

## **The value of the Volunteer Police Cadets** *‘Building on the values of British Policing’*

### **Executive Summary**

Since the Scarman report into the Brixton riots in 1981, the police have been challenged with building stronger links within communities and more specifically the young people within them. A growing body of evidence indicates that the VPC is proving to be a successful vehicle in building strong and lasting relationships with a significant number of our communities. In addition, it supports young people who are at risk of harm, be that from gang membership, radicalisation, social isolation or those suffering from mental health issues. Current membership stands at 50% boys and girls, 30% BAME and 27% from a ‘vulnerable’ background, with evidence that young people previously involved in gangs or radicalised behaviour have become members of the VPC.

There is a growing body of evidence relating to the benefits of the VPC to the police, young people and wider society. A recent survey demonstrates that 95% of the members believed the VPC valued diversity, 95% met people from different backgrounds and 95% felt the VPC had developed their life and employability skills including, resilience, teamwork and confidence.

The VPC has a valuable part to play in key governmental priorities including, violent crime, integration and the Civic Society strategy. There is significant anecdotal evidence that the VPC not only supports young people who are affected by these issues, but the young people themselves, through membership of the VPC undertake social action activity to deal with these issues. Although not a recruiting tool for the police, a significant proportion of the young people from all backgrounds are transferring into policing roles, which is providing the police with an unparalleled opportunity to build a truly representative workforce of the future.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper will outline the context in which the VPC was introduced and continues to operate, setting out the perennial issue of community confidence in the police. This will be followed by an outline of the VPC framework before expanding on how well the VPC supports key governmental priorities and the underlying societal issues. Wherever possible, this will be supported by academic research and specific examples of current VPC activity. The report will conclude with a summary of the potential benefits that the VPC offers to society, the young people and the police.

### **2. Background and context**

It is accepted that British policing is built on the key Peelian Principle of the ‘police are the public and the public are the police.’ In recent history, following significant social unrest, the issue of the police relationship with the communities they serve has come under significant examination. Following the Brixton Riots of 1981, Lord Scarman’s (The Scarman Report 1981) report set out that confidence in policing was a significant issue leading to the riots:

*'I have no doubt that a significant cause of the hostility of young blacks towards the police was loss of confidence.... in the police. (p. 46)*

He then went on to outline the views of the community about why they thought confidence had been lost:

*'... the police were unimaginative and inflexible in their relationship with the community.....' (p. 60)*

Lord Scarman makes mention of the previous salaried cadet programmes as a potential means of bridging the gap between the police and communities

*'...I have in mind the cadet scheme... a sound academic training coupled with an introduction to police work' (p. 78)*

Since the publication of the Scarman Report, the themes of community confidence in the police and relationships with young people have become perennial issues, a situation acknowledged in the latest NPCC Youth Strategy (2016)

*'It is a complex area of policing and one that we often struggle to get right' (p. 2)*

And the APCC and NPCC; Policing Vision 2025:

*'The communities we serve are increasingly diverse and complex, necessitating a more sophisticated response to the challenges we face... if we are to meet our communities' needs, the service must continue to adapt to the modern policing environment.' (p. 2)*

Since 2013, the VPC has developed into an imaginative and innovative opportunity for the police to engage with our diverse communities and actively deals with the issues highlighted by Lord Scarman and reinforced in the Policing Vision 2025. At the same time supporting young people to become active citizens, with all the added societal benefit this brings, to the police and the communities they serve.

Recent research by DeMarco, Bifulco & Davidson (2018) highlight the power of the symbolic representation offered by the VPC. It offers levels of unprecedented access to policing to young people and establishes powerful, positive bonds with the young people thereby allowing the police to engage and influence opinion and attitudes, much of which is taken back into family groups, peers and the wider community.

