agency teams pooling information to build a more holistic understanding of children's circumstances and working with partners (e.g. neighbourhood teams) to provide early support before involvement in crime escalates. While this type of activity was not captured in the police survey,

OPCC survey responses (n = 36) suggested high levels of delivery and perceived effectiveness for related approaches, such as mentoring (81%) and relationship violence prevention (72%).

Knife crime–specific activities and data tools: Case study forces also reported the use of additional knife crime–related interventions not included in the survey or Toolkit. These included the use of knife arches in schools to detect weapons and the development of local data tools (e.g. habitual knife carrier indices) to improve understanding of patterns of behaviour and risk and support future responses from officers when interacting with these cohorts of children.

Fenhurst described the use of voluntary GPS tags as a safeguarding and disruption tool for children at risk of criminal exploitation. While viewed by some as a useful approach for monitoring and supporting behaviour, its impact on offending was unclear. Delivery was constrained by limited and inconsistent funding and practical challenges (e.g. non-compliance with charging or use) that affected its reliability.

Engagement and outreach interventions: Some forces highlighted engagement-focused approaches, including police cadet programmes (East Kenmere and Fenhurst), which were viewed as a means of building relationships with children from diverse backgrounds. These programmes often included structured activities and recognition events, such as award ceremonies.

3.2.4 Summary of intervention delivery

Overall, these findings suggest that intervention delivery across police forces is shaped as much by local context, resource constraints and practitioner perceptions as by the strength of the evidence base. While some evidence-informed approaches are widely used, others with stronger evidence appear under-implemented, and interventions with limited or harmful evidence continue to be delivered or perceived as effective. This points to a gap between evidence and practice and highlights the challenges of embedding evidence-informed approaches consistently across policing.

Table 11. Interventions being delivered across case study forces and funding streams

Survey information on whether these interventions are being delivered has been combined with case study force insights. We've taken this approach to provide the most comprehensive list of what is happening across the five forces. Where mentioned, we have cited funding sources.

	Aldercombe	East Kenmere	Fenhurst	Moorhaven	Silvermarsh
YEF Toolkit					
Hot spot policing	Home Office		Home Office	Home Office	
Problem-oriented policing	OPCC + Police force				
Knife surrender schemes					
Knife crime education*					
Police in schools	OPCC	Police force			
Focused deterrence				Police force	
Restorative justice					
Stop and search					
Media campaigns					
Pre-court diversion					
Trauma-informed training and service redesign					
Mentoring	OPCC + Internal				
Sports programmes				Delivery partners	
Interventions not included in the survey					
Custody intervention*	OPCC				
Prevention for at-risk children*					
Community-based family support*					
Intervention being delivered as confirmed by both the survey respondents and case study forces. One or more respondents in the survey answered yes to stating this intervention is being delivered, in addition to one or more respondents in the survey stating this intervention was not being delivered. These interventions were also not mentioned during the case study force interviews. No reports of this intervention being delivered. * This refers to interventions that were not included in the police survey. Note: OPCC = Office of the Police and National Crime Commissioner					

3.3 Equitable delivery and design of interventions



This section examines key findings on the equitable delivery of EBP to support children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

Evidence on interventions specifically tailored to children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds remains scant. Resultantly, the findings in this section focus more broadly on the measures adopted by the forces to address disproportionality and to offer tailored and effective support to children. It does not focus specifically on evidence-based interventions, practices designed for children from these communities, or on their delivery.

Four themes were identified: (1) attitudes on disproportionality and equitable delivery, (2) ethnicity-related data quality and analysis, (3) current delivery practices and (4) measures taken or identified to address disparities.

3.3.1 Attitudes on disproportionality and equitable delivery

All five case study forces acknowledged disproportionality in policing, with the majority of insights focused on stop and search. While the study sought to understand disproportionality across policing practices, case study forces mainly spoke about stop and search as a policing practice resulting in disproportionality and inequitable outcomes. Beyond this study, the wider evidence base also points to the disproportionate use of stop and search against Black, Asian and minority ethnic children (Keeling, 2017; Minhas & Walsh, 2021; Agnew-Pauley et al., 2025) and limited evidence on disproportionality in pre-court diversion (see section 3.3.4 for more; Ofori et al., 2021; Rahal et al., 2025). Coupled with this, limited evidence on interventions that may have been specifically designed to address disproportionality and their formal evaluation reinforces the gap between an understanding of good practice and what constitutes equitable delivery.

Further, the acceptance and understanding of disproportionality varied within each force and across roles, departments and ranks. In Moorhaven, staff recognised disproportionality in stop and search and its impact on the resulting distrust of the police among some communities. In contrast, while some officers in Aldercombe recognised the disproportionate use of stop and search, others framed it as a statistical issue linked to the borough's predominantly White population, rather than as a policing problem. In Fenhurst and East Kenmere, staff regarded social deprivation as a more influential factor than ethnicity. Some Fenhurst staff highlighted an absence of focus on diversity within White populations, for example, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Others downplayed disproportionality, citing low recorded rates (see section 1.3.2 for more) and adopting a colour-blind approach with the aim of treating all children the same. In East Kenmere, staff explained disproportionality as a downstream effect of deprivation rather than a bias in policing.

“Absolutely can tell you [policing practices are] disproportionate [towards] Black boys over White. Less so on Asian children ... We don't think that means officers are racist, but it is actually because families [are] failed by housing [and] education and [are put] in areas more prevalent with crime, so the knock-on means they are more likely to be picked up”. – East Kenmere

Research also points to disproportionate use of stop and search – the Youth Justice Board's (2026) analysis indicates that Black children are disproportionately subjected to stop and search, and over half of the searches result in NFA. HMICFRS (2021) reported that stop and search, particularly in the context of neighbourhood policing, often results in disproportionate surveillance of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and reliance on stereotypes (Minhas & Walsh, 2021; Agnew-Pauley et al., 2025). Beyond disproportionality,

studies highlighted that the use of stop and search erodes trust and reduces willingness to cooperate with police (Keeling, 2017; Evans et al., 2022).

Silvermarsh reported that despite training to address unconscious bias and ensure equitable decision-making, staff knowledge and understanding of disproportionality remain limited, further impacting staff members' ability and willingness to address it. This may stem from officers shying away from taking accountability or from spending the time to comprehensively consider what practices may need to change to prevent disproportionality. Experts recognised that interventions may appear effective in reducing harm but can still be inequitably delivered in practice, particularly where policing is concentrated in racialised communities. They highlighted the need for scrutinising stop and search data not only to assess whether it reduces crime but also to understand whether any effectiveness is accompanied by patterns of disproportionality and the wider impact on trust and perceptions of justice. Experts also suggested embedding procedural justice in practices like stop and search. Approaching these interactions with transparency, fairness and respect may improve children's experiences of police contact and confidence among frontline officers to capture ethnicity data consistently and equitably.

Staff knowledge and confidence were also shaped by local context and workforce composition. In Aldercombe, an officer expressed low confidence in determining which interventions, though evidenced as effective at a universal level, could be appropriately adapted to support children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. This was linked to the force being predominantly White, raising concerns about the cultural competence required to assess the suitability of such interventions. In Moorhaven, a minority of staff described lower confidence in working with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, attributing it to their rural posting and, resultantly, limited work with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. They described concerns about power imbalances and how children might experience support from officers who did not share their racial or ethnic background. In contrast, other staff in the force reported feeling confident about working with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds due to two factors: (1) examples of White police officers successfully working with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds in urban areas and (2) an absence of concerns raised by children interpreted as evidence that the practice was successful. To ensure effective delivery of interventions and building cultural competence and confidence among force staff, one officer stated:

"Our staff are predominantly between say 30 [and] 40 [and] White; if we are dealing with a 14-year-old from an ethnic minority, the young person must be part of that conversation". – Fenhurst

These findings suggest limited diverse representation of officers within forces and uneven preparedness to engage with children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

When discussing disproportionality and the availability of equitable interventions for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, several officers across case study forces shifted the conversation towards deprivation and other socio-economic factors as playing a key role in shaping police contact. Reframing disproportionality as a result of deprivation can shift attention away from race and ethnicity, despite these factors being closely linked, and may reduce the responsibility of police forces to consider their approach specifically from a race equity perspective. This highlights the need for recognising the different factors that overlap and drive disproportionality. These findings were corroborated by some experts who cited deprivation as a key driving factor for police and called for better consideration of the intersecting drivers of disproportionality and within-group differences, accounting for factors such as geography, class, gender and disability.

With acceptance and understanding of disproportionality varying across roles and ranks, a shift towards equitable delivery remains personality-driven rather than structurally driven. In Moorhaven, the Race Action Lead and a senior officer recognised that siloed working, with low buy-in from senior leadership and limited resources to implement the Race Action Plan, were both key barriers to addressing disproportionality. This indicates that sustained progress is unlikely without a clearer understanding of how policing practices can produce disproportionality and the impacts of this. It also requires clear accountability among officers and dedicated resourcing to ensure that redress is structurally embedded and sustained.

While training on unconscious bias and equitable decision-making for officers may be beneficial – if not already being delivered – additional efforts are likely warranted to ensure that prioritisation of disproportionality, particularly for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, is continuously at the forefront of senior leaders' minds and frontline officers' practice.

3.3.2 Ethnicity-related data quality and analysis

Three out of the five case study forces identified ethnicity data collection as a key challenge. Staff in Fenhurst and East Kenmere noted that frontline officers were reluctant to ask children about their ethnicity. In East Kenmere, staff suggested that some children do not feel comfortable or prepared to self-declare this information, and in Silvermarsh, officers were reluctant to ask children about their ethnicity to prevent any barriers to engaging with them.

“It can be a difficult conversation to have with a child [leading to officer-defined ethnicity]. Maybe they can’t articulate [why they are asking] it to the child or young person, so we have provided support about how to have these conversations, signposting to narrative-type scripts”. – East Kenmere

Experts argued that the absence of analytical skills is a key factor in the lack of understanding regarding disproportionality and differential impacts. They emphasised the need for a more nuanced analytical skillset among forces to interpret disproportionality in their policing practices using force data. Experts also highlighted concerns about the use of predictive policing and AI, noting that these tools may amplify existing biases. This risk arises where models are trained on historical police data shaped by existing disproportionalities in surveillance, recording and contact. As a result, such systems may reinforce inequities in how children are identified, assessed and routed into support or enforcement pathways.

Furthermore, East Kenmere and Silvermarsh raised concerns about the police's ability to analyse and monitor disproportionality levels.

“Current analysis is superficial, counting how many times [a] thing happens rather than [a] more complex analysis”. – Silvermarsh

As a result, senior leaders in East Kenmere were focused on (a) improving system automation to reduce the load on frontline officers and (b) enhancing officer guidance to support their cultural competency and confidence through training and suggested scripts to use with children.

When considering ways to improve current monitoring and evaluation practices around children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, experts also suggested that there may be scope to amend Home Office and OPCC funding criteria to require analysis of differential impacts for interventions or approaches aiming to reduce children's involvement in violence. This aligns with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public authorities to consider and address the differential impacts of their decisions on protected groups.

3.3.3 Current delivery practices

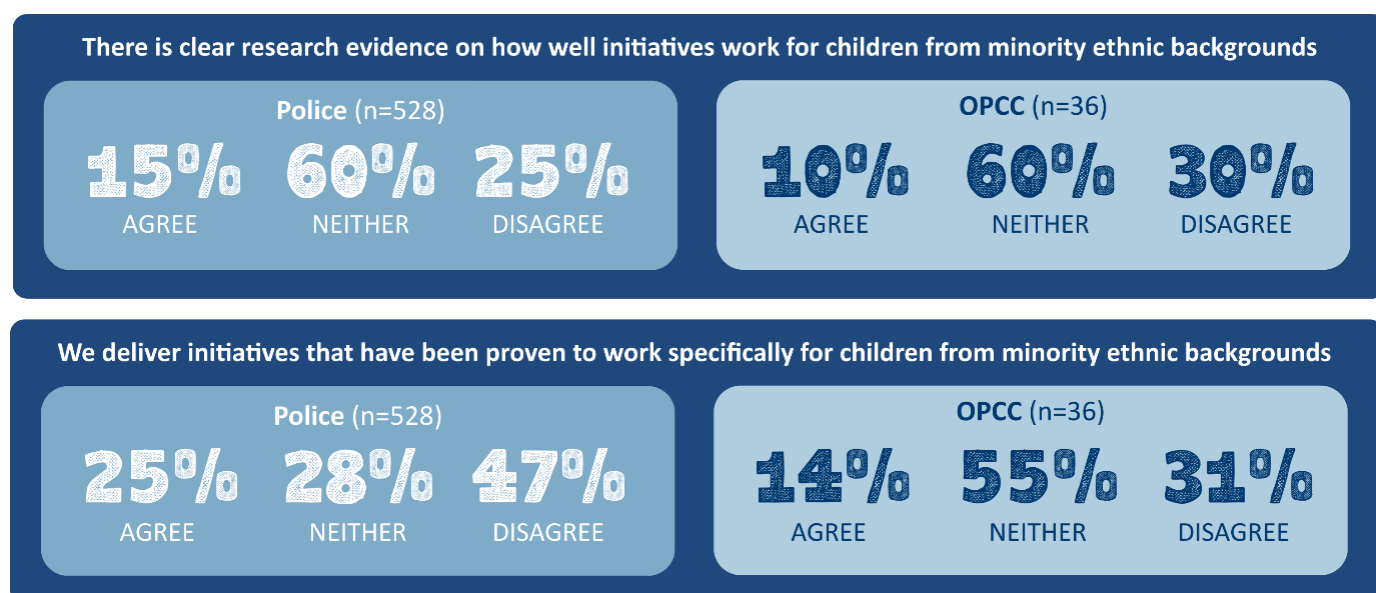
Officers mentioned that most interventions targeted at children are universal, with fewer interventions tailored to children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. Where targeted interventions exist, they are delivered by or in collaboration with partners. Examples of universal and targeted interventions from Moorhaven, Fenhurst, Aldercombe and East Kenmere include:

- Mentoring children engaged in criminal activities or at risk of serious violence through 1:1 coaching and group workshops.
- Access to sports activities via football clubs and gym memberships.
- Apprenticeship opportunities for at-risk children, including training to build and repair motor vehicles.
- School- and college-based interventions and visits to the police to improve children's understanding of policing and the justice system and to build rapport and trust.

In some areas, intervention delivery partners belonged to Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, thus representing the children these interventions were adapted for. For instance, in Moorhaven, mentoring was undertaken by a Black-led grassroots charity in response to the gap in provision for children and young people who are at risk of or involved in offending, exploitation and street conflict. Another intervention aimed at mothers of children involved in county lines led to children being provided with gym memberships, as mothers felt that attending the gym and engaging with peers could help steer them away from county lines.

Besides the above, police-led interventions, particularly in schools, are universal offers, often aimed at creating awareness about the role of the police and building rapport with children from all backgrounds. For instance, in Aldercombe, police interventions in schools focused on topics such as race, the police's use of stop and search, and addressing children's perceptions around policing to build rapport and trust. In Fenhurst, the focus was more on improving the reach of existing universal interventions across diverse groups than on targeted interventions. Some staff from Fenhurst spoke of tailoring interventions to each child rather than different interventions for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, which suggests some efforts were being taken to offer equitable support to children.

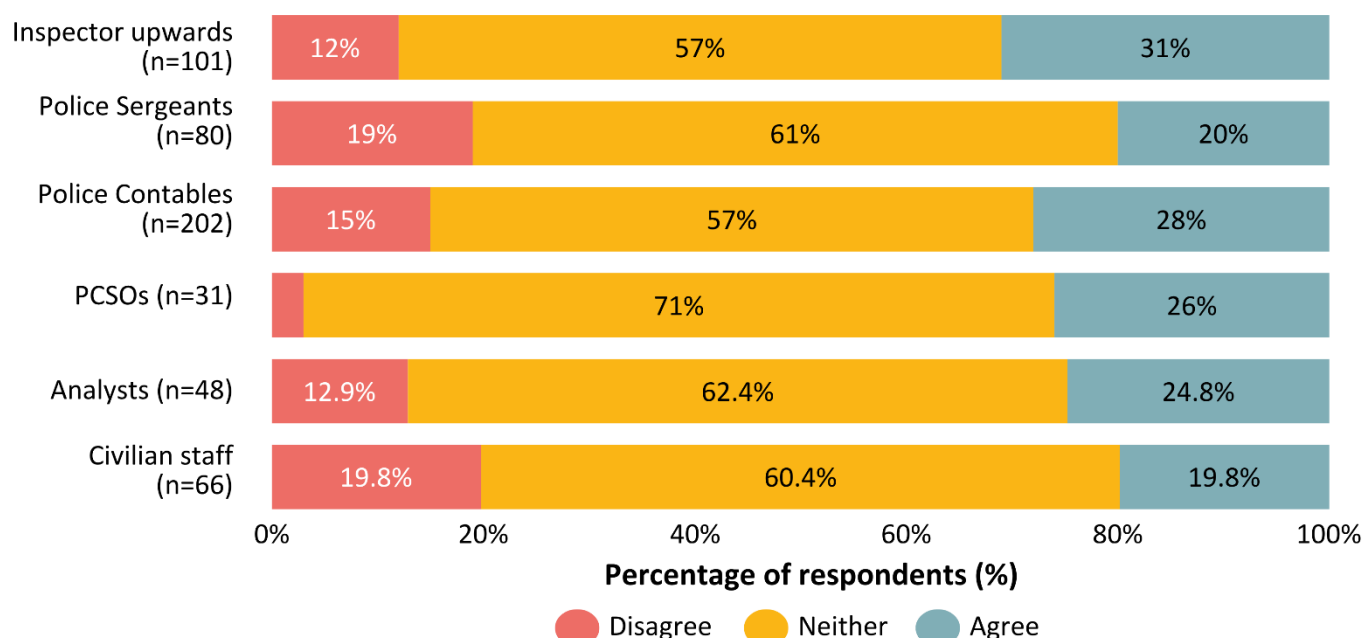
Figure 6. Survey responses on research evidence and evidence-informed interventions for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds



These findings suggest that while there are some pockets of equitably delivered support for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, more work is needed from police forces to ensure they are aligning with the Anti-Racism Commitment set forth by the NPCC (NPCC, n.d.), which frames equity as responding to people from different ethnic groups by taking into account their specific needs, circumstances and experiences, with the understanding that these will be racialised and with the aim of reducing harm. Thus, this goes beyond the use of typical universal provision and calls for targeted approaches. However, many EBP evaluations are not designed to determine effectiveness for different ethnicities, and as a result, robust subgroup evidence is often unavailable. This is corroborated by findings from the survey, as shown in Figure 6, which indicated limited awareness among police and OPCC staff on what works for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Of note, a large proportion of respondents in both the police survey (n = 528) and the OPCC survey (n = 36) reported that they neither agreed nor disagreed when asked if there is clear evidence of how well interventions work for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

25% of police respondents (n = 528) and 30% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) also reported neither on the presence of clear research evidence to support children from minority ethnic groups, thus corroborating the limited awareness or confidence among officers in supporting these groups, as shown above in this section. When stratified by rank, there was little difference in response among analysts, frontline officers and senior leaders (as highlighted in Figure 7). Similarly, 31% of the OPCC respondents (n = 36) and 47% of police respondents (n = 528) did not agree that they deliver interventions that have proven to be effective for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. This may help explain why interventions commissioned and delivered were often universal rather than tailored to Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.

