

SHAPE YOUR SAFETY: Young voices on knife crime 2026



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WHAT IS SHAPE YOUR SAFETY: YOUNG VOICES?

Shape Your Safety: Young Voices is a key part of Police and Crime Commissioner Matt Storey's community engagement programme. The Commissioner is committed to engaging regularly with young people who live in the Cleveland Police force area, to understand their concerns and needs on policing, crime and community safety.

In February and March 2025, the PCC hosted four events across Cleveland to capture the views of local young people on crime and community safety issues. Held in a college within each of Cleveland's four boroughs, the sessions involved almost 160 students. The young people were studying subjects ranging from politics and public services to sociology, criminology and English, or were engaged with the King's Trust.

Working in groups, students developed a policy, campaign or project addressing a specific crime or safety issue. They then presented their proposals to PCC Matt Storey, local MPs, elected members and representatives from partner organisations. Stakeholders questioned the students on how their ideas would create meaningful change, reduce crime, secure funding, handle potential controversy and be communicated effectively to the public.

The four themes covered across the events were violence against women and girls, knife crime, drugs and exploitation through gangs and county lines, and online safety, including radicalisation.

[Our report from last year's events can be read here.](#)



CAPTURING YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON KNIFE CRIME

To build on the previous Shape Your Safety events, the Young Voices on Knife Crime initiative offered a dedicated and supportive space for young people in alternative provisions to speak openly about their experiences, perceptions and concerns on youth knife crime. It was intentionally designed to amplify the voices of those who are often overlooked, especially young people outside mainstream education who may be living with additional vulnerabilities, complex personal circumstances or involvement with the criminal justice system.

This report has been created to summarise the findings of the Shape Your Safety: Young Voices events. These half-day events were held during February and March 2026 at:



with Stockton Riverside College
and
Redcar and Cleveland College

Each event engaged up to 30 participants aged 14–16 and was co-facilitated by PCC Matt Storey alongside colleagues from Cleveland Police. Together, they guided participants through structured discussions that explored the realities of knife crime within their communities and encouraged them to contribute their own ideas for meaningful change.

Through interactive workshops, young people gained an overview of local knife-crime trends, shared their lived experiences and collaborated to develop practical solutions. Activities such as an interactive survey, ethical dilemmas, scenario-based discussions and a real-life, local case study prompted honest reflection and critical thinking. A doodle artist captured their insights in real time, transforming their contributions into creative visual representations of the changes they want to see.



HOW THE SESSIONS WORKED

We created an interactive, half-day agenda that was designed to give young people the opportunity to explore and understand knife crime in Cleveland. They were asked to work collectively to develop solutions to tackle the issue. We wanted them to play a central role in ensuring young people feel safer, supported and included in shaping local policing and community safety.

During their workshops, the students worked on tasks with their facilitator on the following activities:



The first exercise was a true-or-false quiz on local crime statistics. This was followed by an anonymous survey on knife crime, which participants could complete from their smartphones. Only 12% of young people surveyed said they felt unsafe in their local area. When asked about exposure to knife-related behaviour, 28% said they had seen someone carrying a knife, and 16% reported having been threatened by someone with a knife.



The second exercise focused on understanding whether young people would report antisocial behaviour (ASB) or crime – and who they would report to. Several scenarios were proposed to the participants, they were then asked to select from the following options: **Red** for choosing not to tell anyone, **Yellow** for telling someone other than the police, and **Green** for reporting directly to the police. With only 30 seconds to decide, young people were encouraged to make instinctive choices, prompting honest reflection on their attitudes to reporting crime. This was followed by discussions to explore the reasons behind their decisions, including what influenced whether people speak up or stay silent and which trusted adults they would confide in.



The next exercise introduced both the national picture of knife crime and localised data, including discussion of a recent local murder. After presenting this context, participants were asked to reflect on why they believe knife crime happens.



Finally, the participants to consider practical solutions to prevent youth knife crime. Working individually or alongside doodle artist Chris Layfield from Open Door Art, young people visualised their ideas by creating drawings that represented the changes they wanted to see. To guide their designs, participants were asked to imagine how they would use a pot of funding to reduce knife crime, how they would encourage other young people to get involved, and what potential challenges or risks their ideas might face.



WOULD YOU REPORT?