*'This does not mean that public-police relationships will be immediately repaired (if damaged), but it provides the chance for the police to reach more troubled, and at-risk families in a neutral, non-threatening manner. (DeMarco et al. 2018, p46.)*

### **3. The VPC framework**

In 2013 the Police Chiefs of England and Wales agreed a common framework in which the VPC was viewed as an engagement activity rather than one based on potential recruitment and would operate with the following agreed aims and principles

- Promote a practical understanding of policing amongst all young people

- Encourage the spirit of adventure and good citizenship
- Support local policing priorities through volunteering and give young people a chance to be heard
- Inspire young people to participate positively in their communities

Each cadet unit should include:

- Members aged 13-18
- 25% of cadets from a 'vulnerable' background
- Cadets who volunteer 3 hours a month – assisting in community and crime prevention measures
- Cadets that represent the diversity of their service area

Since this time, both the age range and the number of young people involved in the VPC has increased and it now stands at a total of over 17,000 members, starting at 8 years old with mini-police in primary schools, through Junior VPC and then the VPC. The current demographic of the VPC is a 50% mix of boys and girls, 30% BAME and 27% vulnerable to crime or social exclusion.

The value of the VPC is multi-faceted in relation to the benefits for the young people, the police, the communities and larger society. These benefits are highlighted in several recent research studies including, DeMarco (2015), Pepper & Silvestri (2016), and Demarco et al (2018). All three studies have shown significant benefits to membership of the VPC for young people, the police and the communities whilst building trust in their local police.

#### **4. The Home Office Modern Crime Prevention Strategy**

The Home Office, Modern Crime Prevention Strategy (MCPS) identifies 'Character' as one of the 6 drivers of crime and specifically mentions the role of the VPC in supporting young people to make positive life choices, highlighting:

*'they (VPC) tend to reflect the diversity of those communities and help to build positive links between those communities and the police. (Home Office MCPS p.18)*

The *Serious Violence Strategy* (Home Office, 2018) also promotes the importance of providing programmes that help young people build their self-confidence, character and ability to engage positively with society.

Pepper & Silvestri (2016), interviewed 210 cadets in London and found a sense of solidarity within the VPC, which was compounded by a common name, uniform, shared values and norms. They found the positive effects of 'belonging' generated by being a VPC seemed more pronounced with cadets who had strained relationships with parents and carers.

*'their inclusion in the VPC programme appeared to act as an agent of social control, building up their stake in conformity and attachment to conventional institutions' (p. 9)*

Membership of the VPC assists young people with their journey into positive citizenship, allowing them a stable and supportive peer group, as well as time and space to make significant changes in their lives. When one challenging cadet was asked about his future, had he not joined the VPC, he replied

*Erm, probably be in Feltham [Young Offenders Institute] ... in school hours, they think I'm just nothing. (Pepper & Silvestri 2016 p.8)*

Another outlined his previous life compared to how he viewed his situation:

*'... basically, before I joined the cadets I was one of them that would go and fight with the Bengalis. I'm a Bengali.. but I thought to myself I'm a cadet... if I was a police officer I would be doing something. I would be helping people... like yeah and I felt proud innit.'* (p.8)

## **5. Social Integration**

The importance of social integration has been identified as a key societal issue and in recent years several key government reports have investigated this issue: the Casey Review (2016), the Race Disparity Audit (2017), and most recently, the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (2018).