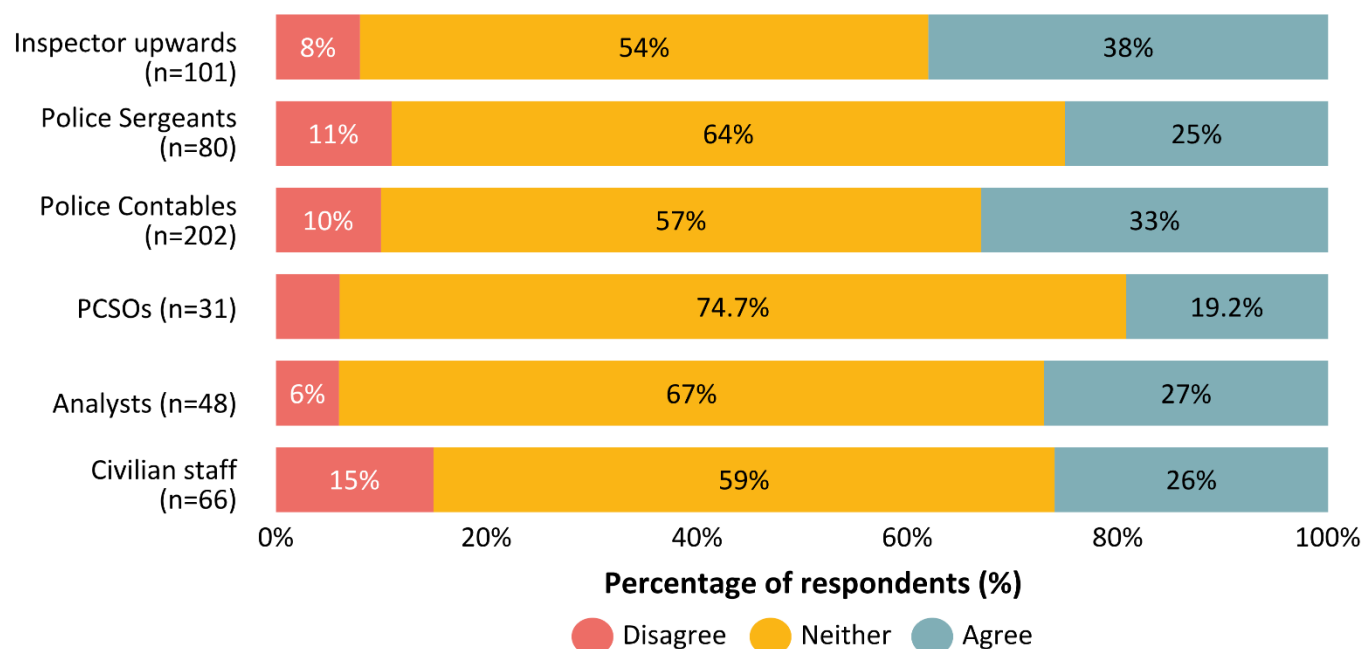
Figure 7. Surveyed police responses stratified by rank (n = 528) on whether there is clear research evidence on how well interventions work for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds



That said, police forces could adapt their ways of working to promote greater equity. For example, recognising the disproportionate use of stop and search on Black boys may encourage more reflective, proportionate and accountable use of these powers.

Figure 8 highlights survey responses, stratified by rank, on whether their force delivers interventions proven to work for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, which demonstrated some slight variation by role. A larger proportion of senior leaders (n = 101) disagreed (38%) compared to frontline officers (n = 313; 30%) and analysts (n = 48; 27%).

Figure 8. Surveyed police responses stratified by rank (n = 528) on whether they deliver interventions that have been proven to work specifically for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds



Two case study forces also highlighted challenges in offering targeted interventions due to pressure from partners to provide a universal offer. In Moorhaven, partners were reluctant to deliver a programme tailored for Black children, citing discomfort with the perceived exclusion of White children. Similarly, in Aldercombe, officers noted that efforts to build rapport and address perceptions of policing among children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups were met with reluctance from schools. According to the police officers, schools reportedly expressed concerns about police targeting children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and asked for a universal offer. As previously mentioned, these experiences contradict the NPCC's Anti-Racism Commitment to equitably support people from different ethnic groups.

Furthermore, staff from Moorhaven called for a new statutory duty on partners to report on efforts made to address disproportionality. Staff stated that while partners recognise disproportionality, efforts to address it remain limited due to a lack of willingness to collectively address the issue, despite the Public Sector Equality Duty. Officers emphasised formalising partners' responsibilities; however, none, except the Race Action Lead, called for a similar statutory requirement for police officers.

"Conversations happen across groups, but they [health, education, social services] don't attend disproportionality meetings. They will have meetings as part of [their] work with some officials, but the problem is that people are having conversations around this without talking to each other. It is happening in siloes and there are no clear pathways from these conversations. We don't know whose responsibility that would be to map that and do that work". – Moorhaven

However, not all partners recognise disproportionality and the need for targeted interventions, as highlighted in this section. While several officers recognised the significance of upstream prevention, some cited limited understanding and buy-in from senior leadership and partners to invest in early, targeted

interventions as a key barrier. This, therefore, suggests the need for improved knowledge and shared accountability across officer ranks and partners to address disproportionality.

Officers also pointed to difficulties in accessing and supporting children who are most at risk due to limited resources, with one officer stating:

“[There are] challenges with postcode lottery, so [we] try and focus on central consistent messaging, but [are] aware that doesn’t support equitable support for all children and young people. [We] recognise the need to deliver locally and have that nuance to level the playing field”.
– Silvermarsh

An officer from Moorhaven highlighted the need to use out-of-court disposals data, along with data on school exclusions and pupil referral units, to identify children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in need of support and ensure upstream prevention and equitable access. Furthermore, to improve the implementation of targeted interventions, experts suggested creating support for the scaling of promising practices, providing clear pathways through evaluation expertise and including equity considerations, but did not offer further details on steps to put this in place.

While the Race Action Plan (2022) and the Police Race Action Plan Maturity Matrix by the NPCC and the College of Policing exist, they are focused solely on the police’s role and holding them accountable but do not extend the same focus to partners. Staff suggest the need for national accountability among both police and partner agencies for delivery against disproportionality. This is likely to require cross-governmental support to ensure all partners adhere to the same expectations around equitable delivery and support, and to sustain priority even amid persistent capacity and resourcing constraints within both forces and partner agencies.

3.3.4 Measures taken or identified to address disparity

In identifying disproportionality in the use of stop and search and gaps in effectively supporting children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, all five forces highlighted various measures that forces have either undertaken or have identified to address this disparity:

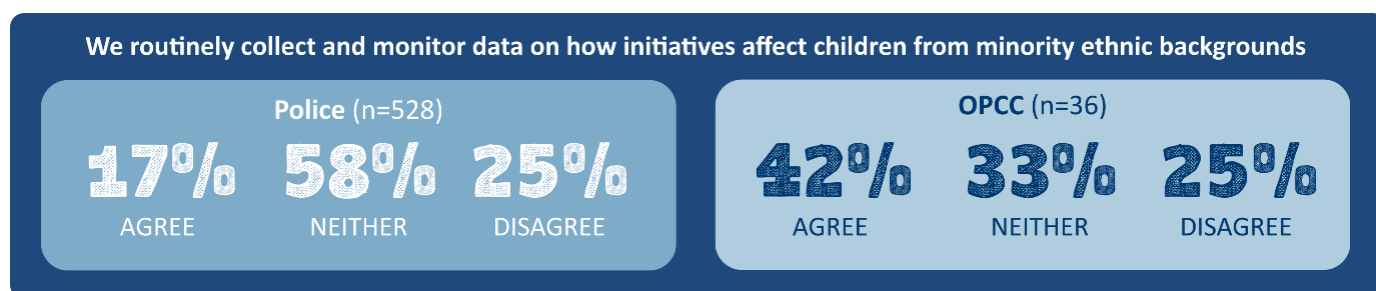
- Moorhaven: Following a stop and search, officers conduct follow-up visits to the child’s house to meet them and their parents or carers. While this was mentioned following discussions around equitable support for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, this approach was being taken for all children, irrespective of their ethnicity, with an expectation that the home visit would provide additional insights and understanding of the child’s circumstances not obtained during the initial stop and search. This approach was not suggested because children needed to explain their behaviour but rather as a chance for the officers to understand a bit more about the child’s circumstances and an opportunity to build trust and confidence.
- Across all case study forces: An Independent Scrutiny Panel, comprising members of the public and representatives from different organisations, is utilised to scrutinise and evaluate the use of stop and search by the force. Staff noted that evidence of differential treatment and bias would result in the officer being subjected to an internal conduct investigation and/or termination of duties.
- Fenhurst: Emphasis from senior officers on reviewing data to monitor representation and disproportionality and drawing on independent scrutiny and advisory groups to check for bias and differential treatment of children involved in violence.
- Silvermarsh: Reviewing body-worn footage to understand why self-defined ethnicity is not recorded.

Additionally, the forces recognised that diversion requiring the admission of guilt can disadvantage children from Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, particularly where a lack of trust in the police reduces the willingness to engage. While not specifically embedded to address disproportionality, Fenhurst and East Kenmere emphasised the importance of an independent out-of-court disposal panel – attended by police officers, YJS staff and representatives from children’s social care and education – to ensure there is a space to acknowledge disproportionality and pay special attention to Black children being brought to their notice. In doing so, the forces align with Child First principles by supporting diversion where possible, thus ensuring equitable decision-making rather than relying on police-led processes alone.

This is also corroborated by wider evidence showing that Black children are diverted less frequently than White children and that the admission of guilt requirement can limit their access to diversion. More broadly, Black children experience poorer outcomes compared to White children at multiple stages of police interactions – including arrest, diversion, charging and court processing – and are ultimately more likely to be convicted (Ofori et al., 2021; Neeraj et al., 2025). To address these challenges, recommendations include ensuring a diverse workforce, developing flexible approaches to engagement when children or families affected by violence are reluctant to participate, and providing unconscious bias training for staff (Ofori et al., 2021). However, the evidence base on unconscious bias training suggests it is most consistently effective at raising awareness rather than directly changing behaviour, and it should, therefore, be embedded within a broader organisational strategy rather than treated as a standalone intervention (Atewologun et al., 2018). Furthermore, experts advocated for independent, panel-led diversion processes to ensure equity.

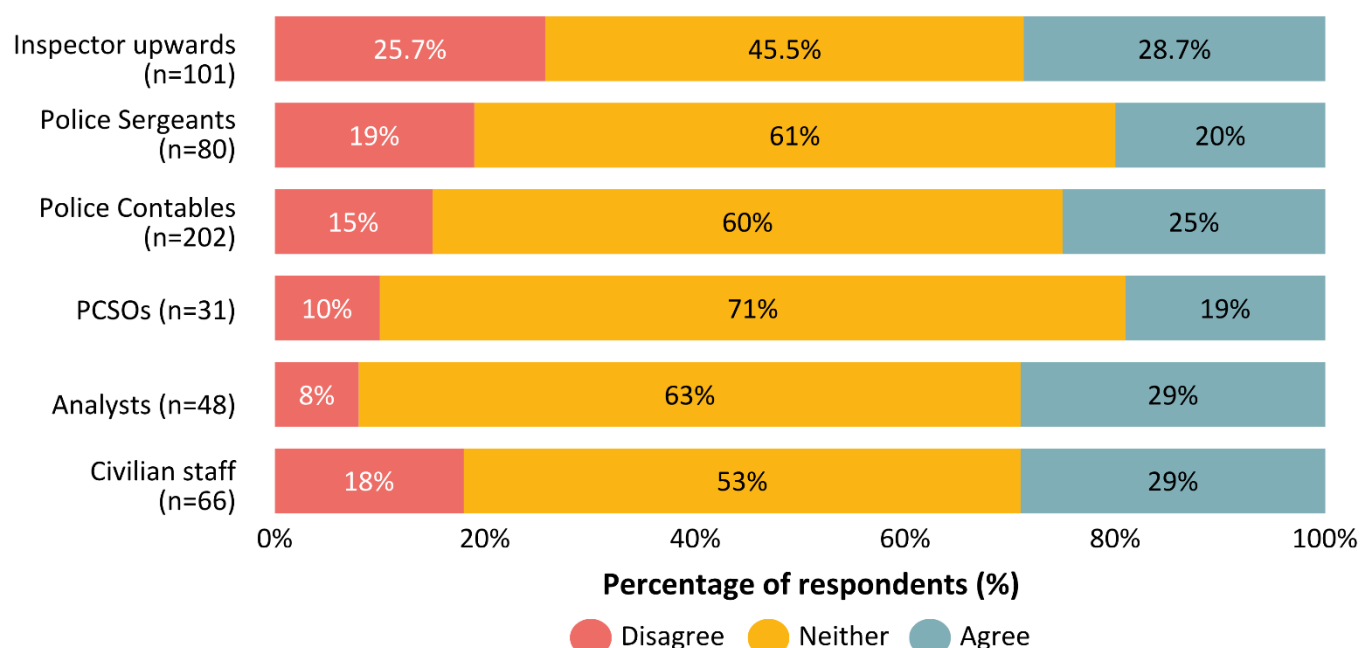
In addition to the above measures, experts highlighted that analysis of equitable delivery currently remains ad hoc and dependent on senior leaders. This was corroborated by staff in Moorhaven and reflected in the survey results (see Figure 9). Very few police respondents routinely collect and monitor data on how initiatives affect Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, indicating that these processes are not consistently embedded. Experts and staff from Moorhaven stressed the need for statutory liability to ensure forces review and report on efforts made to address disproportionality.

Figure 9. Survey responses on monitoring intervention effectiveness for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds



While forces’ views on routinely collecting and monitoring data were mixed, as shown in Figure 9, a higher proportion of OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported collecting and monitoring such data (42%) compared to police respondents (n = 528; 17%). There was little variation in these responses when stratified by rank, as shown in Figure 10. In talking about mechanisms to hold police accountable to prevent children’s involvement in violence, OPCC respondents mentioned holding performance and accountability panels where progress and crime trends are reviewed. However, limited OPCC interviews do not provide an adequate picture of how data collection and monitoring are specifically undertaken in relation to initiatives impacting children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 10. Surveyed police responses stratified by rank (n = 528) on whether they routinely collect and monitor data on how interventions affect children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds



3.4 The extent and influence of funding



Although information detailing the extent of funding available – specifically from the Home Office and OPCCs – was limited across the rapid review and case study forces, and surveyed respondents noted several key challenges with current funding approaches. This section examines four themes: (1) structure and sources, (2) timelines and duration, (3) centralised priorities and (4) performance and administrative requirements.

3.4.1 Structure and sources

All case study forces referenced EBP funding received from the Home Office and, to a lesser extent, OPCCs and VRUs. Experts described the funding landscape as comprising (1) mayoral or OPCC-controlled grants and (2) central government grants.

Moorhaven commented that problem-oriented programmes are being funded via the OPCC and local authorities, where local decisions are made over distribution. Aldercombe also described getting less Home Office funding because of relatively low crime rates in its area and increasingly creative approaches to seeking funding, including via local businesses and charities. Aldercombe, Fenhurst and Moorhaven all confirmed they had received funding from the Home Office via the Hot Spot Response Fund.

Home Office funding for hot spot policing.

Initially, the Home Office funded Surge in 2019, which included £63.4 million allocated to 18 police force areas hit the hardest by serious violence to fund Surge operational activity, including increased patrols (Home Office, 2020). In 2021, this was replaced by Grip, which included two new forces (Cleveland and Humberside) due to growing concerns around increased rates of violence (Home Office, 2025b). This was subsequently expanded to all 43 police forces through the Grip programme to target antisocial behaviour (Home Office, 2025b). Most recently, the Home Office has provided £66.3 million for the Hot Spot Action Fund in 2025–26 to tackle anti-social behaviour and knife crime (UK Parliament, 2025).

3.4.2 Timelines and duration

All case study forces identified the timing and duration of funding as a major issue. Short-term funding cycles – typically for one year only – were described by a senior leader as “*absolute carnage*” and widely perceived as hindering the mobilisation, implementation, evaluation and sustainability of EBP initiatives. Similarly, 50% of OPCC survey respondents (n = 36) identified short-term funding as a key barrier to delivering research-based practices. Short notification periods for funding decisions were also widely criticised.