Across the four provisions, participants took part in a scenario-based activity designed to explore attitudes toward reporting ASB and crime. The exercise presented several ethical dilemmas, each requiring young people to make a rapid decision about whether they would report the incident from the below options:

Red: Would not to tell anyone

Yellow: Would tell someone other than the police (teacher, parent etc)

Green: Would report to the police

The scenarios covered a range of incidents and crime types:



What it told us

Low confidence in reporting to police:

A dominant theme across all areas was a lack of trust in the police response. Young people frequently expressed doubt that reporting would lead to meaningful action. Many young people were concerned about being labelled a “grass” or fear of repercussions. Some young people felt that ASB, including the use of nuisance bikes or deliberate fire setting, as routine or expected, reducing motivation to report.

Influence of peer loyalty:

Peer relationships played a central role in shaping decisions to report. Loyalty, fear of retaliation and a desire to protect friends often outweighed any safeguarding considerations. Low-level criminality from friends was minimised.

Bullying, knife possession and social pressures: Scenarios involving knives generated mixed responses. Many indicated they would report concerns to a teacher or trusted adult, whilst others avoided reporting due to fear of retaliation. Some expressed sympathy for individuals carrying knives, particularly where bullying was perceived to be a factor.

Direct intervention:

Young people demonstrated strong instincts to intervene directly to support peers rather than report incidents formally. When it came to scenarios on misogynistic behaviour or hate crime, many young people felt they would intervene personally to safeguard the victim and challenge behaviours.

Who are the trusted adults?

Across all areas, participants showed a clear preference for informal or familiar support routes over police involvement. Common choices included speaking to a parent or guardian, reporting concerns to a teacher using school-based reporting systems, or opting to alert staff or managers in public settings. Police involvement was generally viewed as a last resort, with school and family networks perceived as safer, more immediate and more effective.

WHY DOES KNIFE CRIME HAPPEN?

Young people were presented with a local case study, a recent knife-related murder, to explore why violence takes place. Following a discussion about the crime, the young people took part in discussions to explore why they think knife-related violence happens.

The feedback from young people can be summarised as below:



Social and economic drivers:

Participants consistently linked knife crime to wider social and economic pressures affecting their local areas. Many described how deprivation, limited opportunities and community-level challenges can shape the environment in which young people make decisions. They understood that knife crime does not occur in isolation and that inequality may influence risk and behaviour.

Lived realities and environmental pressures:

Discussions revealed that young people draw heavily on their lived experiences when forming views about knife crime. They described limited access to positive activities or safe spaces and community pressures that normalise certain behaviours.

Understanding vulnerability and involvement:

Young people demonstrated a clear awareness of how deprivation can increase vulnerability to both victimisation and involvement in crime. They understood that knife-carrying can stem from fear, protection or perceived necessity. There was a recognition that individuals facing social disadvantage may be drawn into harmful behaviour due to circumstances beyond their control.



ITS NORMAL
AROUND HERE

The Horizon School
young voices
on knife crime...

IT MAKES
ME ANGRY



"I wouldn't call
the Police. I'll
take it into my
own hands."

"I'd
tell mu
MUM"

HARTLEPOOL

GANGSTA RAP

REWARD

"How do
we find
out stuff?"



"He could
have
died!"

Your

Got it?

DONT
BE A
RAT!

FOR HANDING IN
KNIVES!



AMBASSADORS

Knives
BIN

CASH...



SNAP
CHAT

FACEBOOK

CONTENT

TIKTOK

NEED
TO BE
IN
DIFFERENT
LOCATIONS



Creative
Designs
on bins

A Blade
does sn't give
you the edge...

THE HORIZON SCHOOL HARTLEPOOL

Young people suggested a range of practical steps to reduce knife crime, focusing on prevention, safety, and trusted voices.

Their ideas included:

- Raise the legal age to buy a knife to 25.
- Ban large blades such as machetes.
- Target support and interventions in high-risk neighbourhoods, referred to as "Manor" (Manor House).
- Return of knife buy-back schemes and the installation of amnesty bins in key locations to encourage safe disposal.
- Create Young Ambassadors who share honest, relatable safety messages on platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, reflecting the idea that young people listen most to those they look up to.

Outwood
Alternative
Provision
Eston.

PROTECTION SPORTS

KNIVES ARE ALL OVER BORO!
We're 16, it's
too late for us!

ESTON

NEED TO BE ON POINT IN TS6...

Young
Voices
on Knife
Crime.

"Help the
public be
better"

IMPROVE
THE ENVIRONMENT
WHERE WE LIVE.

G-TOWN



TS6

You can't change it now...

MIDDLESBROUGH

WARRIOR

CHANGE
NEEDS
TO BE
LED BY
PEOPLE
IN THE
COMMUNITIES...