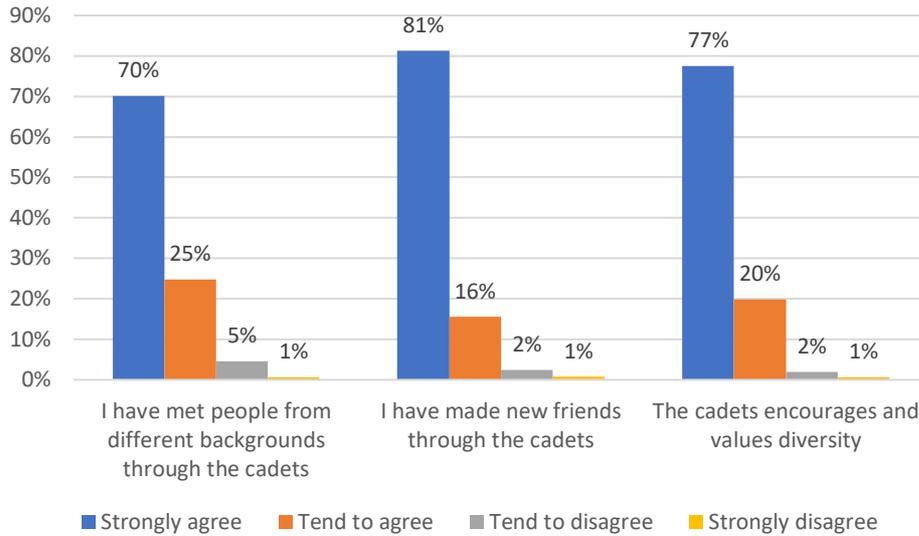
The Casey Review highlighted:

*'Youth programmes that engage young people in altruistic activities seem to be having some success in enabling teenagers from different backgrounds to mix, leading to greater understanding and tolerance, and reduced prejudice and anxiety.'* (page 12)

This finding was supported by research by the Youth United Foundation who identified young people in uniformed youth groups recognise the importance of mixing with people who are different from them: 79% say this in comparison to 66% of non-uniformed youth. (YUF 2018 p. 3). This finding is even more stark in the VPC, which has proved to be very successful at integrating young people from all backgrounds into a cohesive group that come together under the shared values of British policing.

*'You... make friends with people very different to you...and you learn a lot about them, and things you never knew...'* (Demarco et al. 2018 p. 30)

A survey of cadets carried out by Northampton University in February 2019 support this statement with 95% of cadets that participated, confirming they meet people from different backgrounds and 97% of cadets feeling the VPC values diversity:



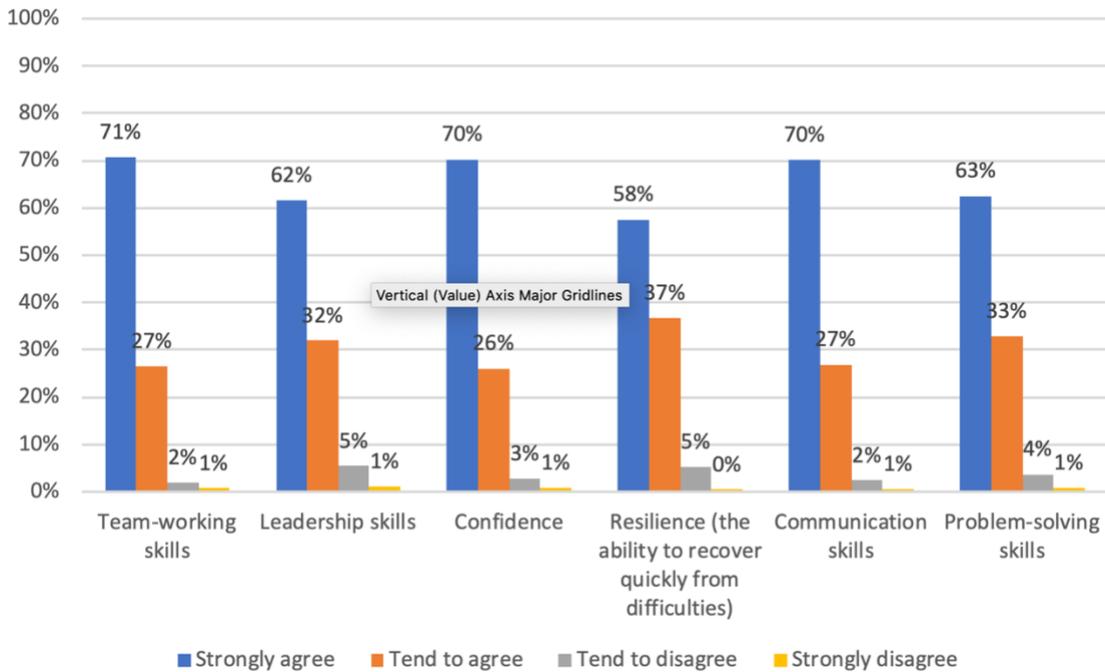
**Fig1. Views of VPC respondents February 2019.**