“We found out in February last year about the allocation [of funding], and none of our interventions started until October, and you miss the summer period [when it’s easier and more effective to reach children]. We need earlier notice and multi-year funding”. – Moorhaven

Wider follow-on complications related to short funding cycles were noted. For example, managing recruitment and workforce capacity issues, rather than actual delivery, accounted for a significant proportion of the funded intervention periods. Silvermarsh highlighted a force-wide 90-day redeployment/onboarding period, which slows down their ability to staff new interventions and limits the delivery window, especially for one-year funded interventions; and East Kenmere described the difficulties of recruiting specialist roles (e.g. analysts), with short-term employment contracts deterring qualified candidates, not supporting sufficient induction and training periods, and limiting continuity. Aldercombe also noted common delays in disbursement, again hindering delivery. As a result, compressed timelines for actual delivery were seen to reduce impact and incentivise watered-down or business-as-usual approaches over EBP.

Several forces (Fenhurst, East Kenmere and Moorhaven) questioned the expectation that initiatives be absorbed into business-as-usual when short-term funding ends without ongoing resources available. Experts reflected that short-term funding cycles make it difficult for both the government to plan for long-term change, and for forces to implement change.

“If you want to deliver within that four-month funding period, then you are bound by the responses that are delivered the quickest, whereas actually the best response in terms of outcomes for these young people or local area might be something that takes three to four months to plan and is delivered over 12 months”. – Moorhaven

3.4.3 Centralised priorities

Another major funding-related challenge across most forces – also cited by experts – was the perception that funding remains top-down and politically driven, rather than responsive to local need (Aldercombe, East Kenmere and Moorhaven). National priorities were seen to direct local activity, which sometimes contradicted locally identified data, context or strategic priorities. There also appeared to be variation in the extent to which forces could flex or reallocate funding to better align with local requirements, and shifting national priorities could lead to inconsistent, fragmented delivery on the ground.

“The risk is [that] it’s just old work packaged in a new way, a possibly saturated response and may not be specific enough to our local context ... For example, the Safer Streets initiative focus on town centres – [the] Home Office prescribed which areas were targeted – but when we looked at internal data, some of these areas didn’t seem like a local priority (some of them didn’t even accurately match up to our policing areas) so this meant a focus on some pointless areas as per Home Office direction”. – Fenhurst

“‘Initiative-itus’, jumping from one issue to another; [a] common problem – police [are] often left confused about strategic direction and just follow funding”. – Expert

3.4.4 Performance and administrative requirements

Some case study forces and experts noted challenges related to the requirements typically attached to funding. Many raised concerns about a perceived overemphasis on box-ticking, compliance and short-term performance metrics (e.g. overtime, patrols and arrests).

“Pressure from [the] Home Office to ‘count stuff rather than do stuff’ makes it difficult for police. Performance frameworks can be harmful. What’s being counted at the government level influences what’s valued within forces”. – Expert

“The risk is that we may hit the targets but miss the point”. – Fenhurst

On the other hand, several senior leaders across the case study forces reflected that external funding often operates as a strategic lever supporting the promotion of EBP in policing, rather than just a financial resource. This helps to both (a) increase the overall focus on a particular issue or initiative and (b) ensure that monitoring and evaluation processes are embedded as part of an initiative. For example, funding from the Home Office or VRU/PCCs was perceived to increase the likelihood that analyst resources would be allocated to an initiative.

“It also probably has more influence, i.e. ‘this is a Home Office initiative’, so we’ve got deadlines; it’s not an option not to do it”. – Fenhurst

Finally, some case study forces (Silvermarsh and East Kenmere) reported that the scale of administrative and reporting requirements for funding was often so burdensome that it discouraged them from applying altogether. While we acknowledge that most funding streams cannot easily be extended beyond one year, streamlining and standardising government processes could support better force-level planning and delivery.

3.5 Culture and understanding of evidence-based practice



This section explores findings on the culture and understanding of EBP within forces, via two main themes: (1) stated appetite and understanding of EBP and (2) knowledge and buy-in.

3.5.1 Stated appetite and understanding of evidence-based practice

All case study forces initially expressed broad support for, and openness to, EBP in principle. Survey findings further confirmed these positive perceptions. For example, 75% of frontline officers (n = 313) agreed that using research evidence to inform decision making and practice is important. 71% also agreed that using research evidence improves the effectiveness of the police’s work with children (n = 313). Similarly, 81% of senior leaders agreed that it’s important for their teams to apply research evidence (n = 101), as did 97% of OPCCs (n = 36). In other words, general enthusiasm about understanding what works was common among forces and commissioners alike.

“Massive appetite: EBP has been pushed for a long time”. – East Kenmere

However, in practice, this stated appetite appeared to overstate the depth of knowledge and cultural buy-in for EBP, as explored in more detail below, and aligns with wider findings about the growing awareness of EBP in policing, but the persistently low levels of acceptance and uptake (Lumsden, 2017; Heyer, 2022).

“No consistency in [the] adoption of EBP in the police force at all”. – Moorhaven

“Overall, positive, but don’t think the agenda is hugely pushed. There needs to be more of a focus at the senior level”. – Fenhurst

“Feel like there is a culture of police officers just ticking boxes, including the Senior Leadership Team, when it comes to analysis”. – Fenhurst

“There is more literacy and questioning around EBP at the executive level – but still see a bit of knee-jerking – no questioning around data and assumptions. Some people naturally get numbers, but not many”. – East Kenmere

Officers’ understanding of EBP varied considerably across all five case study forces, with most unable to clearly define EBP. It was frequently conflated with problem-solving, intelligence, basic performance indicators (e.g. demand trends and number of arrests) and other business-as-usual activities, and some frontline officers interpreted EBP as the case-level evidence gathered for prosecution. This lack of consensus across all forces demonstrated typically limited or surface-level knowledge about EBP, as applied to reducing children’s involvement in violence and also more generally.

3.5.2 Knowledge and buy-in

All case study forces acknowledged that EBP-related knowledge and buy-in are uneven across ranks, roles and teams within their forces, with a consensus that it tends to be concentrated in senior ranks and in analytical or neighbourhood teams and prevention-focused roles, rather than in frontline or response roles. This aligns with wider research showing that EBP awareness tends to be higher at more senior ranks, increasing from frontline officers to supervisors and senior leaders (Hope, 2024), and perceptions from junior staff that EBP is primarily a senior-level or national priority, rather than something relevant to them (Hunter & May, 2020).

“People who look at trends and patterns of crime are typically sergeants, inspectors, etc.; this is not at our level [frontline]”. – East Kenmere

However, this delineation likely oversimplifies the levels of knowledge and buy-in that also vary across ranks and teams. Some forces (Fenhurst and Silvermarsh) flagged that a sampling bias likely resulted in leaders with less positive views not contributing to this project and noted that some leaders engage with EBP as a *tick-box exercise*, or as a way to cut down the list of potential interventions to fund to help decision making, rather than engaging in what the evidence says. Survey findings reinforced that a substantial minority of senior leaders did not perceive meaningful engagement with EBP, with only 62% agreeing that their force was responsive to best practice (n = 101). This dynamic was also evident in complaints that EBP is often seen and used as a marker of legitimacy, without officers and staff (across ranks) engaging critically with EBP or meaningfully shaping practice.

“Staff are often more receptive to trainings/information/initiatives that are ‘based on research’. They don’t necessarily want to know the specific research-related details but feel reassured by that as a seal of approval”. – Fenhurst

Additionally, officers across the case study forces and experts noted that buy-in around EBP remains personality-driven and reliant on individuals with a strong personal interest and a high level of understanding. An individual’s exposure to EBP and research was therefore seen as important, with examples of engaged staff often including officers who had completed degrees as part of their recruitment to the police (e.g. PC Degree Apprenticeship) and staff who have been supported to conduct Master’s or PhD research as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). This aligns with wider research that newer recruits exposed to EBP through formal training routes are more likely to recognise and understand it (Pepper et al., 2024). But without this kind of EBP-specific literacy, forces reflected that the evidence base remains difficult for most staff to interpret and apply.

“The force lacks maturity around understanding EBP – there’s a disconnect between understanding some of the principles in theory and actually applying it in practice. The basics (for example, SARA) people feel relatively confident on, but wider things around EBP can feel too academic, and that puts people off”. – Fenhurst

As such, EBP knowledge and buy-in vary both within and across ranks, roles and teams, rather than just a divide between strategic/prevention and frontline teams or between senior and junior ranks.

Culturally, there was also a consensus across case study forces that the police value and prioritise doing and reactivity, characterised by responding to immediate incidents rather than prioritising longer-term prevention or impact. Officers referred to a fast-paced, action-oriented environment where being a doer is valued. However, within this context, EBP was often perceived by case study forces as time-intensive and unrealistic under operational pressures, particularly for frontline response officers (East Kenmere and Silvermarsh).

“I think the culture in policing has always been a bit ‘shoot things out of a cannon, just keep doing’ – [EBP] needs infrastructure and [resources] over time, and is a slow process”. – Fenhurst

Although this perception was widely reported across case study forces, it likely reflects how EBP is currently understood and operationalised by police, rather than an inherent limitation of EBP. In principle, EBP can also inform in-the-moment decision-making (e.g. through embedded guidance, tools or training), but these applications appeared less developed or visible across case study forces.

This aligns with wider research, which notes that many officers see policing as a blue-collar occupation rooted in practice and delivery, rather than as a professionalised service grounded in academic knowledge (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). As such, officers may be especially sceptical of its relevance and applicability (Fleming, 2018; Fleming & Rhodes, 2018) and judge EBP as a way of devaluing professional judgement and local knowledge (Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024), despite EBP explicitly incorporating these forms of expertise alongside research evidence. This orientation is reinforced by a strong emphasis on on-the-job decision-making and learning, which can further discourage the integration of research evidence into daily practice (Sidebottom et al., 2020; Bullock et al., 2022a). Many forces also commented on the pressure on police to be reactive and the ongoing difficulties in balancing responsiveness and EBP-led approaches. These findings highlight a tension between the pace and demands of operational policing versus the perceived time and effort required to engage with EBP.

Within this context, several case study forces (Aldercombe and Silvermarsh) and OPCC survey respondents emphasised that EBP should be proportionate to the issue at hand, expressing that resistance to research is often due to it being:

- Perceived as overly academic.
- Detached from operational realities and local context.
- Too slow to inform fast-paced decision-making.

Wider literature also indicates that many police officers view academic knowledge as overly theoretical or insufficiently practical to complement operational priorities (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018; Bullock et al., 2022; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). Some surveyed respondents cited similar concerns through open text responses, for example:

“Research is difficult to implement when it clashes with real-world policing”. –Surveyed police respondent.

“Research is too theoretical and wishy washy”. – Surveyed police respondent.

“Some academic [research] is not always practical to implement. What works in research doesn’t always translate into practice, and one solution will work for some but not all”. – Surveyed police respondent.

Rather than rejecting research outright, Silvermarsh advocated for a pragmatic balance: Research that is operationally relevant and methods that are sufficiently robust while remaining feasible in a policing-specific context – in other words, support for good-enough EBP approaches.

These views align with wider critiques in the literature that academic research should account for professional subjectivity and contextual experience, with calls to move beyond gold-standard approaches, such as randomised controlled trials (Lumsden, 2017; Lumsden & Goode, 2018), though this does not preclude the use of robust methods alongside professional judgement and local context where appropriate.

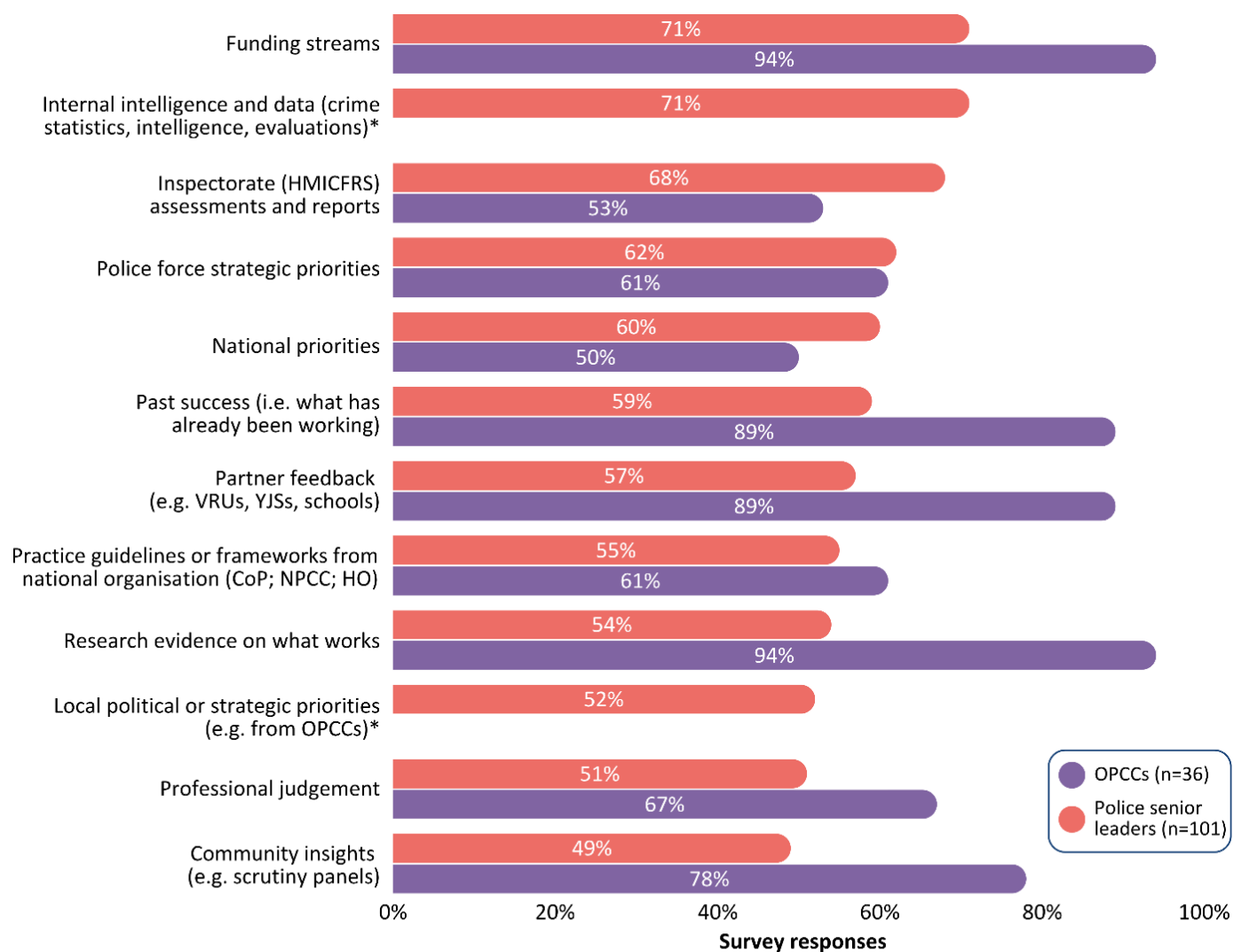
3.6 How forces know what works and make decisions



This section explores how police forces currently engage with a range of sources that typically inform knowledge and decision-making about what works for reducing children’s involvement in violence and how that engagement sits alongside existing evaluation practices. This section includes the following seven themes that explore (1) internal intelligence and data sources, (2) professional judgement, (3) feedback from local partners, (4) external evidence sources, (5) cross-force learning, (6) existing monitoring and evaluation practices and (7) the role of universities and academic partners.

Overall, there were discrepancies in stakeholders’ emphasis on different knowledge sources, as shown in Figure 11. Surveyed senior leaders typically prioritised internally generated insights, whereas OPCC respondents prioritised more formal, external insights (such as research evidence and learning from previous interventions). These findings reflect a tension between operational decision-making and evidence-informed approaches.

Figure 11. Senior leaders' and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's survey responses on the following categories being essential or very important when making decisions about initiatives to reduce children's involvement in violence



* These categories were not included in the OPCC survey.

Decision-making influences are ordered by the number of responses from police senior leaders, from most to least. Within the police survey, only senior leaders (Inspector upwards) were asked to answer these questions.

Case study forces and experts reinforced this distinction, noting that although data-driven decision-making is routine across forces, the systematic use of research evidence remains far less embedded, especially beyond large-scale initiatives. Further, decision-making was also strongly shaped by broader strategic drivers – particularly funding streams (see section 3.4 above), inspectorate (HMICFRS) assessments and reports, and national priorities – with findings from case study forces and surveys indicating that these sources play a major role in shaping priorities.

3.6.1 Internal intelligence and data

Internal intelligence and data were consistently described as a primary source for informing knowledge and decisions across all case study forces, as well as by 51% of surveyed police respondents (n = 528) and 81% of surveyed OPCC respondents (n = 36). Similarly, 71% of senior leaders (n = 101) rated internal intelligence and data as essential/very important sources influencing decisions (as shown in Figure 11 above). These data included performance statistics, intelligence products and insights from self-service dashboards. Demand and crime trends represented a common approach to understanding issues and guiding priorities.

“We’re a very intel-driven force; this is a key source of information”. – Fenhurst

“Police data is the main source – trends and crime data over months/years”. – East Kenmere

Although this approach was typically framed by case study forces as enabling responsiveness to emerging trends, it may risk reinforcing more reactive, incident-led responses. For example, spikes in specific crime types (particularly in the short or medium term) appeared to prompt targeted interventions that were not always situated within an EBP approach.

3.6.2 Professional judgement

The importance of internal briefings, specialist units and on-the-job insights was widely emphasised by case study forces, with professional judgement both directly and indirectly noted as essential to police practice. Furthermore, 51% of surveyed senior leaders (n = 101) said professional judgement was essential/very important when making informed decisions (see Figure 11 above). While 59% cited past success (i.e. what has already been working) as essential/very important, the parameters for what was deemed a success were not specified in this question, meaning these insights may come from both formal evaluation and anecdotal claims. Additionally, while it is likely that professional judgement operated as a filtering mechanism through which internal intelligence and police data were understood and prioritised, case study forces did not explicitly speak about how professional judgement in this context operated in practice. Overall, this aligns with research literature highlighting that experiential learning and advice from colleagues remain central to police decision-making, with some officers placing greater value on tacit knowledge than research evidence (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024).