"Talking is good
but nothing
changes."

POLICE



MORE
TO DO

NEVER
RESPECT
US!

ACTIVITIES
SPORT...
ART...
GYM

YOUR

DO MORE

NO
TRUST

WARRIOR

- Social workers
- Police
- Mental Health Support

CLUBS +
ACTIVITIES
RAN BY
PEOPLE WE
TRUST!

Jail
is just
what
happens
...

I
CARRY
A KNIFE
TO SAVE
MYSELF!!!

Just like being
at home

GOT MY X-BOX...
GET FED...
SLEEP...
BE OUT IN HALF THE TIME...
SO WHAT!!!

STOP AND
SEARCH

CANT EVEN
CATCH THEM!

What if I get
caught on the
way to the
knife Bin?

POINTLESS



ETR

OUTWOOD ALTERNATIVE PROVISION ESTON

Young people highlighted a mix of enforcement, community support, and early-intervention ideas to reduce knife crime.

They suggested:

- Ban online knife sales.
- Increase stop-and-search in areas they identified as high-risk, such as "TS6," "G'Town" (Grangetown) and "Hemo" (Hemlington).
- Invest in local sports programmes led by coaches from their own communities, explaining that these adults "know us, get us and understand our backgrounds" and can check in on them in a meaningful way.
- Invest in creative outlets like art and legal spray-painting sessions.
- Reach children at a younger age to build awareness, confidence and safer pathways long before issues escalate.

KING'S TRUST WITH STOCKON RIVERSIDE COLLEGE

Young people put forward a mix of firm consequences, visible safety measures and strong community support to reduce knife crime.

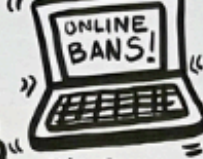
Their solutions included:

- Mandatory military-style service for those caught carrying knives.
- Increase police visibility and expand the use of knife wands with discreet checks.
- Use awareness tools like the Knife Angel to make the risks more real.
- Educate parents who may unintentionally normalise knife carrying.
- Invest in therapy for offenders, victims and families, and pointed to high-risk areas such as Thornaby, "G'Town" (Grangetown) and "Hemo" (Hemlington) as places where these interventions should be prioritised.

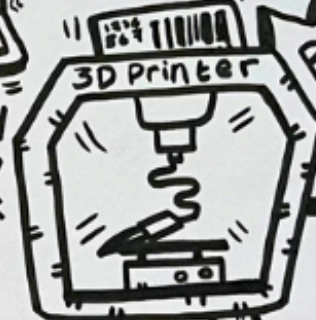
Knives are for chickers
Not much scarier than knife crime!

Crimestoppers
Needs to be better promoted to young people!

Kings Trust
Redcar & Cleveland College.



Serial Numbers on Knives



People are printing knives.



Don't get to the point!

Stop being petty!
Drop the machette!

Would you carry a blade just to get paid.



LISTEN TO WHAT WE SAY!

Knives don't kill people... people kill people!

REDCAR

Young voices on knife crime

STOP

KNIVES!

KEEP EVERY PERSON SAFE!

YOUR

Education for Year 4+

Knives are for butter...

The tables can easily turn if you carry a knife

LEGO NOT JUST SPORTS CLUBS FOR KIDS...

Can't keep putting plasters on it!

The world can be a nasty place



KING'S TRUST WITH REDCAR AND CLEVELAND COLLEGE

Young people emphasised a balance of accountability, support and early intervention when discussing ways to reduce knife crime.

They suggested agencies should:

- Offer rehabilitation and restorative justice, alongside therapy for those involved in knife offences.
- Introduce practical measures such as adding serial numbers to online knife purchases.
- Bring in knife-registration system to improve traceability.
- Start education as early as Year 4 and expand non-sport youth activities, like Lego clubs.
- Focus efforts on high-risk areas such as Grangetown, where targeted support could make the biggest difference.

BEDE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

The PCC hosted a Shape Your Safety session at Bede Sixth Form College. Students worked independently in groups over a few weeks to analyse a local case study for missed opportunities, incorporate local data, and design interventions to reduce knife crime in their area. The PCC later returned to hear their presentations, delivered to peers and senior representatives from the police, public sector and VCSE partners.

Five groups presented in total, with one selected to represent their work at the Cleveland Youth Safety Summit, hosted by the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV).