## 6. Civic Society Strategy and the #iwill campaign

*The Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone* (Cabinet Office, 2018) sets out a commitment to empower young people to shape the future of the country by helping them to develop the skills and habits of social responsibility during their childhood and youth. In his foreword to this report, The Minister of State for Policing and Fire makes mention of the outstanding volunteering undertaken by the VPC after the tragic events at Grenfell Tower. After the fire, the local cadet unit organised a week-long camp on the Isle of Wight for children who had been affected by the fire. Following this successful trip, a new junior VPC was established in the Islamic Centre next to the tower and is now flourishing.

Youth Led Social Action as defined by #iwill campaign is a key component of the VPC, with each member expected to undertake at least 3 hours of volunteering every month which equated to over 700,000 hours in 2017. It is of note that the VPC is the only uniformed youth group in the UK that sets an expectation on the young people to undertake social action in a structured manner. The skills that are obtained from participating in youth led social action are widely recognised as key employability skills and the young people in the VPC confirm their membership helps them to develop these skills Fig. 2 below.

**Level of agreement about that the scheme has had a positive impact on skills and confidence**



**Fig. 2 Responses from VPC members in relation to skills and confidence**

Much of the VPC social action is undertaken at a local level depending on need, however there are some that have the potential to be scaled to a national level which could make a significant contribution to reducing risk and harm.

The Breck Ambassadors,

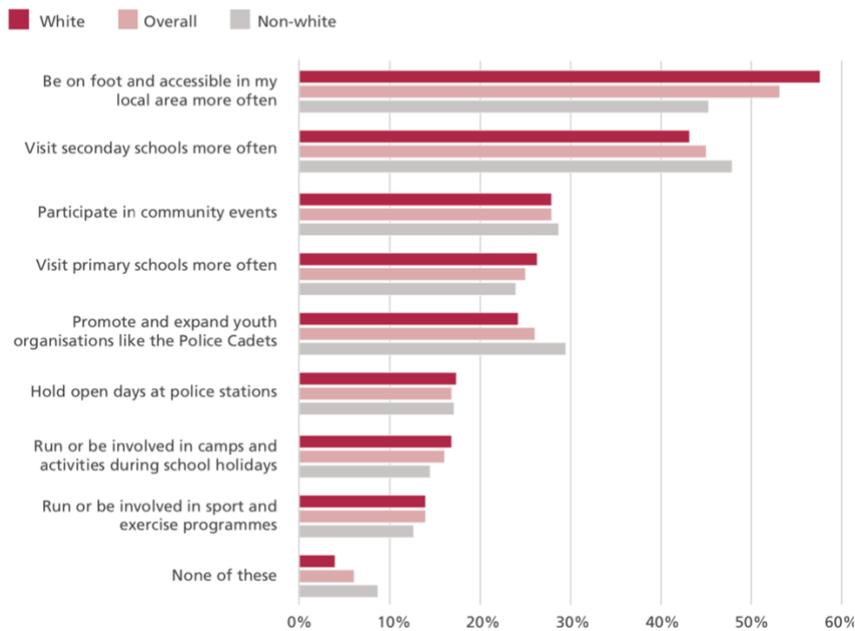
After hearing of the tragic story of Breck Bednar who was groomed online and then lured to a house by the groomer and killed, the VPC in Tower Hamlets contacted Breck’s mother and sought ways to help. From this initial contact, there are now over 200 cadets in London who have been trained as ‘Breck Ambassadors’. Together they have delivered ‘peer education’ sessions regarding online safety to over 20,000 other young people in London. There has been significant interest for other VPC across England and Wales to support this project, but resources do not allow for this coordinated approach to be undertaken in a structured manner.