3.6.3 Feedback from local partners

Case study forces often referred to the benefits of feedback from local partners in supporting decisions to reduce children’s involvement in violence. Typically, this included all information shared by agencies such as local authorities, health, education and YJSs and was used by police to supplement internal data, usually either for a wider local context on trends and priorities or for insights into individual-level cases. Similarly, 57% of surveyed senior leaders (n = 101) and 89% of OPCCs (n = 36) reported partner feedback as essential or very important.

Often discussed in relation to partner feedback, many case study forces also highlighted wider community feedback as an important data source, with community engagement activities (e.g. consultations, community meetings, advisory groups and listening exercises) informing knowledge of locally specific concerns. Aldercombe made the link that, given taxpayer funding is the highest contributor to force functions, public priorities are important in shaping decision-making. East Kenmere referenced isolated instances of co-produced work with communities and young people helping to shape decision-making (e.g. around knife crime interventions). Similarly, 49% of senior leaders (n = 101) stated community insights (such as scrutiny panels) were essential or very important when making informed decisions about reducing children’s involvement in violence (see Figure 11 above).

3.6.4 External evidence sources

Overall, survey findings highlighted the relatively low engagement with external research evidence among police respondents (see Figure 12), with engagement rates across different roles detailed in Figures 13, 14 and 15 below. In comparison, there was much higher engagement with external research evidence by OPCC respondents (again, see Figure 12), underscoring their important role in bridging the gap between research and operational practice.

Figure 12. Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner responses on finding and using research evidence

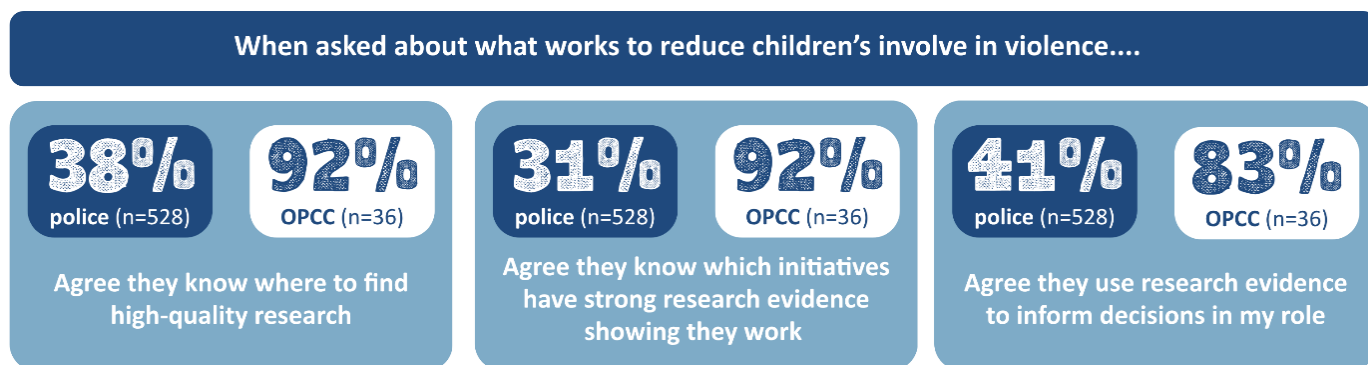


Figure 13. Police responses to: I know where to find high-quality research about what works to reduce children's involvement in violence

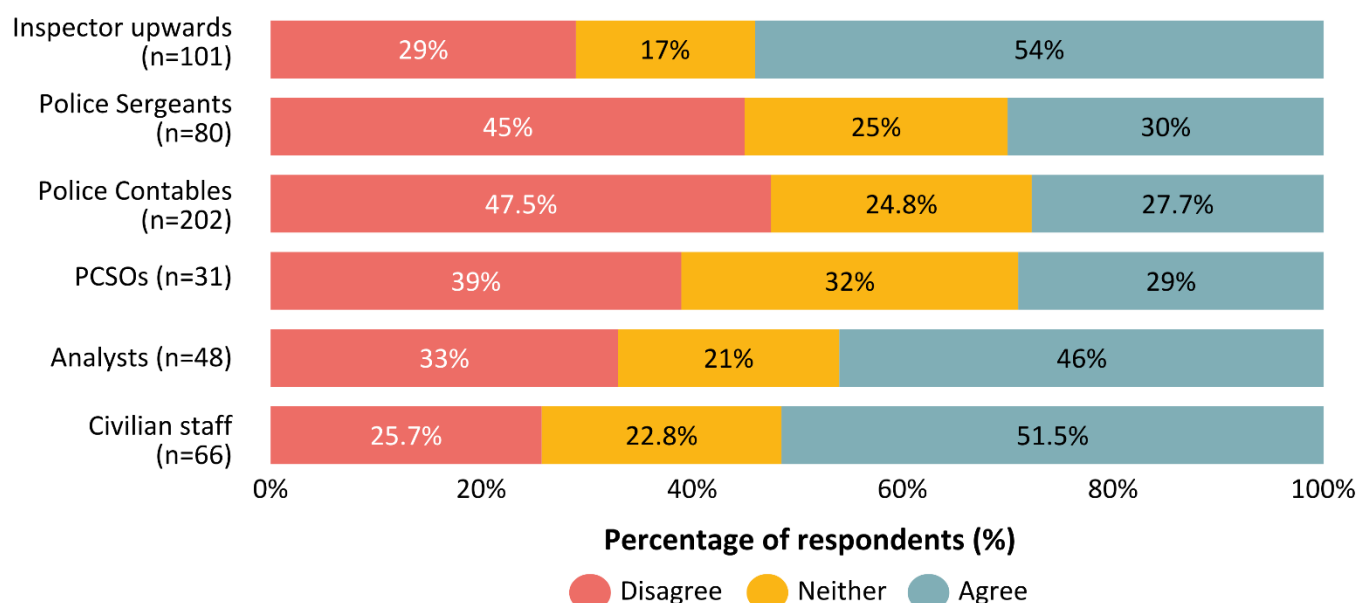


Figure 14. Police responses to: I know which initiatives have strong research evidence showing they work to reduce children's involvement in violence

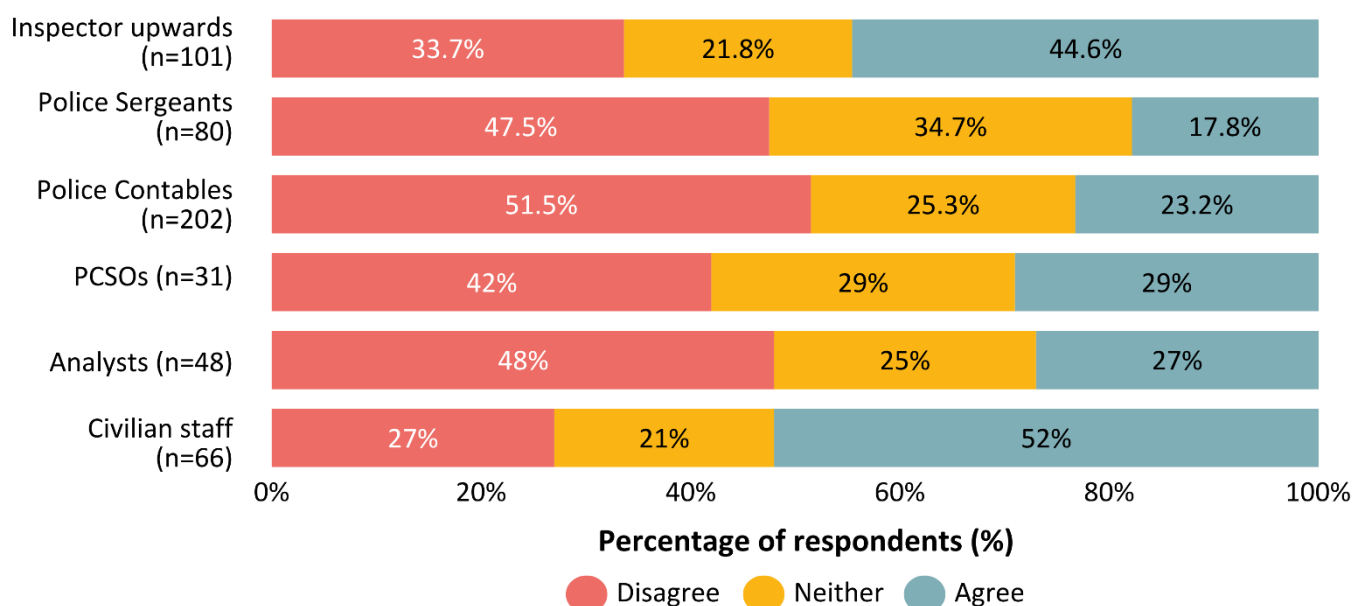
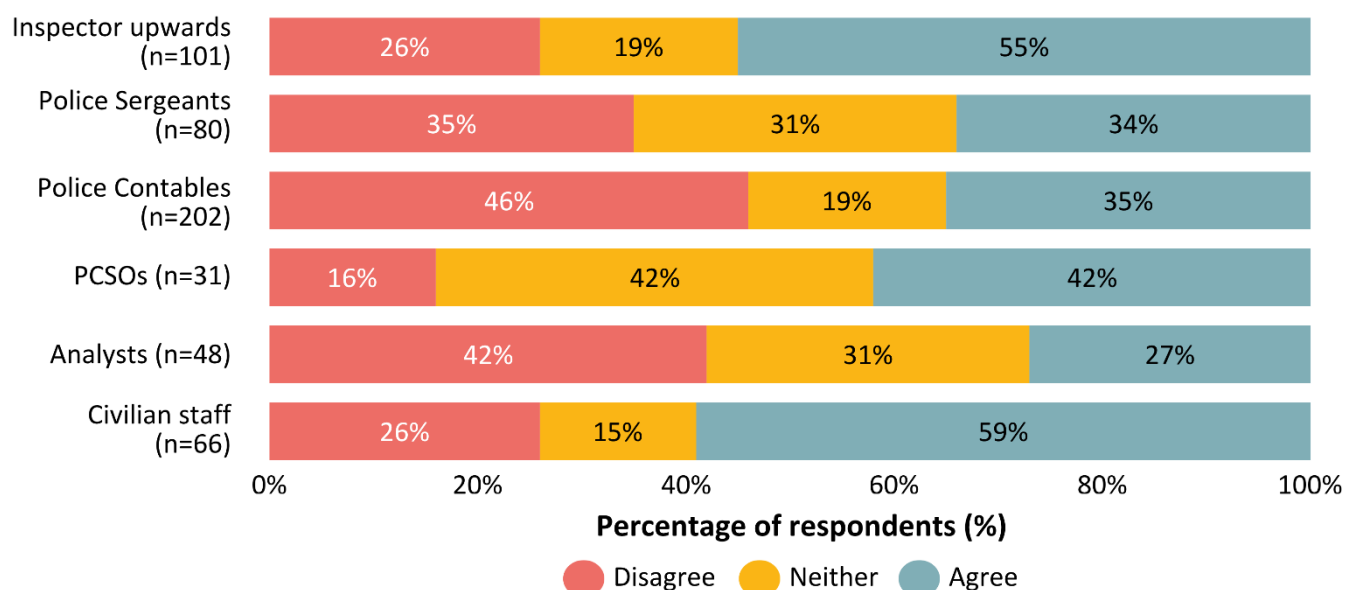


Figure 15. Police responses to: I use research evidence on reducing children’s involvement in violence to inform decision-making



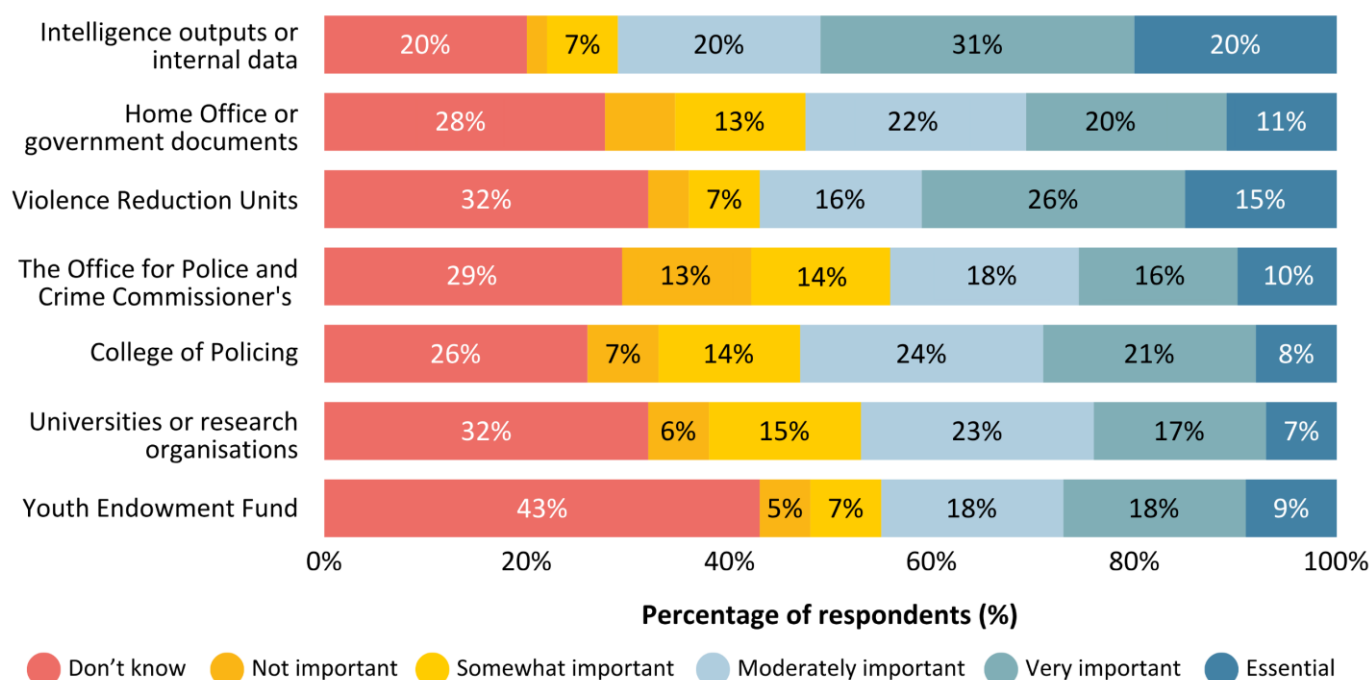
There was also a lack of consistency across and within case study forces when asked about external sources that might inform decision-making. External evidence sources – including academic research, evaluations, national guidance or resources (e.g. from the College of Policing, the Society of Evidence-Based Policing, the YEF, NPCC and Home Office), toolkits and inspection reports – were generally known about across all case study forces but not routinely or meaningfully incorporated into force knowledge or decision making.

“Definitely not using [this type] of information day-to-day. Typically, [it’s] only used in large-scale initiatives, for big problems or when we get to [the] point [where] we’ve tried everything”. – Fenhurst

Survey findings further reinforced these messages. As shown in Figure 16 below, only a relatively small proportion of surveyed police respondents rated sources such as the College of Policing, the YEF and university or research organisations as important (i.e. essential/very important) for influencing decisions around which interventions should be delivered to reduce children from being involved in violence, and a considerable proportion said they didn’t know about these sources. There was also variation in responses by rank, as detailed in the [appendix 1](#). For example, frontline officers reported a higher proportion of ‘don’t know’ than senior leaders and analysts, indicating lower visibility of and engagement with external evidence among frontline teams. Furthermore, open-text responses to the survey suggested that some respondents did not know where to look for relevant evidence, stating that they found searching for external sources a key barrier.

“There are so many sources and often differing interpretations of what the research is saying that clarity on what, and how, to implement can be tricky to navigate”. – Surveyed police respondent

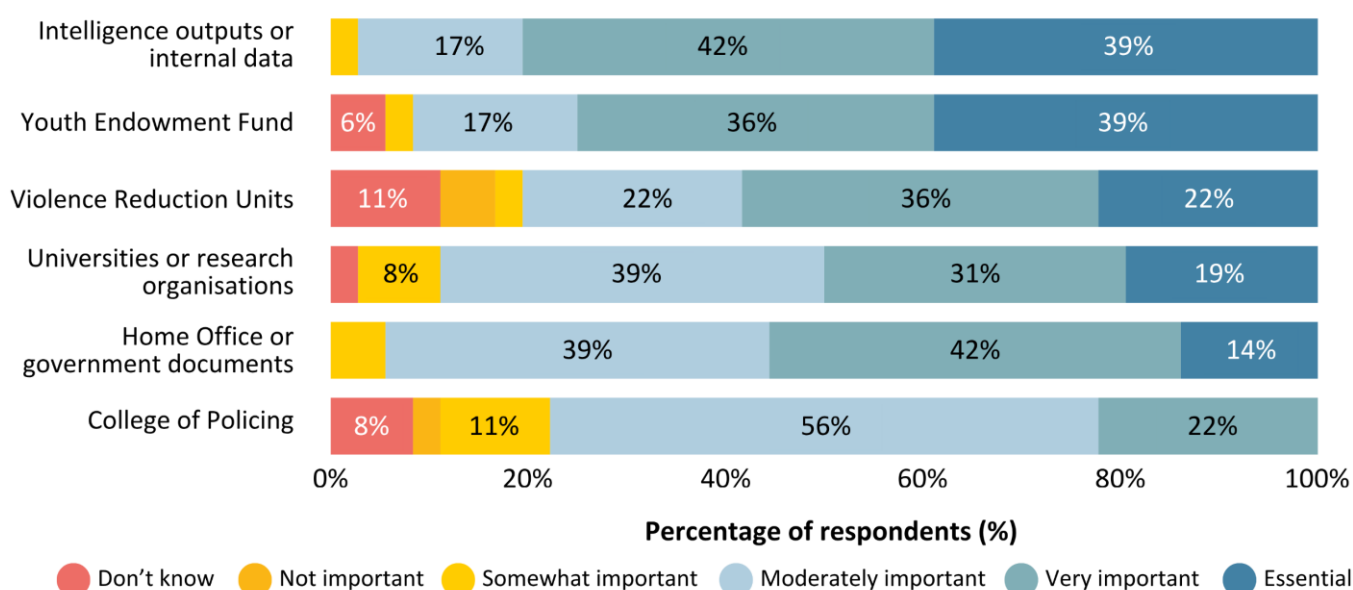
Figure 16. Police responses on how important the following sources have been in influencing interventions to reduce children’s involvement in violence



These findings align with wider research that suggests police officers frequently report difficulties in locating, understanding and applying research evidence (Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). As such, despite a substantial expansion of EBP resources over the past 15 years, meaningful uptake remains limited.