Proposed solutions:



This solution sought to improve delivery of school and college programmes by rethinking how sessions are taught so they feel relevant, engaging, and impactful. Frequency of sessions would be increased and youth clubs could be used to extend education beyond school.



This solution proposed interactive workshops including real stories from victims and families, hearing the human impact of knife crime on real people. The young people also wanted to include offender perspectives to help young people understand the long-term realities of carrying or using a knife.



This solution focused on mental health and therapeutic support, with access to therapists for those affected by knife crime. The provision would build resilience and coping strategies to help young people manage fear, trauma, or pressure.



This solution would use workshops to teach conflict-resolution skills to reduce the perceived need to carry a weapon for protection. Sessions would promote safer decision-making to empower young people to choose non-violent responses.



This solution would introduce monthly amnesty days in education settings for a safe, judgement-free opportunities to hand in knives. Collected knives would be repurposed into meaningful art to melt down into sculptures or public art that symbolises peace and anti-violence.



This solution would use social media as an engagement tool, by creating short anonymous surveys on TikTok and Snapchat for quick, youth-friendly ways to gather honest feedback and insights. This would allow agencies to reach young people where they already are to make participation easy and increase engagement.

The winning solution:

This solution recommended treating knife crime as a public health issue, shifting the focus from punishment to addressing the underlying social causes of violence. They highlighted the need for a multifaceted, preventative approach involving coordinated work between policing, education, health services, government and community organisations.

Their model emphasised early identification of risk, targeted support and interventions for vulnerable young people. The overall aim was to reduce knife violence by tackling root causes such as poverty, limited opportunities and harmful environments, while providing support that prevents escalation and breaks the cycle of harm.



THANKS AND FEEDBACK

The PCC would like to thank all participants for contributing their views. This will help him to deliver against his vision of creating safe, strong and confident communities across Cleveland.

The Commissioner would also like to extend his thanks to staff from the educational facilities for providing staffing and hosting these events. We're grateful to Chris Layfield from Open Door Art, for so wonderfully capturing the views of young people in his doodle art.

And a big thank you to PC Geoff Coggins, PC Joshua Hall-Young and Early Intervention Officer Emma Atkinson from Cleveland Police, for their facilitation support.

Young people gave their views on the Shape Your Safety events and why it was important that they had their say on ideas to reduce youth violence. This was captured in a short film that was screened at our Youth Safety Summit in March 2026. Some of these views have been captured below:

"In past education, in schools and in primary school, there's been a couple of sessions based on knife crime, I wouldn't say they were a massive impact, compared to the session today"

"On the doodle art, you got to express your mind in a different way than usual, you don't have to speak, you can draw, you can do whatever you want"

"These sessions are very useful because they give you an understanding of knife crime and I think that we get it at school, but people older should get it too so they understand more"

"It can affect jobs when you're older, it can affect where you get housed, little things can ruin every day life just from carrying that one knife"



WHAT NEXT?

We want this report to inform policy and commissioning activity of public services at a local, regional, and national level. The young people across all provisions demonstrated a clear understanding of the wider social and economic factors influencing behaviour in their communities.

Young people frequently linked knife-related harm to issues such as deprivation, limited opportunities and environmental pressures within their neighbourhoods. These discussions highlighted the lived realities shaping their experiences, showing strong awareness of how social disadvantage can increase vulnerability to both victimisation and involvement. Across all groups, young people shared common themes, strong ideas, and a clear passion for change - demonstrating exactly why their voices are so important.

This depth of understanding provides valuable context for shaping prevention and early-intervention approaches. The contents of this report will help the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver against the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan, by ensuring a young voice is captured. It has also been used to support the development of the Cleveland Knife Crime Action Plan, which includes specific reference to increased educational provision for young people and stronger enforcement for offenders.

Our request to other organisations working on public safety in Cleveland is to consider the views of these young people when developing your own solutions to reduce knife crime. How can you help to deliver projects and schemes that meet the needs of children and give them confidence that their views are being heard?

We are committed to hosting further Shape Your Safety: Young Voices events, as the findings showed a clear need to engage with children earlier. The programme will now expand to include primary-aged young people (9–11 years old). Building on the dedicated and supportive space already created for young people to speak openly about their experiences, perceptions and concerns around crime, the next phase will focus on delivering sessions in areas with higher levels of anti-social behaviour and crime.

If you are interested in Shape Your Safety: Young Voices events, contact us now on pcc.office@cleveland.police.uk

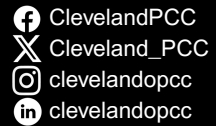


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