The VPC in Tower Hamlets are now keen to use the same network to develop peer education sessions relating to the effects of knife and other violent crime, which will be delivered by the VPC.

**7. Violent Crime**

In the report ‘It Can Be Stopped’ (2018), The Centre for Social Justice demonstrated that there was desire from a significant number of young people to see the police promote and establish youth organisations like the VPC, Fig. 2.

Figure 47: Which of the following would you like the police to do in order to better connect with young people in London today?



**Fig. 3 responses from young people to question set by Centre for Social Justice**

In the report the Centre for Social Justice recommend:

*‘All secondary schools and colleges in London should have a volunteer Police Cadet programme or be affiliated to one nearby...’ (recommendation 30, 2018, p105)*

There is significant anecdotal evidence that the VPC is effective in supporting young people who have been involved in knife or other violent crime. These include a young black boy arrested at the scene of a gang related murder in south London who went on to become a police cadet, special constable and is now a firefighter in London. Another young man, whose brother was stabbed, joined the cadets after being impressed by the work of the officers. Since joining the VPC he has been instrumental in setting up the junior VPC unit at Grenfell Tower and appeared on Crimewatch Roadshow exulting the virtues of the VPC.

The VPC also allows the young people to feel they are taking an active part in making their communities safer when they undertake volunteering activities, such as those set out in fig. 4 where the cadets were working to support Neighbourhood Watch to increase their membership, thereby building resilience in communities.



**Fig. 4 VPC week of action on Hammersmith**

Other cadets have been involved in ‘mystery shopper’ activity, attempting to buy knives, alcohol and other prohibited articles from local shops. Building on the ‘mystery shopper’ activity, cadets are now taking part in activity to prevent sexual exploitation by accompanying plain clothes police officers to hotels. Once there, they seek to obtain a room without a prior booking, with the proprietor being challenged and educated, should they be permitted to book a room.

The list of impactful social action undertaken by the VPC in support of communities is significant and as partnerships continue to develop with other established organisations like Neighbourhood Watch and other local and national charities the opportunities are boundless.

### **8. Mini Police**

The Mini Police programme aims to engage with young people in the last 2 years of primary school and over the past 18 months has seen substantial growth and continued growing demand from schools and local communities. This early intervention, delivered in partnership with schools in areas of social deprivation, provides opportunities for the young people to engage informally with their local police and work with them to undertake social action relating to issues of concern to them. Recent evidence from Jubilee Centre indicates that young people involved in social action in primary school are over twice as likely to continue volunteering into adulthood (Arthur et al 2017). Although still at the early stage of development, the Mini police has the potential to provide a consistent engagement model that could be expanded across a significant number of schools.

## **9. Conclusion**

The VPC has been operating for 6 years and has proved effective at bridging the gap between police and young people, reaching all sections of society. It is now the recognised uniformed youth group of the police, however, unlike the other uniformed youth groups it lacks infrastructure to support a safe and consistent delivery model.

The running of any organisation of 15,000 young people takes significant resource to deliver. When it is then involves young people from more challenging backgrounds who undertake social action in their communities, under the auspices of the VPC, the complexities of running such an operation become magnified and require significant infrastructure to allow it to be delivered safely.

The VPC is now poised to make an even more significant contribution to the issues that society faces and demonstrate the police commitment to young people from all backgrounds. The cumulative impact that the VPC could make is significant, however the current lack of infrastructure is a risk to the long-term sustainability of the VPC and significantly impedes its ability to maximise the opportunities that it offers.

A long-term benefit of the VPC is that, by inviting young people from all backgrounds to gain a practical understanding of policing and supporting them into adult life, it is changing the perception of the role of police. As a result, the diverse group of young people are making informed career choices to take on adult roles within policing. This will greatly assist in building a representative workforce, in keeping with the Peelian principles and answering the perennial challenges highlighted by Lord Scarman in 1981, through to the Policing Vision 2025.

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