In comparison, Figure 17 shows that a relatively high proportion of surveyed OPCC respondents rated sources such as the College of Policing, the YEF and university or research organisations as important (i.e. essential/very important) for influencing decisions around which interventions should be delivered to reduce children from being involved in violence, with only a very small proportion who said they didn’t know about these sources.

Figure 17. Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner survey responses on how important the following sources have been in influencing interventions to reduce children’s involvement in violence



As noted, OPCCs represent an important mechanism for helping to bridge this gap between operational practice and the use of external evidence sources. As further highlighted in Table 12 and Table 13, survey findings indicated that OPCCs reported not only engaging with research evidence but also embedding it within core functions, such as priority setting, programme review and partnership working. As such, OPCCs generally appear well-positioned to champion EBP, but their ability to fully operationalise this is reportedly hindered by significant resourcing limitations.

Table 12. Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) responses to the following statements about evidence-based practice

OPCC and Mayoral Functions (n = 36)	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %
We stop or change initiatives if the research evidence shows they are not working or harmful.	78%	19%	3%
My organisation is responsive to best practice.	83%	14%	3%
We routinely review youth violence prevention activities.	81%	11%	8%
We use data intelligence to inform decision-making around what works.	72%	19%	8%
Senior decisions are informed by the best available research evidence.	72%	22%	6%
We have the necessary training on what works.	61%	17%	22%
We have the time and resources to plan research-informed initiatives.	28%	30%	42%
We use research evidence when setting priorities in policing and crime plans.	72%	22%	6%

Table 13. Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner responses to the following statements around evidence-based practice

In the past 12 months, has your office ... (n = 36)	Yes	No (not in the last year)	Don't know
Shared learnings internally to inform future practice.	89%	8%	3%
Provided monitoring data to operational leads.	78%	11%	11%
Partnered with a research organisation.	72%	25%	3%

3.6.5 Cross-force learning

Cross-force learning was referenced by most case study forces. In practice, this involved sharing case study examples and lessons learned from relevant new initiatives (either across specific forces or nationally), participating in policing conferences and engaging in ongoing benchmarking practices. However, the reported frequency and the perceived value were mixed. For example, there were more negative views expressed in East Kenmore and more positive views expressed in Aldercombe. Both the case study forces and the police survey highlighted that cross-force learning is viewed particularly negatively when interventions developed in other forces are recommended or adopted without sufficient responsiveness to local crime patterns, geography or wider community dynamics, especially when such interventions are perceived as London-centric. Silvermarsh reported similar challenges within the force, noting different areas

have their own local needs, meaning force-wide interventions also require tailoring and separate evaluations.

“But every area is different, so [it] doesn’t always resonate; just because it’s worked in another area, doesn’t mean it’ll work in our area”. – East Kenmere

This finding reflects a perception among case study forces that interventions developed elsewhere may lack local relevance. While this emphasis on responsiveness and tailoring highlights the importance of context-specific approaches, it may also indicate some scepticism towards the transferability of insights from other forces and towards EBP more broadly. This appears to be a key reason why cross-force learning is somewhat limited and may reflect ongoing tensions between locally responsive interventions and the perceived applicability of generalisable evidence-based approaches. Reliance on individual, informal relationships was another factor that limited cross-force learning (as noted by Fenhurst). However, formal structures such as problem-solving conferences³ and the Tilley Awards⁴ were occasionally noted across most case study forces. Experts similarly acknowledged the uneven nature of sharing good practice at a national level.

Finally, one case study force (Aldercombe) also reflected that inspections are a missed opportunity for sharing best practice and information about which areas are piloting new interventions.

3.6.6 Existing monitoring and evaluation practices

Overall, there was limited evidence of structured or robust monitoring and evaluation lifecycles in current practice across all forces.

For example, analyst roles were not typically described as being designed to support EBP monitoring or evaluation, with limited resources available for this purpose. Instead, analysts were largely focused on performance monitoring and data intelligence. Only 40% of surveyed analysts (n = 48) reported providing monitoring data to operational leads in the past 12 months. Some forces (Fenhurst and Moorhaven) commented on the often-varied skillsets across analysts (e.g. related to statistical analysis and understanding of the EBP literature). These variations were perceived by some (especially analysts) as being intensified by inconsistent training pathways, limited opportunities for structured upskilling and a lack of standardised role expectations or recruitment requirements. Additional resources for upskilling analysts and recruiting additional analysts (especially those with EBP-relevant expertise) would help equip them to better support evaluations.

“Jack of all trades, pushing work around to deliver, rather than playing to individual strengths and delivering specialist products”. Fenhurst

These structural and capacity constraints appeared to have shaped how and when analysts were involved in initiatives. There was consensus that analysts were rarely positioned to inform strategic decisions about which initiatives to fund, implement or discontinue. In fact, only 23% of surveyed analysts (n = 48) agreed that their analyses had been used to inform the start, stop, scale-up or adaptation of an approach. Aldercombe and Fenhurst also noted a key issue around analysts often only being included in initiatives late in the process – if at all – reducing their ability to advise on and embed appropriate monitoring and evaluation methods. As one analyst described it:

³ For example, the [National Problem Solving Conference](#) aims to explore, share and celebrate problem-solving initiatives and knowledge with the police and partners at a local, regional and national level.

⁴ The Tilley Awards celebrate problem-oriented projects that have achieved measurable success in resolving issues relevant to the police. By formally recognising good practice, the awards aim to increase the profile of problem-solving in the UK.

“We’re not kept in the loop about initiatives; [we’re] not involved from the start – requests for our support come later, we play catch-up, [and] at that point, it can be a bit unclear how we can help. Tends to be more of, ‘Let’s start a project and involve analysts later’. This is really frustrating”! – Fenhurst

While earlier involvement of analysts can strengthen intervention design and evaluation, they face competing demands and variable levels of experience and expertise, meaning their contribution to EBP is inconsistent within and across forces. Clarifying expectations of the analytical function and strengthening capabilities may improve their impact.

In forces with a VRU structure, analytical support for research and evaluation typically sits within those units.⁵ This aligns with the grant agreements for VRUs, which specify that each VRU must have a specified data or evaluation lead to support evaluation processes (Home Office, 2024). In Moorhaven, some roles were described as having an explicit EBP focus, though a significant portion of their role was limited to supporting neighbourhood teams with problem-solving plans.

Most case study forces noted that monitoring and evaluation activities are hindered by police *“marking our own homework”*. This phrase was used by East Kenmere, Fenhurst and Silvermarsh alike, with several senior and strategic staff reflecting on the need for specialist support and critical friend oversight to provide guidance on monitoring and evaluation practices. In saying that, survey findings indicated that 92% of OPCC respondents had used data or research to hold the police to account for their performance on violence prevention (n = 36).

Several specific methodological limitations in existing practice were noted by surveyed respondents and case study police forces. These included:

- **Weak evaluation design.** Research questions – and the theory of change or logic models – are not used or clearly defined from the outset of an initiative.
- **Poor measurement frameworks.** Baseline data are not adequately captured, there is over-reliance on blunt monitoring and outcome measures (i.e. basic performance indicators using internal data, as noted above), and potential displacement effects are overlooked.
- **Limited ability to attribute impact.** There is a lack of control or appropriate comparison groups. The survey findings also strongly highlighted this issue, with only 2% of analysts (n = 48) saying that they had tested the outcomes for an activity against an unaffected comparison in the last 12 months. An additional issue was not accounting for potentially confounding variables, especially the myriad other initiatives running at any given time within each force.

“It’s really difficult to isolate which part of police response (e.g. YJS referrals, support packages in schools, knife crime initiatives, hot spots policing, etc.) may be contributing to positive outcomes. We aren’t able to look at these initiatives in isolation”. – Fenhurst

- **Short-term focus.** A lack of longitudinal analysis and relatively short-term follow-up periods, despite Fenhurst and Moorhaven noting concerns that meaningful changes in children’s outcomes often become visible only over longer timeframes.

Instead, several forces (Aldercombe, Fenhurst and Moorhaven) – especially neighbourhood officers and officers in prevention-focused roles – placed considerable value on case-level anecdotes as evidence of what

⁵ Only 20 forces have a VRU as part of the [Serious Violence Fund](#) (Home Office, 2024).

works for reducing children's involvement in violence. Examples included improved school attendance (Silvermarsh), less harmful drug use (Fenhurst) and general reflections on children's attitudinal changes or how they were spending their time. These individual-level changes were often interpreted as signs of an initiative's success – even where aggregate data suggested no overall impact (i.e. Silvermarsh). While this may reflect attempts to capture nuanced outcomes and plays an important role in storytelling to supplement quantitative statistics or capacity constraints for more formalised evaluation, relying on anecdotal data may risk overstating an initiative's effectiveness.

More broadly, some forces (East Kenmere and Silvermarsh) reflected on cultural pressures that inadvertently position monitoring and evaluation activities as a means of proving success rather than robustly testing impact. Some staff in strategic and analytic roles noted a limited appetite for openly reflecting on what has worked less well or not as intended, as well as some resistance to engaging with analytical or practical complexity. In turn, this may mean initiatives are discontinued without identifying or embedding relevant learning. An officer from Silvermarsh highlighted that often, interventions that have been stopped are not further interrogated to see what learning could be taken to support future intervention design and delivery, with an emphasis on starting again rather than building on previous ideas and innovations.

Similarly, the survey findings indicated that initiatives are not typically changed or stopped when research evidence shows they are not working for, or are even harmful to, children. Only 34% of frontline officers (n = 313), 50% of senior leaders (n = 101) and 47% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) agreed that this happens. Furthermore, when senior leaders (n = 101) were asked whether they had made a decision to change or stop an approach based on research evidence in the past year, only 38% reported yes, and 46% said no or not in the last year and 16% said they didn't know.

“Police don't have that culture, they say they do but won't admit it's not worked, or we learnt from this”. – Silvermarsh

“[We're almost] doomed to succeed because we often only really measure the bits that we know are doing well”. – East Kenmere

“There is [a] very low appetite from senior leadership teams for complexity”. – Fenhurst

Most forces (Aldercombe, East Kenmere, Fenhurst and Silvermarsh) reflected that innovative, reportedly evidence-based initiatives are often used to demonstrate leadership potential and support promotion, even when their evidential basis is overstated or selectively presented. Internal politics around promotion and careerism – factors influencing which forms of research evidence are prioritised and acted upon – are similarly noted in the wider research literature (e.g. Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). Several experts and officers suggested that promotion and progression criteria could instead be leveraged to incentivise genuine engagement with evidence-informed practice, rather than this potentially performative use.

“Projects/initiatives driven by people looking for the next promotion suffer [the] same short-term[ism] as the government”. – East Kenmere

Other officers reflected that the emphasis on rapid delivery often results in the implementation of an initiative without a suitable assessment, with a tendency to pursue shiny and innovative initiatives without fully considering or testing their potential impact.

“We're problem solvers, [our] desire is to fix stuff quickly”. – Aldercombe

“Cops have a let’s do it, let’s get on with it, bull in a china shop mentality ...[the] police have an inbuilt anxiety to just DO [it]; if [you don’t,] ~~not~~ you’re held to account ... this can be good but needs to be balanced with more of an EBP lens”. – East Kenmere

3.6.7 The role of universities and research partners

Views on collaboration with universities were mixed across case study forces. While some (e.g. Moorhaven and East Kenmere) reported relationships with local universities, the existing relationships we heard about were typically informal and dependent on individual contacts rather than embedded organisational partnerships. This may be down to the permeation of collaboration with academic partners within and across forces. Conversely, Aldercombe expressed scepticism about the practical relevance of academic input, particularly where research timelines were perceived as misaligned with operational demands. Officers described uncertainty about how researchers could support day-to-day priorities and who to approach within universities and research partners. These insights almost contradict earlier sentiments about the need for external support in evaluation activities (as reported in section 3.6.5).

Wider evidence also suggests that police–academic partnerships often remain sporadic and personality-driven rather than embedded within organisational structures (Lumsden, 2017; Bullock et al., 2022b). Organisational factors may further limit their effectiveness, including a limited focus on evaluation within policing culture, time pressures that restrict engagement with research activity and differences in pace and expectations between academia and operational policing (Keay & Kirby, 2018; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024).

Despite this, experts and some officers across case study forces identified potential benefits in strengthening relationships with local academic partners. For example, recent national investment in police–academic partnerships (e.g. the establishment of the Policing Academic Centres of Excellence by the NPCC and the UK Research and Innovation) may provide opportunities to support structured collaboration. More strategic engagement was viewed as a possible mechanism to build capacity and capability, particularly in understanding what works locally to reduce children’s involvement in violence.

There was also a view across forces that officers entering through degree apprenticeship and degree-holder entry routes or undertaking postgraduate study may gradually increase their internal knowledge and appetite for EBP. This was seen as a potential lever for fostering more practical and mutually beneficial working relationships with universities and research organisations.

3.7 What influences decision-making and evidence-based practice?



This section focuses on what influences police forces’ knowledge, attitudes and decision-making when selecting and delivering interventions, exploring (1) competing priorities and capacity, (2) data quality, (3) data accessibility, (4) analytical influence as a condition of EBP, (5) training, (6) partnership working, (7) data sharing, (8) leadership and organisational governance and (9) changing the political and media narrative.

3.7.1 Competing priorities and capacity

When asked about challenges in adopting an EBP culture, the most consistently cited issue by case study forces was limited capacity and protected time. This constrained the forces’ ability to engage with the wider evidence base beyond internal intelligence, data and professional judgement (see sections 3.6.1 and 3.6.2), to:

- Undertake structured problem-solving with colleagues to identify new or innovative approaches (often aligned more closely to problem-oriented policing).

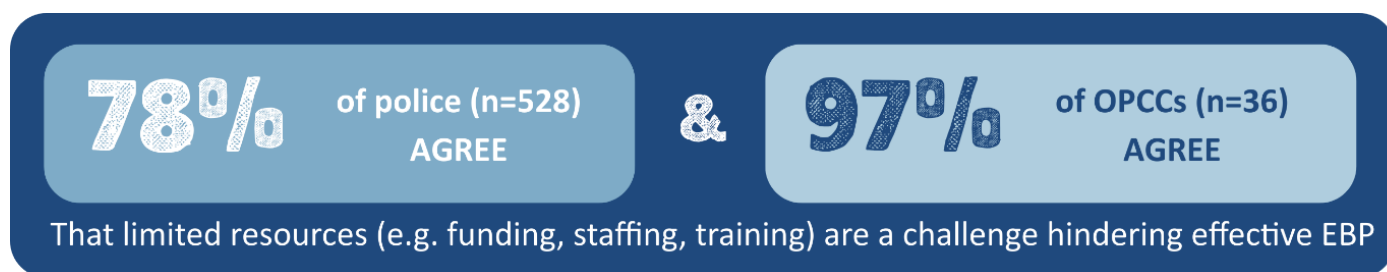
- Embed internal evaluation processes, such as establishing baselines and defining clear outcomes and metrics.

Capacity constraints hindered all five case study forces' ability to embed resources for analysing or interpreting findings, particularly when overall capacity was already stretched, and response-led activities took precedence. Accordingly, when new interventions were mobilised, they often omitted formal evaluations to understand whether they were effective.

"Often, as police, we haven't got the luxury of EBP research, we might just need to get on with it". – East Kenmere

Previous literature similarly showed that frontline officers often cited time and capacity constraints as barriers to locating, understanding and applying research, with lower proportions of supervisory and senior officers identifying these barriers (Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). Studies have also shown that frontline officers have less awareness of, and access to, the research evidence base that could inform their practice than supervisory and senior officers (Fleming & Wingrove, 2017; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024).

Figure 18. Police and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner survey responses on limited resources



These findings were echoed by survey responses. As highlighted in Figure 18 above, 78% of police respondents (n = 528) and 97% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported limited resources, such as funding, staffing and training, as a challenge. Furthermore, 66% of police respondents (n = 528) and 72% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) identified time pressures and competing priorities as barriers to effective EBP. Only 42% of senior police leaders (n = 101) believed they had sufficient capacity to support their teams in implementing new initiatives. Among OPCC respondents (n = 36), 42% did not feel they had adequate time and resources to plan research-informed initiatives, and 31% did not feel they had sufficient capacity to support implementation. 61% of frontline officers (n = 313) agreed that operational pressures make it difficult to change how they work. These constraints sit alongside wider operational pressures: 65% of police respondents (n = 528) and 50% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported high or fluctuating levels of demand as a primary challenge.

Even where there was encouragement and appetite around EBP, organisational barriers remained. Aldercombe and Silvermarsh emphasised the need for dedicated time and space to undertake meaningful analysis. Officers who had previously held specialist or non-response roles reflected that such positions had enabled more proactive thinking.

These findings suggest that limited organisational headspace, rather than resistance to the evidence itself, is a central barrier to embedding EBP in practice. Embedding EBP requires more than increased capacity. Respondents suggested that proactive, analytical and innovation-focused work is unlikely to flourish within response-based roles. Instead of expecting all officers to embed EBP, designated roles or protected capacity for specific officers or staff members may help create the conditions for sustained problem-solving and evidence use, rather than expecting all officers to undertake this work alongside reactive duties.

Experts highlighted the importance of framing EBP in ways that resonate with operational priorities. In particular, positioning EBP as a mechanism for reducing repeat demand and improving efficiency may help address perceptions that it represents an additional burden in already pressurised environments. Demonstrating how evidence-informed approaches can prevent avoidable demand and support more effective resource allocation was viewed as one way to strengthen engagement with EBP in practice.

3.7.2 Data quality

Some case study forces (East Kenmere and Fenhurst) reported outdated IT systems and a need for improved IT processes to streamline and improve the accuracy and quality of data. This aligned with survey data, in which 32% of police respondents (n = 528) and 25% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) reported that IT systems not being fit for purpose is a main challenge in embedding EBP.

In addition to outdated systems, several case study forces (Aldercombe, East Kenmere and Fenhurst) commented on concerns about the quality of the data. This included both inaccuracies due to technological issues and/or officers failing to ask for self-defining information, such as ethnicity (as highlighted in section 3.3.2). There was some agreement that items need to be mandatory to ensure all officers obtain this information:

“Any field that’s not a mandatory requirement to be entered by [the] police will be a problem for us”. – East Kenmere

Silvermarsh highlighted the implications of having poor data for EBP-related purposes, stating:

“The data used for evaluation is only as good as the data that is being input”. – Silvermarsh

Case study forces were interested in improving the accuracy and quality of recorded data. For example, Aldercombe highlighted the importance of recording the type of weapon being carried. Suggested improvements included adding prompts to digital forms to reduce data gaps, using scenario-based training to identify what prompts officers to ask follow-up questions or record additional details (such as weapon type), and how to capture contextual information effectively. Improved data capture may help police colleagues build a clearer understanding of a child’s circumstances and behaviours.

3.7.3 Data accessibility

Both survey findings and case study forces cited data accessibility and usability as challenges. Just over half of frontline officers (53%, n = 313) reported having access to the data and tools they needed (e.g. analyst support or dashboards) to reduce children’s involvement in violence. 46% of senior leaders (n = 101) believed they had sufficient data intelligence to inform decisions about what works. Similarly, half of the OPCC respondents (50%, n = 36) indicated that limited access to quality data, analysis or appropriate tools hindered effective EBP.

Some case study forces (Fenhurst and Silvermarsh) reported that self-service tools, including dashboards, were improving access to data by visualising and simplifying complex datasets. However, such tools were not widespread and still required analyst input to design and maintain. In some areas (Moorhaven and Silvermarsh), self-service platforms were being introduced to address analytical capacity gaps. While these approaches increased access to information, many raised concerns about the capability and confidence needed to produce outputs without specialist analytical support.

“And if the analysis is complicated, it comes with more caveats and is more difficult for staff to understand”. – Fenhurst

Experts echoed these reservations, cautioning against substituting skilled analytical roles with dashboards alone. They emphasised that while self-service platforms can enhance transparency and efficiency, they do not replace the interpretative, critical and evaluative functions required to generate insight and organisational learning, which may already be limited across forces.

Case study forces and experts noted that systems and analytical products need to be more user-friendly and intuitive, alongside training opportunities to encourage engagement beyond analyst teams. Greater standardisation within police forces in how data and insights are presented – for example, through consistent templates or dashboard configurations – was suggested as one way to improve accessibility for officers and staff.

3.7.4 Analytical influence as a condition for evidence-based practice

Experts emphasised the need to protect and expand analytical roles, arguing that analytical capacity should be embedded within programme design and implementation rather than treated as a reactive support function.

Analysts in several case study forces reflected on the limited understanding among officers of their role, capacity and constraints. In Fenhurst and Aldercombe, they felt that analytical recommendations were not always implemented, with uptake shaped by senior leadership buy-in and their perceived feasibility, which may not always align with analysts' views.

Surveyed analysts (n = 48) perceived themselves to have the relevant technical skills (88%), appropriate tools (71%) and confidence in their analytical methods (85%). However, case study forces highlighted considerable variation in analysts' skills and roles. While forces often employ different types of analysts (e.g. performance analysts and intelligence analysts), their work is rarely focused on supporting evidence-based approaches to interventions.

Survey responses from analysts (n = 48) also indicated that only 60% felt their senior leaders valued and used analytical evidence within their force. Furthermore, only 69% of analysts agreed that they have access to relevant operational data, and only 52% of analysts agreed that they are given clear guidance on how to complete a task (n = 48). These survey findings point towards structural and process barriers that may both constrain the effective use of analytical evidence and help explain why analysts' roles in supporting EBP appeared limited across several forces.

While the OPCC survey did not specifically ask about analytical resources or capacity, respondents (n = 36) were asked about challenges that may hinder effective practice. Only 17% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) agreed that applying research evidence to practical application is a key challenge. These findings suggest that analytical capability may be present, and typically, its integration into strategic decision-making is not a concern.

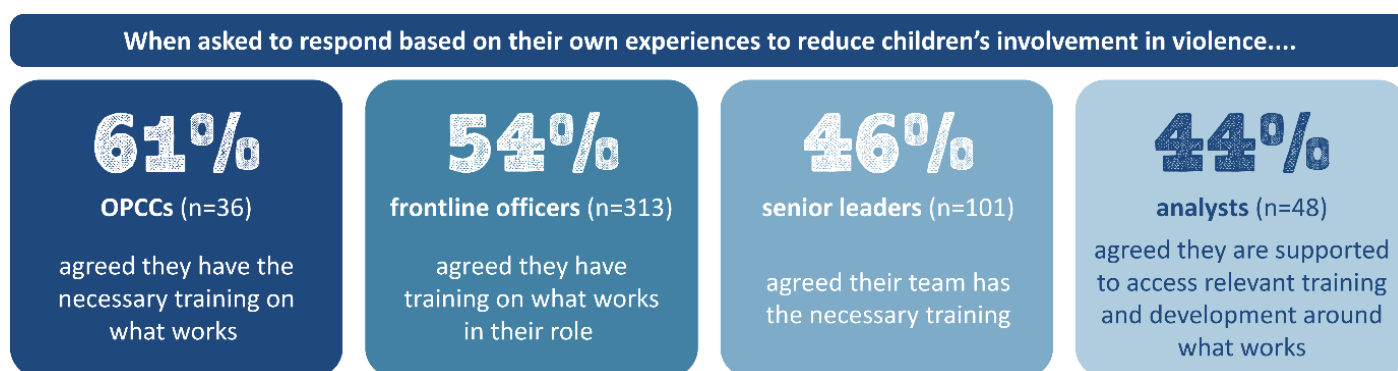
While not all analytical roles require a specific focus on EBP, a dedicated capacity for evidence use may help strengthen the application of evidence in practice. Research indicates that embedding an intelligence-led approach can serve as a useful objective decision-making tool (Darroch & Mazerolle, 2015). O'Brien & Evans (2021) suggested that policing structures need to be research-informed and data-led, with analytical functions to ensure EBP is successfully embedded. In addition to force-wide understanding and support for EBP, one solution may be establishing dedicated EBP analyst roles across different departments within the force. That said, this will likely remain a key challenge, given the existing pressures on analyst capacity across many forces.

3.7.5 Training

Survey responses indicate that training opportunities related to what works are not consistently embedded across roles (see Figure 19). 54% of frontline officers (n = 313) reported receiving training on what works, and 61% felt they had the necessary training to reduce children's involvement in violence. Among senior leaders (n = 101), 54% believed their team had sufficient training to reduce children's involvement in violence. Analysts (n = 48) reported lower perceived support for training, with only 44% stating they felt supported to access relevant training and professional development. Some open-text responses from survey respondents suggested that training officers on new interventions would help the adoption of research-based practices across the force.

That said, only 17% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) identified limited training and specialist skills as a barrier impacting effective EBP, and 61% agreed they have the necessary training on what works to reduce children's involvement in violence. These numbers suggest that training and skills within OPCCs are likely higher than those of their police colleagues.

Figure 19. Police officers' responses to training opportunities



Previous research that asked officers about training on EBP found lower levels of reported training compared to our survey findings, with only 15% reporting having received any formal training and/or support in the use of research and 10% having ever received any training on how to identify or evaluate which strategies are effective at reducing crime (Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). On closer inspection, training was most commonly reported among senior officers (27%), compared to 9% of supervisory officers and 6% of frontline officers (Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). These findings are not specific to reducing children's involvement in violence, and data collection took place in 2016–17, which may explain the differences in training opportunities for frontline officers.

Limited training and specialist skills were also identified as barriers to effective EBP by 42% of police respondents (n = 528). Across case study forces, officers emphasised the value of additional training, particularly to strengthen analytical capability and improve understanding of academic research among those without a research background (Moorhaven and Aldercombe).

Suggestions from the case study forces included CPD, university-accredited courses and online seminars. The Tilley Awards were cited as an effective mechanism for incentivising engagement with problem-solving and could be expanded to focus on broader evidence-informed practice. Fenhurst highlighted the value of external expert-led training, while experts recommended structured, repeated core learning and mandatory frameworks, rather than one-off exposure, to build sustained habits.

Case study forces and experts also emphasised the need to extend training beyond analysts and senior leaders. Targeted development for frontline and mid-level officers was viewed as important to reduce resistance, build skills in research literacy and data interpretation, and promote organisational buy-in

(O'Brien & Evans, 2021). Collectively, the findings suggest that strengthening EBP requires systematic, role-appropriate training pathways rather than ad hoc or voluntary opportunities.

3.7.6 Partnership working

Across case study forces and expert interviews, there was consistent recognition that many drivers of harm lie beyond policing (e.g. involving health, education, housing and social care) and that reducing children's involvement in crime requires coordinated, multi-agency responses. Police interventions were widely viewed as insufficient in isolation; sustained prevention was described as dependent on a broader package of support addressing underlying issues such as deprivation, homelessness and domestic abuse.

However, partnership working was frequently described as challenging. In the survey, 44% of police respondents (n = 528) and 56% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) identified external partnerships as a barrier to effective EBP. Furthermore, 8% of OPCC survey respondents (n = 36) provided open-text responses stating that while the YEF Toolkit is useful, partners are often reluctant to engage with or draw on research-based practice.

Similar challenges around partnership working were reported by case study forces. This included structural and relational constraints, such as:

- Partnerships were often described as role- or personality-driven, with frequent turnover of police personnel disrupting continuity and trust (Aldercombe).
- Misaligned priorities created tension, particularly where the Child First approach conflicted with enforcement-led activity. Although multi-agency forums could help mitigate these differences (East Kenmere), friction remained where partners were reluctant to support enforcement when deemed necessary (Aldercombe).

Case study forces also described systemic over-reliance on policing. Police were frequently required to fill gaps left by other agencies, particularly in safeguarding, shifting resources from strategic prevention to reactive demand. In some areas, partners defaulted to police leadership on emerging issues, reinforcing the perception that policing is the primary response even where other agencies may be better placed to lead. As one expert reflected:

"The most frustrating thing for us is that we're just one sector, and everybody sees their own pockets. The challenge is bringing everyone together and then [understanding] the problem and [the] influence of all these agencies consistently. [...] A lot of stuff always falls back on policing, but others need to step up and understand their role, whether that's health, social services, etc."
– Expert

Differing priorities across local authorities, education and social care limited agreement on which interventions to fund. Investment decisions were sometimes described as personality-driven, and short funding cycles constrained longer-term prevention planning (Aldercombe).

Structural fragmentation was evident at multiple levels. Nationally, experts described siloed working between inspectorates and government departments, such as safeguarding practices for children not joined up with violence. Similarly, prevention and forensic Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health Services teams are separated. Resultantly, local collaborative efforts are typically undermined by siloed central government structures.

"If [the] government [were] more connected, we wouldn't have to do it locally. The problem that we have is that [the] government works in silos. They don't collaborate, their inspectorates are

not collaborative and often attempts at a local level to be collaborative are pushed apart by the inspectorate coming in”. – Expert

At the same time, governance complexity at the local level – including differences between local authority-maintained schools and academy trusts, and variation across multiple local authorities within a single police area – created additional barriers to consistent partnership working (Fenhurst and East Kenmere). Thus, some case study forces reported that these multi-level misalignments weakened attempts at coordinated prevention.

Despite these challenges, examples of effective practice were identified. Regular multi-agency meetings (e.g. Knife Crime Meetings and Task Coordination) with children’s services, adult services, housing and local authorities – with clear communication channels, strong safeguarding relationships and shared digital platforms (e.g. Microsoft Teams) – were viewed as facilitating timely information sharing and coordinated responses (Aldercombe and Silvermarsh). In one case study force, the council had created a comprehensive map of local support services to support direct referral pathways and effective signposting in one area. These mechanisms were seen to mitigate fragmentation where sustained commitment and clarity of roles existed. That said, officers within this force understood the challenges of keeping the list up to date and the resources required to replicate this across all areas of the force.

“None of us [has] the answer – united, we are more powerful than our individual parts”. (Fenhurst).

These findings align with previous research emphasising the importance of consistent communication, trust-building and structured multi-agency processes in supporting effective interventions (Kerr et al., 2021; Olphin et al., 2025). Overall, while partnership working is widely regarded as essential for prevention, its effectiveness is shaped by structural alignment, continuity and shared accountability across systems.

3.7.7 Data sharing

Data access and sharing were consistently described as significant barriers to using evidence-informed approaches to reducing children’s involvement in violence, both within forces (across departments and teams) and between police and partner agencies. In the OPCC survey, 58% of respondents (n = 36) identified information-governance or data-sharing restrictions as a challenge to effective EBP.

Case study forces and experts emphasised the need to improve both multi-agency data access and data quality. Aldercombe and Moorhaven described difficulties in securing partner data due to resource constraints, differences in recording practices and a lack of standardised formats, which limited its suitability for evaluation. East Kenmere similarly reported challenges linking and analysing partner data in meaningful ways. For example, knife crime data was described as patchy, and broader outcome measures (e.g. related to education, employment or wellbeing) were not consistently accessible to the police.

“When they finish that intervention as police, how are we going to measure that? ... Education, local authorities [and] social care will know [these] things. We don’t have their data”. – Moorhaven

Several case study forces reported having data sharing agreements in place (Silvermarsh and Fenhurst). However, these arrangements were not always consistent across departments or geographic areas. Additional barriers included partners’ reluctance and nervousness about sharing data, typically due to a lack of knowledge and understanding around the General Data Protection Regulation processes and what they are allowed to share. In Silvermarsh, data sharing was described as working well in specific contexts, such as statutory safeguarding cases involving Early Help or YJSs, but less effectively in prevention-focused work

– partly due to challenges in persuading partners to share what might be seen as unrelated data to support prevention work. Fenhurst and Moorhaven highlighted challenges with incompatible systems, duplication of effort and time spent navigating fragmented processes. Across case study forces, there was consistent feedback about these challenges seeming unnecessary but persistent:

“Frustrating as always, [and] more barriers than necessary ... [They need] to feel robust support behind them on sharing the right information. Limited confidence in officers on this”. – East Kenmere

The Serious Violence Duty is intended to ensure relevant services work together to share information and target interventions to prevent and reduce serious violence. It also highlights the importance of data and intelligence sharing as part of the local strategic response (Home Office, 2023). That said, there was no mention across the case study forces of its use or of its accessibility in supporting data-sharing agreements with partners. Officers across case study forces emphasised that challenges often sit beyond their control, such as limitations in data systems and resistance from partner organisations. As a result, barriers to data sharing were often framed as systemic issues, with limited ownership at an operational level.

A small proportion of OPCCs cited similar challenges, with 8% of surveyed OPCCs (n = 36) stating that partners – both statutory and non-statutory agencies – lack proper IT systems and awareness of how to use them, and, as a result, information sharing between partners is a challenge.

Previous research has highlighted similar barriers around data protection requirements and information-sharing policies, preventing effective collaboration (Keay & Kirby, 2018; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024).

3.7.8 Leadership and organisational governance

Case study forces described limited formal mechanisms for sharing learning and embedding EBP. While internal platforms such as intranets⁶ and learning sessions existed, their use in informing EBP was unclear and varied at an individual rather than organisational level. Moorhaven commented on the limited attendance of senior leaders at the knowledge exchange sessions, meaning that individuals with more influence to embed learning and support change were often not present. Within-force departments were often described as operating in silos, with limited awareness of parallel initiatives and few opportunities to share best practices across teams.

Survey findings suggest that structured organisational learning is not yet routine. While 65% of senior leaders (n = 101) reported having shared learnings internally to inform future practice to reduce children’s involvement in violence in the past 12 months, only half of frontline officers (50%, n = 313) said they have opportunities to develop and try out new innovations in their role, and 54% of frontline officers (n = 313) felt their line manager supports them to use research evidence in decision-making. This indicates uneven support for EBP beyond isolated teams.

Senior leadership alignment was viewed as critical to support EBP culture. All case study forces emphasised that without clear endorsement and integration into strategic objectives, EBP is unlikely to be sustained. In Moorhaven, officers reflected that a more team-driven and structured approach would better support consistency, rather than reliance on informal or personality-driven initiatives. Survey responses also

⁶ Police force intranets are secure, private internal networks or websites used to centralise information, communication and operational resources. They are a hub for police officers and staff to access relevant policies, intelligence and business applications. Each police force in England and Wales has an independent intranet.

revealed a perception gap: only 44% of senior leaders (n = 101) believed that senior decisions are informed by the best available research evidence, compared to 72% of OPCC respondents (n = 36).

Existing literature reinforces the importance of visible and sustained leadership commitment in embedding EBP (Fleming & Wingrove, 2017; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). Lack of clarity from leadership around how EBP is relevant to distinct roles within police forces and where responsibility for engaging with research lies leaves staff uncertain about which roles are expected to apply EBP and what this should look like in practice (Fleming & Wingrove, 2017; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024). International evidence suggests that where senior leaders actively champion EBP and governance structures formalise its role in strategy and policy, it is more likely to become embedded in routine practice and drive effective cultural change (Darroch & Mazerolle, 2015; O'Brien & Evans, 2021).

All case study forces highlighted the importance of senior leadership buy-in to promote EBP. Without alignment with senior leaders' priorities and organisational objectives, EBP was viewed as unlikely to become embedded beyond individuals informally advocating for the use of evidence within the force. Moorhaven suggested that moving towards a more team-based approach – rather than one reliant on individual champions – may help foster a more consistent organisational culture supportive of EBP and equitable service delivery.

Experts similarly emphasised the importance of visible and sustained leadership engagement. Professional networks and partnerships – including those connected to the YEF, the College of Policing and the Society of Evidence-Based Policing – were viewed as mechanisms that can support knowledge exchange and engagement with research evidence. When senior leaders visibly champion the use of evidence and participate in these networks, EBP may be more likely to be perceived as part of routine policing practice rather than an additional task. However, embedding these approaches consistently across forces and sustaining momentum over time remains an ongoing challenge.

3.7.9 Changing the political and media narrative

Across case study forces and expert interviews, the political and media environment was seen to prioritise visible, short-term enforcement outcomes over longer-term prevention (as noted in section 3.4.4). This aligned with the case study forces' emphasis on officers putting more value in reactive work as opposed to longer-term prevention activities, which is perceived to align with taking an evidence-informed approach (see section 3.5.2). The government's focus was characterised as results-driven, with pressure to demonstrate rapid reductions in crime. Moorhaven highlighted that potential changes in political leadership every four years can disrupt continuity, making sustained investment in prevention and long-term funding for strategic work difficult to maintain. These findings align with the wider literature on policing performance cultures that highlights pressures for visible, swift action and measurable outputs, often at the expense of proactive, planned interventions (Lumsden, 2017; Sidebottom et al., 2020; Bullock et al., 2022a; Selby-Fell & Newton, 2024).

Survey findings reinforced this perception, with 28% of police respondents (n = 528) and 25% of OPCC respondents (n = 36) identifying the political context as a challenge to effective EBP. Fenhurst and Aldercombe suggested that evidence-informed approaches may conflict with dominant political or media narratives, particularly where research points towards less visible, longer-term solutions. As one participant noted:

*"[The] best changes we can make may betray common sense or narratives from media/politics".
– Fenhurst*

Community expectations were closely linked to this dynamic, with residents often seeking a visible police presence following increases in crime (Aldercombe, Fenhurst and Silvermarsh). In Aldercombe, officers noted that actions, such as increased patrols, were frequently requested by residents as tangible evidence that the police were responding. While visible policing can provide reassurance and, in some contexts, contribute to crime reduction, officers described a tension between these expectations and prevention-focused approaches, where impacts are typically longer-term and less immediately observable.

Officers described a need to demonstrate value for taxpayers' money through immediate and tangible action. Enforcement was widely perceived as the most legitimate response, while prevention and trauma-informed approaches were less well understood or accepted by the community. This created tension between research-led approaches emphasising early intervention and behaviour change and public demand for immediate enforcement. In Fenhurst, low levels of trust in the police were seen to compound these pressures. Officers noted that where trust is fragile, prevention-focused initiatives require sustained, proactive relationship-building and more creative outreach to avoid disengagement or perceived failure.

Experts echoed these concerns, arguing that political and media rhetoric shapes funding streams, policy priorities and operational practices. They described a feedback loop in which distorted public understanding influences political messaging, which in turn reinforces enforcement-focused agendas:

“Public understanding is heavily distorted, but [we are] unsure how to correct [it]. That’s reflected in rhetoric [from] politicians and that, in turn, shapes an agenda in [a] way which isn’t helpful if concerned in effective EBP”. – Expert

Together, the evidence suggests that embedding EBP requires structural and cultural shifts in how policing work is organised and valued, not just greater awareness of the evidence base.

One expert suggested there is limited *“cultural appetite for doing things differently”*, particularly for politically charged issues such as child exploitation. In such contexts, stakeholders may have vested interests in particular approaches, reducing willingness to engage with alternative evidence or shift strategy. National policy and guidance were therefore seen, at times, to reflect cultural and political pressures more than the available evidence. This context was viewed as limiting the forces' ability to prioritise and resource EBP, particularly where impact is less immediate or less visible.

3.8 Local practice and system-level changes



Several local practices and system-level changes were identified to support the delivery of evidence-based interventions in response to children's involvement in violence. This included changes across five sections: (1) knowledge and appetite for EBP, (2) project cycle from implementation to evaluation, (3) intervention equity for children from minority ethnic backgrounds, (4) data quality and accessibility and (5) effective partnerships.

3.8.1 Knowledge and appetite for evidence-based practice

Across survey responses and case study forces, there was variation in officers' understanding of EBP and appetite to engage with research evidence. Some of this comes from the department or team officers sit in, with neighbourhood teams and analytical or prevention-focused teams more likely to be aware of EBP. Additionally, officers with a vested interest in or understanding of EBP often have some academic background (e.g. completing a master's degree). To improve knowledge and engagement in EBP, two changes have been identified.

Leadership and organisational embedding of evidence-based practice

PRACTICE
& SYSTEM

While there is value in having champions across police forces – particularly those affiliated with networks such as the College of Policing Evidence Champions' Network and the Society of Evidence-Based Policing – current approaches often rely on individuals to drive awareness and support the use of research evidence in decision-making. This can limit the reach and sustainability of EBP, particularly when responsibility falls to a small number of motivated individuals.

To strengthen the understanding and use of evidence-based interventions, engagement is needed from both senior leaders and a wider pool of officers and staff across teams and functions. Moving from an individual champion model to a more distributed, cross-team approach may increase the visibility of EBP and reduce reliance on single points of advocacy. This could support the consistency – particularly when individual officers move into a new role – of using research as part of everyday practice.

There may also be a role for national networks, such as the College of Policing Evidence Champions Network and the Society of Evidence-Based Policing, in supporting this shift. For example, working with existing champions to identify and engage colleagues across different departments and roles could help broaden participation and strengthen organisational buy-in for EBP.

Making evidence-based practice feasible within operational constraints

PRACTICE
& SYSTEM

Given that time and capacity constraints were the most frequently cited barriers, reframing EBP as a mechanism for reducing demand and improving efficiency may support buy-in across forces. However, this alone is unlikely to shift practice. Greater uptake is more likely where the use of evidence is made feasible within day-to-day policing. This includes building officers' confidence and skills to apply evidence in practice, creating the time and organisational support needed to act on it (Michie et al., 2011), and demonstrating clear, practical benefits through small-scale changes or early examples of impact (Darroch & Mazerolle, 2015). Approaches that reduce complexity – such as simple tools, prompts or streamlined processes – may help integrate EBP into routine decision-making, rather than positioning it as an additional or specialist activity.

National organisations can support force-level activity by promoting EBP as a mechanism for reducing demand and improving efficiency, which may support buy-in and force-wide messaging across forces, rather than as an add-on.

Findings across case study forces and expert interviews highlighted variability in officers' understanding of EBP and the need for more structured and sustained training. While a range of approaches exist – including CPD, accredited courses and external input – these are often ad hoc and not consistently embedded across roles. Expanding these approaches in a more structured way, with repeated core learning and incentive mechanisms (e.g. Tilley Awards), may help to embed sustained engagement.

Training should also be role-specific and extend beyond analysts and senior leaders to include frontline and mid-level officers, supporting the development of research literacy, data interpretation skills and practical application in decision-making.

3.8.2 The project cycle from implementation to evaluation

Improving outcomes for children requires not only the selection of evidence-informed interventions but also stronger approaches to how these interventions are implemented, monitored and evaluated in practice. Across expert interviews and case study forces, several challenges were identified that limit the quality and consistency of current approaches.

Embedding evaluation from the outset

**LOCAL
PRACTICE**

Monitoring and evaluation activities are often introduced after interventions are already underway rather than being built into the design phase. Embedding monitoring and evaluation activities as part of an intervention's set-up phase, rather than retrofitting them once delivery is underway, would be beneficial in improving the current practice and the quality of internal evaluations. Capacity constraints aside, this may encourage analyst involvement earlier in the project lifecycle, with clearly agreed research questions and proportionate but robust research methods. Experts also highlighted the importance of providing clearer pathways to evaluation expertise and support for scaling promising practice, including consideration of equity impacts.

Balancing local adaptation and evidence use

**PRACTICE
& SYSTEM**

Case study forces emphasised the need to tailor interventions to local contexts. While force-wide approaches can support consistency, they may not always reflect the needs of different communities (e.g. inner-city versus rural differences). The same applies to evaluation; evidence from one setting does not necessarily translate to another, meaning additional or adapted evaluation may be required. This highlights the importance of adapting interventions while maintaining fidelity to core evidence-informed principles and, where necessary, undertaking localised evaluation to understand what works in different contexts.

Locally, forces could adopt a structured approach to adaptation, ensuring interventions are tailored to local needs while retaining their core evidence-informed components. Where interventions are adapted, proportionate local evaluation should be built in from the outset to assess effectiveness and inform ongoing delivery. This does not necessarily require large-scale or resource-intensive evaluation but rather the use of practical and scalable approaches – including a combination of quantitative and qualitative data – to understand whether an intervention is working as intended in a new context.

That said, the importance of local adaptation should not be used to justify divergence from evidence-based interventions without sufficient consideration of existing research and why such variations might be necessary.

At a system level, partners, including VRUs, OPCCs and the Home Office, have a role in supporting this approach. This includes recognising that interventions may require adaptation across different contexts,

avoiding assumptions that approaches proven in one area can be directly replicated elsewhere and ensuring funding and commissioning arrangements allow for local tailoring and evaluation. Support mechanisms to share learning across areas – including what works, for whom and under what conditions – may also help strengthen the evidence base and its application in practice.

Strengthening external support, scrutiny and learning

SYSTEM-
LEVEL

There were mixed views on the extent to which forces should rely on internal evaluation. While the ethos of EBP encourages practitioners to be reflective and critical, there may be value in strengthening external support and challenge. This could include academic partnerships, peer review and cross-force collaboration to improve evaluation quality and support shared learning. Existing mechanisms – such as the [College of Policing Practice Bank](#) – provide a platform for sharing innovation. However, findings suggest such resources are still not being used to their full potential, suggesting that making information available is insufficient to drive uptake. Greater focus may therefore be needed on how learning is actively disseminated, interpreted and applied in practice.

Enabling delivery through funding and system support

SYSTEM-
LEVEL

Short-term and fragmented funding arrangements were identified as a barrier to effective planning, delivery and evaluation. While funding cycles are often constrained, there may be opportunities to streamline and standardise processes. This would require funders (such as the Home Office, OPCCs and VRUs) to provide earlier indicative allocations and more timely confirmation of awards. Reducing the administrative burden associated with bidding and reporting and allowing greater flexibility in how funding can be used locally may also support more effective implementation and evaluation of interventions.

3.8.3 Intervention equity for children from minority ethnic backgrounds

Findings from survey responses, case study forces and expert interviews highlighted ongoing concerns about disproportionality and the equitable delivery of interventions. Awareness remained primarily focused on the disproportionate use of stop and searches, but a wider focus and consistent changes, as a result, remain a challenge. Furthermore, there is inadequate evidence of interventions that have been designed or tailored for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

Strengthening accountability and incentives

PRACTICE
& SYSTEM

Existing frameworks – such as the Police Race Action Plan – primarily focus on policing, with less emphasis on the role of wider partners. Extending accountability mechanisms to include partner agencies, supported by clear expectations and routine performance reporting, may help ensure that equitable delivery is treated as a shared responsibility. This should be underpinned by regular monitoring of disproportionality data, with expectations for forces and partners to review outcomes and take action where disparities persist.

This could include:

- Formalising partners' responsibilities – for example, through a statutory duty requiring partners to report on efforts to address disproportionality (see section 3.3.3) – to strengthen prioritisation of equitable support for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Amending the existing outcomes framework to include time-bound targets and named leads across teams who are responsible for ensuring training to improve understanding and operational changes to meet outcomes and reduce disproportionality. This would help shift the focus away from individual buy-in and advocacy towards embedded, collaborative and cross-team working. To

support sustained change, this approach should be reinforced through routine monitoring, regular reviews of outcomes and ongoing supervision to ensure that learning is applied in practice over time.

- Strengthening the role of funders, including the Home Office and OPCCs, by requiring forces and partners to demonstrate how interventions are likely to impact children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds as part of funding applications and reporting processes, helping to embed consideration of differential impact more systematically.
- Improving shared understanding across partner agencies by clarifying roles, responsibilities, and the purpose of and safeguards for targeted approaches. Clear communication and joint working may help address gaps in partner understanding and support more coordinated delivery of equitable interventions.

Embedding equity into decision-making and delivery

PRACTICE & SYSTEM

Targeted training on bias, equitable decision-making and the interpretation of data (including disproportionality and disparity) may support improved understanding, particularly when linked to real-world practice and supported by supervision and feedback. However, improving equity in practice requires more than awareness or training alone. Thus, forces and partners may also benefit from embedding considerations of disproportionality into routine decision-making processes, including how children are identified for interventions, how resources are allocated and how outcomes are monitored. This could be supported through the use of clear frameworks, prompts or decision-making tools that encourage practitioners to consider differential impacts and justify their approach.

Ensuring that responsibility for equitable delivery is distributed across teams – rather than reliant on individual advocates – may also support more consistent practice. This aligns with broader findings on the need to move from individual ownership of EBP to more embedded, cross-team approaches.

3.8.4 Data quality and accessibility

Findings across case study forces highlighted challenges with both the quality and accessibility of data used to inform decision-making. Inconsistent or incomplete recording – particularly of contextual information – limits the ability to understand children’s circumstances and behaviours. At the same time, existing systems and analytical outputs are not always accessible or intuitive for officers and staff, reducing their practical use in day-to-day policing.

Improve the quality of data captured from children

PRACTICE & SYSTEM

Improve data quality by strengthening recording processes at the point of capture, including the use of system prompts, clearer guidance and scenario-based training, to support more complete and contextual recording. This could include incorporating expectations around data completeness (e.g. self-defined ethnicity) and consistency. Approaches should focus on making it easier for officers to record relevant information within existing workflows, recognising constraints posed by system design, duplication across databases and operational demands. Routine internal quality checks and supervisory oversight may help reinforce expectations and improve consistency over time.

While these approaches may not fully address the underlying reasons officers do not always record self-defined ethnicity, combining them with targeted training on unconscious bias and disproportionality may improve awareness and subsequently improve data completeness and the quality of insights used to inform practice.

Improve the accessibility and usability of data and analytical products

PRACTICE & SYSTEM

Enhance the usability and standardisation of analytical products, including more intuitive systems, consistent templates and dashboard configurations, alongside training to widen engagement beyond analyst teams. Case study forces noted that systems and analytical products need to be more user-friendly and intuitive, and that there needs to be training opportunities to encourage engagement beyond analyst teams. Greater standardisation within police forces in how data and insights are presented – for example, through consistent templates or dashboard configurations – could improve accessibility for officers and staff across roles, ranks and teams.

Strengthen the role and influence of analysts

PRACTICE & SYSTEM

Case study forces, surveyed police respondents (including analysts, n = 48) and experts highlighted that analysts are often used in a reactive capacity and focus on performance monitoring and data provision rather than on supporting the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions. While analysts fulfil a range of important functions, the lack of dedicated capacity for evaluative and innovation-focused work limits the ability of the forces to apply evidence in practice.

Analyst roles were not typically described as being designed to support EBP, with limited resources allocated to this function. Instead, analytical work was largely centred on performance and intelligence outputs. Forces may benefit from creating or designating analytical roles focused on EBP and evaluation, with access to strategic decision-making forums. This suggestion aligns with previous research, which has suggested policing structures need to be research-informed and data-led, with analytical functions to ensure EBP is successfully embedded (O'Brien & Evans, 2021). Building such relationships between officers and analysts, over time, may help strengthen officers' overall use of relevant research evidence to inform decisions around what works to reduce children's involvement in violence.

Senior leadership can play a key role in supporting this shift by prioritising the use of existing analytical capacity and enabling analysts to contribute from the outset of intervention design to develop clear research questions, baseline measures and appropriate evaluation approaches, rather than introducing evaluation retrospectively. While examples of this approach were observed when partners – such as OPCCs or VRUs – led evaluation activity, this was not driven internally by the forces. This suggests that, with appropriate prioritisation and support, more proactive use of analytical capacity is achievable without requiring significant additional resources.

In addition to providing analysts with opportunities to support intervention design and evaluation, experts mentioned the variation in analytical capability as a barrier, particularly in relation to interpreting disproportionality and differential impacts. Strengthening the analytical skillset through clearer role expectations and development opportunities may support more consistent and informed use of data in decision-making. This might include refining roles to ensure candidates have specific skills and experience or protecting a number of working days or budgets for analysts to engage with CPD opportunities.

3.8.5 Effective partnerships

Strengthen whole-system approaches

SYSTEM- LEVEL

Experts highlighted that siloed working across government departments and inspectorates can undermine partnership working at a local level. This includes a lack of alignment between related policy areas, such as safeguarding and violence prevention. This fragmented national landscape can filter into local practice, limiting the ability to implement coordinated, whole-system approaches.

While case study forces described partnership working as an effective mechanism for delivering EBP, common barriers persist (e.g. related to data sharing and governance complexity). Variations in partnership arrangements and local systems (e.g. local authorities and education) further contribute to inconsistency in how multi-agency working is implemented across force areas.

To enable more consistent joint decision-making structures, shared outcomes and clearer accountability, partners could:

- Strengthen cross-government alignment of priorities, funding and accountability to support a more coherent whole-system approach to preventing children's involvement in violence.
- Build on existing whole-system approaches (e.g. VRUs) by clarifying shared objectives and responsibilities across agencies, ensuring interventions are led by the partner best placed to deliver them. This may help reduce the tendency for prevention activity to default to policing.

Strengthen multi-agency data sharing

**PRACTICE
& SYSTEM**

Improving EBP may require more formalised, multi-agency data-sharing frameworks and interoperable systems, ensuring that partner data can be accessed, linked and used consistently for prevention and evaluation. However, technical solutions alone are unlikely to resolve existing barriers. Cultural factors – including trust between agencies, confidence in lawful information sharing and the perceived value of data use – alongside data quality and recording practices, will also shape whether shared data can be used effectively. Addressing these issues is unlikely to be achieved through fragmented local agreements alone and will likely require national coordination to support greater consistency, clarity and shared standards.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Key findings and implications

This section summarises the key findings and considers the implications for current policing practice. It draws together insights across the research questions to highlight how policing responses to children's involvement in violence are currently shaped in practice.

4.1.1 Interventions currently being used



Overall, the survey findings indicate that a range of interventions are being delivered across police forces and funded by OPCCs to address children's involvement in violence. Some commonly delivered interventions align with the evidence base: restorative justice (76%), a high-impact approach; and hot spot policing (84%) and problem-oriented policing (69%), both moderate-impact approaches. These interventions were widely embedded across police forces, suggesting that some areas of policing practice are broadly consistent with the current evidence base on reducing violence involving children.

However, alignment between delivery and the evidence base was not consistent across all interventions. Some of the strongest evidence-based approaches, such as focused deterrence, are notably under-implemented (32%) relative to their perceived effectiveness (75%), indicating potential missed opportunities to scale interventions with the greatest impact. This picture becomes more complex when considering force-level data: 39 out of 44 forces had at least some respondents confirming delivery, yet only one force confirmed full delivery. This considerable within-force variation raises questions about whether the delivery reflects deliberate, force-wide strategic decisions or more ad hoc practice and suggests that internal communication of operational strategy may warrant attention alongside questions of EBP.

In contrast, several widely delivered approaches – including knife crime education (67% delivered, with 85% perceived as effective), police in schools (74% delivered, with 82% perceived as effective) and media campaigns (64% delivered, with 59% perceived as effective) – have limited or uncertain evidence of effectiveness, suggesting that practice is not always driven by the strength of the evidence base. The high levels of perceived effectiveness for some of these interventions, despite limited evidence, may partly explain their continued widespread delivery.

While interventions categorised as harmful were less commonly delivered, their continued use and perceived value among some respondents highlight ongoing challenges in aligning practice with evidence. For example, prison awareness programmes were reported as being delivered by a small proportion of surveyed respondents (8%), despite the YEF Toolkit identifying these approaches as harmful. Overall, while there is widespread activity across police forces, the extent to which this reflects EBP is mixed, with clear opportunities to strengthen alignment between what is delivered and what is most likely to reduce children's involvement in violence.

4.1.2 Equitable delivery and design of interventions



Overall, the findings suggest that the equitable use of evidence to inform policing practice and intervention design is not yet systematically embedded across forces. While there was recognition that disproportionality exists in policing outcomes – particularly in stop-and-search practices – this understanding was inconsistent across ranks, roles and forces. In some areas, officers suggested local statistics may appear more pronounced due to the relatively small proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents within the local population.

Officers also reported limited analytical capacity to examine disproportionality in greater depth, including weak interpretation of differential impacts and inconsistencies in recording self-defined ethnicity. In many cases, efforts to address disproportionality appeared to rely on individual interest or leadership rather than being structurally embedded within organisational practice.

When considering how interventions are designed and delivered, police-led activities were typically described as universal rather than proportionately targeted. Examples of interventions supporting children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds were infrequently cited. In several instances, officers reported that partners preferred universal approaches over targeted interventions, reflecting concerns about perceived exclusion. This may limit opportunities to tailor support in ways that respond to unequal risk or need.

Experts suggested that funding criteria from the Home Office and OPCCs could act as a practical lever for change. Requiring forces to assess and report on the differential impact of interventions – including impacts on children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds – may help embed more systematic monitoring and evaluation practices. This may be particularly effective, given officers' reflections that evaluation activity is often prioritised when it is tied to funding requirements.

While training on unconscious bias may help raise awareness (Atewologun et al., 2018), the key challenge in addressing disproportionality lies in embedding these insights into routine policing practice. Without sustained organisational reinforcement, improvements in officers' knowledge and awareness may not translate into consistent changes in decision-making. Accountability may therefore need to sit at the force level, with clear leadership expectations and oversight mechanisms to support consistent adoption.

This aligns with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010, which requires public authorities to consider and address the differential impacts of their decisions on protected groups. In practice, this includes taking proportionate steps to reduce disadvantage and respond to unequal outcomes. Without such structural reinforcement, disproportionality in policing practices may persist, limiting the extent to which children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds receive equitable and proportionate support.

4.1.3 The extent and influence of funding



Across forces, funding for activity aimed at reducing children's involvement in violence was described as heavily centralised and largely dependent on short-term government grants, which shape how evidence-informed approaches can be planned and implemented in practice. Police forces primarily rely on Home Office allocations and funding from VRUs and OPCCs. While these sources provide important resources for prevention and intervention activities, the current funding landscape was widely reported to constrain the consistent use of evidence-informed approaches.

A key challenge relates to the short-term nature of funding cycles. Many grants operate on annual timelines, often with late notification and delayed disbursement. This compresses the time available for planning, recruitment, implementation and evaluation and may incentivise quicker or more familiar activities, rather than approaches that require longer preparation and sustained delivery.

Tensions between nationally prescribed priorities and locally identified needs were also cited. In some cases, funding criteria were perceived to direct activity towards initiatives that did not fully align with local data or priorities, contributing to fragmented delivery. Frequent shifts in funding priorities were also described as undermining longer-term strategic planning, contributing to a pattern in which forces follow available funding rather than sustaining interventions grounded in local evidence.

At the same time, external funding can act as a lever for improving practice. Where monitoring and evaluation requirements are attached to funding, it was reported that analytical oversight and evidence use are more likely to be embedded.

Although extending funding cycles may not always be feasible, streamlining and standardising government funding processes could support more effective planning and delivery. Earlier indicative allocations and more timely confirmation of final awards may help forces plan interventions, recruit staff and embed evaluation processes.



4.1.4 Knowledge and evidence informing decision-making

Overall, the findings suggest that knowledge about what works to reduce children's involvement in violence – and how evidence should inform policing decisions – is unevenly understood and applied across forces. While awareness of EBP exists across many forces, understanding varies considerably by role and rank. In some cases, EBP was conflated with problem-solving, performance monitoring or anecdotal case-level evidence, indicating that engagement with research evidence often remains surface-level. Across several forces, engagement with EBP appeared to rely on individual interest, academic exposure or personal motivation rather than being consistently embedded within organisational practice.

Decision-making was primarily shaped by internal police data and professional judgement. Demand trends, intelligence products and performance metrics were frequently cited as the primary sources informing priorities and operational responses. While data from partners (e.g. children's services, health and education) and community insights were also influential, these sources were typically used to supplement internal intelligence rather than to systematically integrate wider multi-agency evidence. External research, including the YEF Toolkit and academic evidence, was not consistently known or routinely embedded in day-to-day practice, with uptake appearing inconsistent across roles (and particularly limited among frontline officers).

The findings also indicate that structured monitoring and evaluation practices remain limited across many forces. Analysts were rarely involved early in the design of initiatives, reducing their ability to influence decisions about whether interventions should be introduced, adapted or discontinued. Evaluation activity was often described as focusing on performance monitoring (e.g. offending statistics) rather than assessing intervention impact (e.g. changes in children's behaviour or wellbeing). In several cases, anecdotal case-level outcomes were used as indicators of success, and initiatives were seldom changed or stopped based on research evidence.

A range of organisational and cultural factors were reported to shape how evidence is used in practice. Time and capacity constraints were widely cited as barriers, with operational demands reinforcing reactive approaches to policing. EBP was sometimes perceived as time-intensive or overly academic, which could limit engagement with research evidence among officers operating in fast-paced frontline environments. In addition, uneven access to analytical support, limitations in data quality and accessibility, and inconsistent training opportunities further constrained the routine use of evidence. Broader organisational and external pressures – including political expectations, media narratives and community demand for visible enforcement activity – were also reported to influence the types of practice prioritised within policing.

These findings suggest that strengthening the consistent use of evidence within policing will require changes both within day-to-day practice and the wider systems that shape policing activity.

4.1.5 Local practice and system-level considerations



The findings across the research questions also highlight several considerations relating to both local policing practice and wider system conditions that may influence the consistent use of EBP in policing, which have been summarised in Table 14. These considerations reflect issues raised by experts, case study forces and surveyed respondents and are presented to inform ongoing discussions about how EBP may be strengthened across policing and wider partner systems.

Collectively, these considerations highlight the importance of aligning organisational culture, operational capacity and system-level structures to support the consistent use of evidence in policing responses to children's involvement in violence.

Table 14. Summarised local practice and system-level changes to support evidence-based practice

Local practice changes	System-level changes
Knowledge and appetite for evidence-based practice	
Police forces to move away from individual champion models to a more distributed, cross-team approach – including senior leaders – to increase the visibility and use of evidence-based practice (EBP).	National networks (e.g., the College of Policing and the Society of Evidence-Based Policing) to support existing champions within forces to help identify and engage colleagues across departments and strengthen organisational buy-in for EBP.
Senior leaders should identify and promote practical examples of EBP that reduce complexity – such as by simplifying tools and prompts or streamlining processes – to support integration into routine decision-making and improve officer buy-in and confidence.	National organisations to promote EBP as a mechanism for reducing demand and improving efficiency may support buy-in across forces.
Expand existing continuing personal development opportunities and accredited courses with repeated core learning around EBP and incentive mechanisms (e.g. Tilley Awards), which may help to embed sustained engagement.	
Training should also be role-specific and extend beyond analysts and senior leaders to include frontline and mid-level officers, supporting the development of research literacy, data interpretation skills and practical application in decision-making.	
Project cycle, from implementation to evaluation	
During intervention set-up, discuss and put in place relevant monitoring and evaluation processes. Where capacity exists, consider the involvement of analysts early on.	Funders (e.g. the Home Office) to provide earlier indicative allocations, confirm awards more promptly and reduce administrative burdens while allowing greater flexibility in how funding is used locally to support effective implementation and evaluation.
Police forces need to balance national interventions – and their supporting evidence – with locally tailored interventions. Consider multiple evaluation approaches to ensure that what works in one area, but needs adapting in another area, is evaluated.	Partners, including Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners (OPCCs) and the Home Office, should support police forces and share learning across areas – including what works, for whom and under what conditions – to strengthen the evidence base and its application in practice.
	Strengthen external support and challenge. This might include formalising academic partnerships, peer review processes and cross-force collaboration to improve evaluation quality and support shared learning.

Local practice changes	System-level changes
	The College of Policing is to use the resources in its Practice Bank with police forces to ensure the resources are being used to their full potential. This might include working with forces and partners to better understand how learning is actively disseminated, interpreted and applied in practice.
Intervention equity for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds	
Shift from individual advocacy to embedded, cross-team accountability by incorporating time-bound targets and named leads into existing outcomes frameworks to drive improvements in understanding and reductions in disproportionality.	Funders (e.g., the Home Office and OPCCs) should require forces to demonstrate how interventions are likely to impact children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds as part of funding applications and reporting processes.
Improve multi-agency working by clarifying roles, responsibilities and the purpose of targeted approaches, supported by clear communication and joint working to enable more coordinated and equitable delivery.	Formalise partners' responsibilities – for example, through a statutory duty requiring partners to report on efforts to address disproportionality – to strengthen the prioritisation of equitable support for children from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.
Strengthen equitable practice through targeted training on bias and data interpretation, alongside embedding considerations of disproportionality into routine decision-making, supported by clear frameworks, tools and shared accountability across teams.	
Data quality and accessibility	
Improve data quality by strengthening recording at the point of capture through system prompts, clearer guidance and training, with expectations for completeness (e.g. self-defined ethnicity) and consistency, supported by quality checks and supervisory oversight.	
Enhance the usability and standardisation of analytical products through more intuitive systems, consistent templates and dashboards, alongside training to improve accessibility and engagement beyond analyst teams.	
Senior leaders should prioritise existing analytical capacity by involving analysts from the outset of intervention design and evaluation while addressing variations in analytical capability, particularly in interpreting disproportionality and differential impacts.	
Strengthen analytical skillsets through clearer role expectations and development opportunities to support the consistent use of data in decision-making.	
Effective partnerships	
Work with partners to formalise data-sharing frameworks and interoperable systems for prevention activities. As part of this, work on cultural factors, such as trust and knowledge, that shape the perceived value of data use.	
	Support local areas in formalising data-sharing agreements between police forces and partners to increase access to and the usability of data for prevention activities.
Strengthen the cross-government alignment of priorities, funding and accountability and build on whole-system approaches (e.g. VRUs) by clarifying shared objectives and responsibilities so that interventions are led by the most appropriate partner.	

4.2 Limitations

While the study was completed to a high standard, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- **Limited evidence in the rapid review.** The rapid review was restricted to English-language publications and focused on literature published within the past 10 years. While this enabled timely synthesis, it increases the risk that relevant studies were not identified. Although grey literature was searched, its quality and coverage are variable, and it is possible that some relevant sources or databases may not have been accessed.
- **Survey analysis was limited to descriptive statistics.** No inferential testing was conducted, meaning that observed differences (e.g. between ranks or between police and OPCC respondents) should not be interpreted as statistically significant.
- **Responses within forces were not always consistent.** Some surveyed respondents reported that particular interventions were delivered, while others from the same force did not. This likely reflects variations in departmental oversight and awareness but limits certainty about force-wide practice. Therefore, gaps in delivery may not be accurate and should be interpreted with caution.
- **Potential sampling bias.** Participation in both the survey and case studies may have been more likely among individuals with a prior interest in or existing engagement with EBP, given the networks through which the survey was distributed. Those less engaged with EBP may be underrepresented, and levels of EBP engagement across the wider policing workforce may be overstated. Furthermore, as this project focused specifically on EBP to reduce children's involvement in violence, findings may not be generalisable to EBP more broadly.
- **Power dynamics during workshops.** Cross-team discussion during the workshops may have been influenced by organisational hierarchies. Senior staff often contributed more prominently, and frontline officers may have been reluctant to challenge views expressed in mixed-rank settings.

4.3 Overall conclusion

Despite these limitations, the study provides a robust and multi-method assessment of how evidence is currently understood and applied within policing responses to reducing children's involvement in violence. Across data sources, there is consistent evidence that, while there is awareness of EBP, its application remains uneven and constrained by organisational and system-level factors. Strengthening the use of evidence will therefore require coordinated changes across local practice, funding structures and wider system conditions to support more consistent, equitable and effective responses.

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6 Appendices

6.1 Appendix 1

Appendix Table 1. Sources of influence for Inspector upwards (n=101)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	14%	48%	22%	4%	0%	13%
The Home Office or government documents	9%	27%	36%	12%	3%	14%
Violence Reduction Units	17%	35%	17%	5%	6%	21%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	10%	28%	25%	15%	6%	17%
The College of Policing	3%	32%	27%	18%	7%	14%
Universities or research organisations	1%	21%	36%	20%	4%	19%
The Youth Endowment Fund	10%	26%	24%	10%	4%	27%

Appendix Table 2. Sources of influence for Police sergeants (n=80)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	16%	33%	18%	10%	4%	20%
The Home Office or government documents	6%	21%	16%	13%	9%	35%
Violence Reduction Units	10%	23%	18%	11%	4%	35%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	3%	11%	18%	18%	18%	34%
The College of Policing	8%	19%	15%	18%	13%	29%
Universities or research organisations	3%	16%	23%	15%	6%	38%
The Youth Endowment Fund	4%	18%	15%	9%	6%	49%

Appendix Table 3. Sources of influence for Police constable (n=202)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	19%	23%	22%	7%	2%	27%
The Home Office or government documents	7%	14%	18%	14%	11%	36%
Violence Reduction Units	15%	23%	15%	8%	3%	36%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	7%	10%	19%	12%	16%	35%
The College of Policing	6%	17%	23%	14%	7%	33%
Universities or research organisations	6%	12%	19%	15%	7%	40%
The Youth Endowment Fund	6%	10%	19%	8%	5%	51%

Appendix Table 4. Sources of influence for PCSO (n=31)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	23%	26%	23%	3%	0%	26%
The Home Office or government documents	23%	19%	16%	3%	6%	32%
Violence Reduction Units	23%	23%	19%	3%	6%	26%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	16%	13%	23%	6%	10%	32%
The College of Policing	16%	26%	26%	6%	6%	19%
Universities or research organisations	10%	16%	16%	16%	6%	35%
The Youth Endowment Fund	10%	23%	10%	6%	6%	45%

Appendix Table 5. Sources of influence for analysts (n=48)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	38%	19%	19%	15%	0%	10%
The Home Office or government documents	25%	25%	15%	17%	0%	19%
Violence Reduction Units	10%	25%	15%	4%	0%	46%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	8%	21%	10%	15%	6%	40%
The College of Policing	15%	21%	25%	10%	0%	29%
Universities or research organisations	13%	23%	17%	13%	2%	33%
The Youth Endowment Fund	10%	23%	10%	0%	2%	54%

Appendix Table 6. Sources of influence for civilians (n=66)

	Essential	Very important	Moderately important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know
Intelligence outputs or internal data	23%	38%	17%	3%	2%	18%
The Home Office or government documents	17%	20%	24%	17%	5%	18%
Violence Reduction Units	21%	29%	12%	8%	3%	27%
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners	24%	17%	15%	14%	12%	18%
The College of Policing	17%	18%	30%	12%	3%	20%
Universities or research organisations	18%	20%	26%	11%	6%	20%
The Youth Endowment Fund	18%	29%	15%	3%	8%	27%